

# Civil Society and **Peace** Building

2018 — 2019



Civil Society and Peace Building  
in Colombia

## PRESENTATION

The Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (IPTI), which is associated with the Graduate Institute of Geneva in Switzerland, is an institution that sits between the academic and practice worlds. On the basis of research projects on the role of different actors in peace processes and transitions in various global contexts, IPTI has produced comparative analyses on some relevant questions for civil society in Colombia and its role in building an inclusive peace.

The pilot project Impact Local Peace/ILP, which was implemented between January 2018 and May 2019, has generated processes of exchange and reflection with and between civil society actors in a variety of contexts. The purpose is to jointly explore and articulate the frameworks for reflection and the tools for collective action in civil society with the aim of:

- Contributing to conceptual clarity on the issues of civil society, peace-building, and inclusion.
- Generating critical thinking and facilitating reflection with regards to the dynamics of civil society and its impact on processes of inclusive peace-building.
- Generating technical inputs on peace-building to be submitted for consideration about strategy by civil society (relation between coherence and collective impact, inclusion and contextual relevance).

In the case of Colombia, a nucleus of active organizations on issues of peace and citizen participation was made up by the National Secretariat for Social Pastoral (Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social - SNPS), the National Forum for Colombia (Foro Nacional por Colombia), the Center for Research and Popular Education (Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular - Cinep), the Corporation for Research and Social and Economic Action (Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica - Ciase), Policéntrico and the Exstituto de Política Abierta. The group operated under the coordination of Alianza para la Paz (APAZ).

These pages present the result of a documentary search on a process that sought, in addition to the previously mentioned objectives, to describe the articulation and cohesion of different organizations of civil society. Given that the reality of each country is different, the expressions of civil society that respond and contribute to overcoming challenges are also different. In this regard, civil society is understood here to mean a variety of citizen expressions, individual and collective, organized and not organized, that are self-defined and differentiated among themselves and with respect to the State. Some of them identify around common objectives aimed at building a society where participatory democracy is the rule that governs peaceful coexistence while others do not. However, the challenge of inclusiveness for peace-building lies precisely in the possibility of establishing dialogue and mutual understanding among the different expressions of civil society in the country.

## I. Civil Society, Peace and Inclusion in the Colombian Context

In this section of the document we offer a number of reflections on civil society, peace, and inclusion from a perspective both critical and proactive. Likewise, we hope that these reflections will lead to future debates on a body of coherent and unified definitions that reflect the perspectives of Colombian civil society based on their own visions, experiences, and differences.

### The various “peaces” and peace-building in Colombia

Peace-building is a political process, which is very different from the tendency to politicize peace. It is a political process insofar as, during the negotiation phase between the groups in conflict, it is the leaders and authorities that represent those groups who engage in a political dialogue under the observation, mediation, and guarantees provided by autonomous and impartial entities, ideally of an international nature. The agreement to reach a ceasefire and all that it entails, as well as agreeing on a package of social, political, and institutional reforms to compensate for the structural imbalances that underlie the origins of the armed conflict, is a process of balances of power that must be adjusted in terms of the common objective of putting an end to the armed violence and setting the groundwork for change.

During the implementation phase of the agreements, which assumes widespread participation by actors with their different national, sectorial, and territorial agendas, the political process acquires greater relevance because its success depends on the leadership and the negotiating capacities that the participants have with respect to the power holders they represent. This involves both maintaining the support of those in favor as well as changing the attitudes of those who are against. At the same time, peace-building implies transforming structures and political relations that contribute to polarization, power disparities, and the continuation of the conflict.

However, peace should not be manipulated politically. When political parties introduce peace processes into their political agendas to compete to gain political control of the State, peace ceases to be a political process for change, and becomes a politicized and manipulated process that reaffirm the political status quo. At that moment, sectarian discourses, agendas and interests take precedence over the common objective that peace seeks.

In addition to the different “peaces” which are referred to in political discourse, there are also conceptual “peaces.” Ironically, Colombia has been an academic reference point for the study of conflict, violence, and peace. The vibrant production of theory about these has sought to make sense of a reality of armed violence that seems to perpetuate itself in repetitive cycles. In the wake of a failed attempt to stop this violence at a political and social level (through pacts or security policies), new concepts and theories are emerging that react post factum and propose to correct mistakes.

Colombian civil society has moved through this context, confronting and absorbing its effects. One of them – perhaps the most important – is to make sense of an expectation for peace that has been marked by personalism and politicization and which has been overwhelmed by the effects of armed violence and social polarization. The decades of work by a diverse civil society that has permeated into local and national environs with varying levels of impact has not been sufficient to offset the

pounding that the peace process has suffered. The challenges that the current situation impose on a civil society committed to peace-building are even greater, given that the process has transited to a political contest while armed violence has intensified.

### **Civil Society: a necessary diversity**

The debate about the notion of civil society in social theory is widespread and lacking in unity. It depends to a great extent on the current of thought that offers a definition and the context in which it is observed.

Without attempting to become involved in the complex debate over this topic, some key ideas can be identified within the Latin American context. In the first place, civil society is also political, that is, it exerts power in explicit or implicit terms that aims to confront the State and the political class or, instead, it seeks to increase the efficiency of the State's bureaucratic machinery. In the second place, the debate on the substance of the issue – it sometimes is ontological – about what is and what is not civil society or what civil society in Latin America should be, ends up being not productive and, on some occasions, counterproductive, given that it runs the risk of deepening divisions and discriminations in societies that are already polarized and exclusionary. Given that civil society is directly influenced by the relationship between State and society, in Latin America the low level of stateness is compensated by a presidential centralism rooted in history that means that it is the governments which define the State's dynamics and not the other way around.

Each new government transforms the relations between the State and society, which makes for a dynamic and diverse civil society. Likewise, the changes in government create a challenge for the transformation of the State to overcome its dependency on the position of the governments. However, the absence of the State in many territories is also a factor that contributes to the organization of the population, not necessarily in the form of a civil society that seeks to influence the State but one that must overcome the challenges posed by its absence.

Colombian society at this moment finds itself in transition in a direction that will depend to a great extent on the outcomes of the peace process in the short term. Similarly, civil society – in its wider sense – also confronts a transformation because its role will depend in this new chapter of Colombia's history on the relation between the State and society that is being prefaced at this moment.

### **Inclusion: a necessary condition for a civil society that builds peace**

To talk about inclusion when peace-building requires reference to a specific contextual setting so that the concepts are not limited to a vague 'common ground' accepted by all but which take shape for only a few. To avoid this comfortable temptation, it is necessary that peace-building move from its environment of principles and aspirations to one of methodological concreteness in the face of the social conflicts and the political challenges to peace.

To undertake peace-building in the Colombian context we must refer to the influence that exclusion has on the diverse social conflicts which are present in the national territory and the traditionally repressive or indifferent ways that the State has addressed them. Seen from the perspective of

inclusion, one of the principal demands expressed by the actors directly involved in the social conflicts is the recognition of their rights and their situation as political actors.

Inclusion in order to gain legitimacy runs the risk of political manipulation in a society where the peace processes have been politicized. Be it in the case of those actors who attempt in a limited manner to rescue the peace agreement or those who seek to reduce its influence in public policy, there is a tendency to manipulate inclusion with the objective of legitimizing their own positions. In this respect, the influence of civil society is limited given the institutional power that is wielded by government offices and regional powers in Colombia.

Therefore, this process must be the result of a conscious dynamic to generate confidence among the parties. This also means overcoming the barriers imposed by the multiple Colombian “peaces” and recovering the spirit of a peace in which politics is the means and not the end; where negotiations do not depend on engaging with only one group but involve all while simultaneously transforming the role of the State. It also means closing the gaps between academic sophistication and the concrete needs for conflict transformation in the territories. Finally, inclusion also refers to a normative framework that transcends formalities and becomes an instrument for nonviolent transformation of conflicts.

## II. Armed Conflict, Peace Process and Civil Society in Colombia

### Armed Conflict

In the case of Colombia, the armed conflict has deep roots in a long history of political, economic, and social struggles. In turn, and given its long duration, the conflict has gone through different stages with important changes that have marked its character, its intensity, the groups involved, the areas affected, and the international context that nourished it.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) were created in 1964 by “Manuel Marulanda” (aka Tirofijo), who was linked to the Communist Party of Colombia, as a reaction to the attacks on the community of Marquetalia, where numerous government troops<sup>1</sup> fell upon 48 armed rebels who escaped with their families into the hills of the zone. At nearly the same time as the creation of the FARC, the National Army of Liberation (ELN) came into existence in 1964, followed by the Popular Liberation Army (ELP) in 1967. The ELN was made up youth from the cities influenced by the Cuban and Chinese revolutions and former members of liberal guerrillas from the time of “the Violence” (*la Violencia*). The EPL, however, emerged from a schism with the Communist Party (PC), made up of those who rejected the reformist and conciliatory tendencies of the PC in the beginnings of the National Front. Subsequently, in 1974, a group belonging to the Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO) party, criticized irregularities in the 1970 elections and split to form an urban guerrilla force – the Movimiento 19 de abril (19th April Movement), known as M-19 – that was different from the other existing guerrilla groups.

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<sup>1</sup> 16,000 according to the FARC, 2,400 according to current estimates.

At the same time, armed self-defense groups of different types began to appear. Some were peasant owners of small- and medium-sized tracts of land who received help from the army to organize and arm. Others represented the response of drug traffickers who went after the guerrillas.

The incursion of drug trafficking in the Colombian political scene introduced a dichotomy which, observed from the trajectories of political violence, turns out to be spurious. Beyond a formal and legalistic distinction, in political and social terms there exists a wide range of interactions between the political and the criminal, especially with regards to drug trafficking. The resources generated by this activity fueled, in a natural way, the political confrontations, both armed and unarmed, at all points of the Colombian political spectrum.

### **Peace process with the FARC-EP**

During the government of President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), the political negotiation with the FARC-EP proceeded along a new route that was based on the elimination of armed groups that operated outside the law and by signing up civil society to achieve military successes, which in turn facilitated the creating and subsequent consolidation of paramilitary groups.

After assuming this new perspective, the Santos government in 2012 began a new process of dialogue with the FARC-EP in Havana (Cuba), which aimed to transform the conditions of the armed conflict in the country, without risking the current State and development model. The agreed agenda between the parties included issues such as: a) comprehensive rural reform; b) the right to political participation; c) the process to put an end to the conflict; d) the means to address the illegal drug problem in its entirety; e) the claims, reparations, and support for victims for getting to the truth; and f) the mechanisms to verify the agreements reached by both sides.

The negotiation process ended with the agreement to end the conflict and the building of a stable and long-lasting peace, as well as the implementation of a plebiscite that turned out unfavorably for the implementation of the agreement. These results evidenced even more the polarized environment that characterized politics in the country, which put a brake to the implementation of the agreements. To summarize, two elements must be underlined: in the first place, a peace agreement was built that produced a consensus between opposing positions, and thousands of guerrilla fighters laid down their weapons, but a high percentage of the citizenry did not approve of the agreement during the plebiscite held in October 2016. In the second place, the State's institutions were not ready to assume the changes required for the implementation of the Final Agreement, which resulted in delays in carrying it out.

### **The role of civil society in the peace process**

During the last two years of the process of the implement of the peace accords between the national government and the FARC-EP, the various sectors of civil society have mobilized in support of the issues that make up the agreed agenda for peace, which have been accepted by public opinion as substantive issues to overcome the conflict and consolidate peace: resolve the problem of unequal distribution of land; guarantee a political opening and participation; resolve the drug trafficking problem; guarantee the right to comprehensive reparations for the victims of the armed conflict; and implement the programs for reinsertion into civil life of the insurgent forces.

Three big periods of mobilization for peace can be distinguished prior to the period of actual mobilizations of diverse social sectors that have come out openly in support of the agreements and to seek in this way, as was mentioned, the inclusion of their agendas and demands:

- a) First period: a nascent mobilization in support of the peace agreements;
- b) Second period: the strengthening of the movement for peace during the 1990s; and
- c) Third period: a mobilization that seeks a negotiated path for achieving peace and calls for peace as a policy of the State.

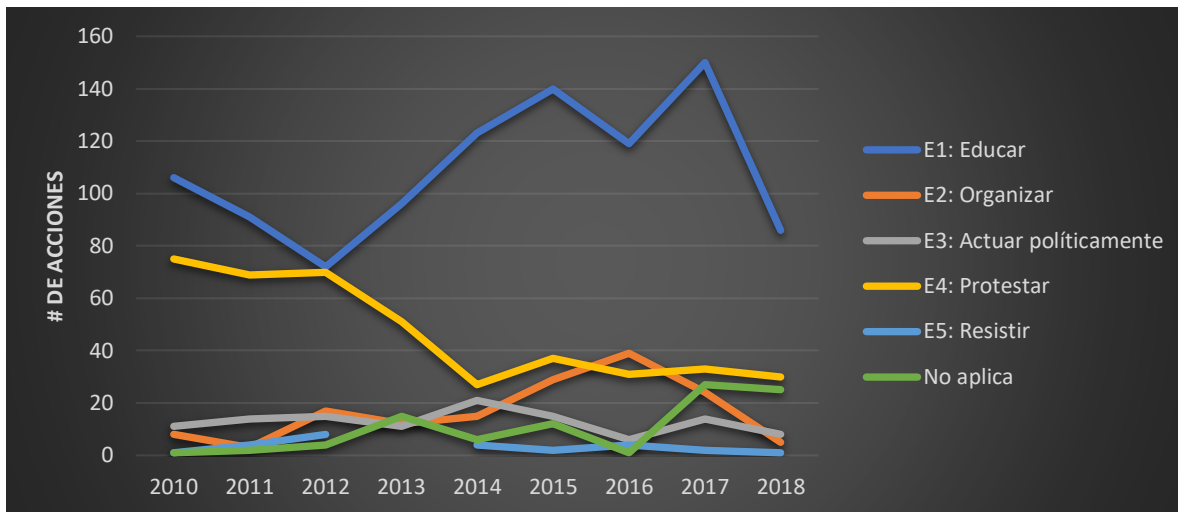
In turn, a number of tendencies or specific characteristics can be identified with regards to the actions of Colombian civil society:

1. Linkages on the basis of networks, platforms and /or collective processes of organization.
2. The National Council for Peace, Coexistence and Reconciliation-CNPRC.
3. Academic programs of formal education for peace.
4. Centers and research institutes for peace.

### **Analysis of the repertoires for action used by civil society on the basis of the functions developed by IPTI**

The period 2010-2018 is interesting for an analysis of the mobilization for peace because it contains a phase of relatively constant growth of actions to promote peace.

The activities of mobilization for peace in Colombia, accumulated over the years, have gained by diversifying their repertoires. Nonetheless, a preference for certain types of mobilizations includes marches and demonstrations in public spaces and the creation of academic and teaching scenarios such as meetings, forums, or seminars. This diverse repertoire reflects a selection of strategies of the different sectors involved, which are derived from their visions or understandings of peace. Thus, strategies for change include the set of resources – of different types – arranged to bring about transformations that will mold those visions of peace that people have worked to bring about. The repertoire of actions listed above constitute the components of five key strategies: educate, organize, act politically, resist, and protest. The analysis undertaken by Cinep has produced the following results of the period under consideration:



Number of actions according to strategy 2010-2018. Datapaz, 2019, Equipo Iniciativas de Paz (EIP).

One of the findings made by IPTI is that, as is the case with socialization, many initiatives involving cohesion develop better when violence is absent or at low levels. In Colombia, these efforts have been present even at moments of high numbers of violent incidents, as in 2012 or 2017. It should be stressed also that the variety of expressions of this violence are not only linked to actors like the guerrilla but can be traced back to a diversity of actors who are responsible for them.

To the above must be added that cohesion for peace was present even in moments prior to the period selected in the form of initiatives by civil society that attempted to change how others perceived the rest of society in a variety of places such as Comunidad de Paz de San José in Apartadó or Alta Montaña in the Montes de María region.

It can be mentioned that certain functions like service delivery for peace-building are related to the protection of citizens and declarations of peace zones.

It is evident that socialization and social cohesion stand out within the framework of tools used by civil society in Colombia, added to public advocacy for peace in a wider perspective, inclusion, recognition, and resistance to all forms of violence.

### From institutional peace to collaborative peace

Upon a recognition that Colombia has a diversity of visions for peace, Wikipaz (*Wikipace*) was set up as an experiment to devise a collaborative meaning of peace for the country. This platform provides a multi-sensorial experience, where users have the possibility to interact through words, songs, and images, to express their opinions and sentiments on a variety of topics. Thus, Wikipaz was set up as a preliminary exercise for the collaborative construction of a concept of peace based on emotions, sentiments, understanding, and thoughts from people who do not normally participate in projects of civil society organizations that work in peace-building.



This study aims to inquire about the vision held by that sector of society described initially as non-organized civil society; that is, the social actors that, while belonging to civil society, do not belong to organizations or initiatives that work actively in peace-building.

From a first glance, we can conclude that non-organized civil society is generally very much in line with the system of transitional justice that stresses truth as a fundamental element in order to move forward, pardon, and not repeat the violence associated with the conflict in Colombia. Likewise, it can be understood as a society that is willing to pardon and seek reconciliation among the different actors in the conflict and which wishes for comprehensive and collective reparations that, more than a squabble between victims and perpetrators, understands the complexity of the conflict and the need to become involved actively in peace-building.

Citizen participation is noteworthy for its role and vision in peace-building given that the people are interested and, in fact, participate but do not clearly understand the consequences of this participation or do not see it reflected in the institutional activities of the public administration.

In this sense, it is very enlightening to distinguish the words, images, and songs that people associate with the concept of peace and how they differ with those that are underscored in the Peace Accords of 2016; the former emphasize aspects such as tranquility, harmony, respect, tolerance, coexistence, and reconciliation. This marks a difference between institutional and everyday peace. Without assigning greater or lesser value to one or the other, it seems clear that work needs to be done to achieve more coordination between the two.

The challenge resides in harmonizing these two concepts of peace (institutional and everyday). This might have positive effects in terms of peace-building and defusing polarization. Initiatives such as the use of artistic and cultural venues to promote social cohesion can help in generating synergies between both spaces.

### **III. Peace beyond the peace agreements with the FARC: case studies**

#### **Analysis of three cases that underline the role of civil society in processes of citizen participation**

Three cases examined by the National Forum for Colombia identify the potential of civil society to exert a territorial, regional, or national influence by means of diverse participatory formats that constitute important resources for the peace-building Colombia needs. Each case involves different formats of participation, motivation, and linkages among actors that show how civil society can strengthen the social fabric to create better living conditions and how it can participate and raise its voice, both of which are substantive elements for devising a political and cultural project that leads to relations that are more plural, inclusive, and transparent.

The cases examined were:

1. A case study on citizen participation in a national consultation venue that came out of the final Peace Agreement, aimed at developing norms for devising a law to guarantee participation by social organizations and movements.
2. A case study for collective creation of Territorial Action Plans (Planes de Acción Territorial – PAT) for victims in the department of Meta.
3. A case study of the experience of the municipality of Cajamarca, in the framework of the popular consultation on the exploitation of natural resources in the municipality.

After examining these experiences of citizen participation, a number of considerations can be pointed out that show the potential of social organizations and movements and of the citizenry, in general, to contribute to peace.

A first issue involves the political contexts in which participatory dynamics and, of course, peace-building occur in the territories. Effective participatory exercises must be long-term, that is, they involve a number of conditions that are needed in order to reach the objectives of the participatory process and, as evidence shows, they also require a strong social fabric in the territory as a basis for the construction of agreements and for bringing forces together in support of the objectives of the participation. In this sense, linkages are very important because, as mentioned, they can provide greater legitimacy for actions by civil society as well as by the State. They also strengthen the bonds of confidence, that lead to more equitable relations, based on the recognition and the assurances that the initiatives that are undertaken with others will be steps in the direction of reaching the common objective that was agreed upon.

In addition, a favorable political environment is required, whenever the authorities provide a political opening, for including citizen participation as a substantive component of governance. It is a fact that society by itself cannot be successful in its intention of building democracy. These processes must be undertaken in permanent agreement with the authorities because democracy is the result of joint action by all of society.

The second conclusion refers to the need for these processes to include social counterweights built in by autonomous citizen leverage, characterized by their own identity in support of clear-cut initiatives about what they want to build via participatory dynamics.

The third condition refers to linking different repertoires and formats for participation. Sometimes civil society reaches out to institutional forms of participation, but in others it uses less institutionalized formats or even leans towards mobilizations and social protests. What these cases clearly demonstrate is that participation is much more successful and effective when various forms of participation are linked together.

A final discovery is related to learning and the capacity to undertake actions to overcome difficulties and obstacles. In fact, people participate and learn during the process to relate to other actors and create and implement a set of strategies to reach the objectives they set down; this joins them together in strength to obtain resources, knowledge, and strategies, which are relevant because the

citizenry adapts successively to changes and circumstances. This shows that participatory processes, from the actors' perspectives, should include a principle of resilience, that is, one of constant re-adaptation to the circumstances that are demanded from each of the actors.

These four conclusions stand out in the cases analyzed in that they guarantee sustainability for the participatory processes, a necessary factor for democratization and peace-building. Participatory processes of medium term duration that are supported by ever more solid, linked, and strong social sectors, as reflected in their autonomy and interests, are the ones that really contribute to strengthening the democratic system and, thereby, the political and cultural project for peace.

#### **IV. Inclusion for peace-building**

Inclusion in peace-building is part of a debate that looks to define the most appropriate mechanisms for converting expectations into practice. Thus, it is important to differentiate between inclusion as a means to gain legitimacy for processes and inclusion as a process. Inclusion should be examined in terms of its practical contribution to peace-building and not just with regards to its expectations and fulfillment as formal requirements.

However, in order to define inclusion and how to achieve it in practice, we require an in-depth understanding of the multiple expressions of diversity in the country. This understanding is based on analytical frameworks that capture the multiple dimensions, levels, structures, and dynamics within which exclusion and oppression operate in highly divided societies and which are fraught with different expressions of violence and discrimination. Taking these conditions into account is a requirement for effective inclusion in peace-building that will overcome obstacles that, if not properly identified, are hidden away in the frameworks of power that tend to perpetuate the dynamics of conflict.

This study incorporated the concept of intersectionality as a basis for identifying the positions on which we stand as researchers and actors in social processes, in order to build different relationships with our counterparts that, in exercises such as this one, are fundamental. (Ciase, 2018b).

Intersectionality is a complex system of multiple and simultaneous structures of oppression/privilege, in which discrimination – by reason of gender, race, ethnicity, age and other factors – generates a continuum that involves multiple experiences of violence and discrimination which, in turn, structure diverse scenarios of privilege, subordination, and even symbolic nonexistence. (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005 quoted by Ciase, 2018, p. 19).

The methodology employed for this section of the study had three components: the first involved a focus group with participation of feminist organizations from civil society (human rights, peace-building, former combatants, academics); the second was a questionnaire sent out electronically to representatives of these organizations; and the third, although first in implementation, was an overview of the state of the art on social inclusion associated with peace-building.

The exercise with the participating organizations provided evidence, once more, that the concept of inclusion has multiple levels and projections. Thus, it is important to understand inclusion not as a unifying and homogenizing concept – that originates in an acceptable venue, built along patriarchal lines by an ideal power-holder with a particular worldview and a specific development model – but as a permanent practice of listening, building, deconstructing, and starting over on the basis of plural experiences, outlooks, and understandings that celebrate differences as a treasure trove that can encompass everything from ethnic ancestries to ecological, political, economic, and social perspectives that, in sum, constitute human society and, especially so, in a country like this one that imbibes from different traditions and diverse experiences. In this manner, the actions of the women’s movement were identified at various levels – macro, midlevel, and micro – which in turn are related to the dimensions of intersectionality.

At the macro level and from a perspective of structural intersectionality, there emerged a scenario that allowed for a widespread discussion about the ways in which demands for inclusion are presented to the State as a natural intermediary of civil society – a guarantor of rights – especially with regards to the peace-building process.

With regards to the midlevel dimension and its categories, the main element was the difficulty to generate inclusions and conversations within the women’s movement. This might originate in the idea of a homogeneous movement, that finds difficulty in recognizing its diversity and how to integrate and equate non-hegemonic struggles, as was observed especially in the focus group when referring to trans women, women ex-combatants, and the relationships between urban and rural women. This is further complicated by the possible clash of agendas among these sectors with relation to peace-building and also suggests the inclusion of other narratives, such as those that emerge from the war. When mentioning these topics, we refer to the outlooks that former combatants have with regards to the feminist objectives of their organizations and what they can contribute as part of them.

Finally, at the micro level (identities) we observe that, given that which is personal for feminism is also political, and that this is the discursive challenge for the women’s movement in general, this political discourse has become an obstacle that impedes contact between the personal (micro) dimensions with those of a macro and mid-level character and interrupts the back and forth exchanges between the personal and the political. This implies that personal practices that were considered pleasurable within the focus group cannot support the professional and political activities of the women, while those hegemonic dynamics continue to dominate in the participating organizations. Thus, these instruments do not come into play when seeking to identify inclusion, which might contribute to expanding the spectrum of what we understand and accept as inclusion in Colombia today.

## **V. Current challenges for the role of civil society in building an inclusive peace**

### **A diverse civil society: ¿Unity or lack of unity?**

By definition, a diverse civil society is the expression and the incentive for a participatory citizen democracy. However, in Colombia this diversity is not synonymous with unity in the face of the challenges posed by a society polarized around the issue of peace. Unity, or better said, the greatest possible unity, becomes necessary when the objective of peace-building is threatened by the power of political actors who oppose the process and the persistence of armed actors associated with political or criminal interests. In this scenario, unity to seek negotiated outcomes to the remaining armed conflicts in the country becomes a necessity and a challenge for civil society.

Unity does not mean homogeneity. On the contrary, the diversity of political projects, worldviews, capacities, and repertoires for action contribute to a greater coherence in the search for common objectives. That is why heterogeneity should not be transformed into an obstacle to political unity for a civil society that supports peace-building and the implementation of the peace accords.

### **Polarization: Reproducing the ideological struggle in civil society**

One of the challenges that all societies face after an armed struggle is overcoming the ideological confrontation that influences polarization and mutual discredit among political actors. Civil society does not avoid this situation and confrontational, dichotomous discourses between “left and right” that exacerbate fragmentation and exclusion can still be heard.

It is necessary that debate and mutual understanding among different expressions of civil society overcome ideological barriers and transform this situation into an engine for social change on the road to achieving a diverse society, politically and ideologically, but unified in its objective to build peace.

This is a challenge for civil society in the current scenario, where government policy tends to belittle the importance of the peace agreements with the FARC-EP as a route for transformation and social change. The task of civil society in support of peace is to move the will of the detractors and not to confront or exclude on the basis of programmatic or political differences. In the end, peace should be an objective of “lefts and rights”, a policy of the State and not an excuse for exclusion and confrontation.

### **Overcoming asymmetries and building counterweights**

One of the principal challenges facing civil society in Colombia is the effect of power asymmetries that prevail in highly divided societies. When to this added an adverse political environment in the public sphere, these asymmetries become even more pronounced.

Civil society can make an important contribution to overcoming power asymmetries by generating or strengthening the social fabric. A well-structured society is a society with greater capacities to provide counterweights in the face of power asymmetries. The creation of alliances and the

organizations of platforms and networks of organizations will allow for greater linkages among diverse repertoires and formats for action that exist in Colombian civil society.

### **Inclusion of non-organized civil society**

This project has contributed to filling a void in knowledge about non-organized civil society, as well as its lack of inclusion. The expressions, interests, language, and formats of non-organized civil society are different from the rest and this presents a challenge for organized civil society to move closer to the diverse non-organized expressions that also demand the implementation of the peace agreements and the search for negotiated solutions to the remaining armed confrontations in the country. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that just as there are sectors that work for the compliance of the peace agreements, there are also those who reject them for a variety of reasons and propose a fundamentally different conception of peace.

In order to overcome this challenge, a greater effort must be made to research and generate information on a participatory basis in order to build bridges of understanding in the first place and thereafter to establish direct links.

It also involves overcoming ideological and programmatic barriers that range from the technical to the political and, similarly, from observation and study to complementing repertoires of action that non-organized civil society possesses, all of this in order to overcome Manichean outlooks on the country and its history that do not mesh with the nuances that we observe currently.

### **From an institutional peace to a widespread peace**

Colombia is characterized by a tendency to formalize and institutionalize (legal regulation) social processes. Even though this is necessary in all societies that are committed to the rule of law, the problem emerges when formal considerations are not converted into concrete social realities, into their material expression and their ownership by society. Civil society in general proposes a vision of peace that goes beyond the institutional processes, that is, a peace that takes shape in social and territorial terms under the belief that peace is a social, geographic, and historical construct. The demand for compliance of the peace agreements cannot be limited to creating institutions, issuing regulations, or devising plans if all of this does not translate in observable results for the social groups most affected by the armed conflict and by the social structures that set the stage for it.

This transition is not only technical – that is, improving the efficiency of the institutions – but also political, in which the will of the people influences policy and not only the bureaucracy. This involves a political process which brings together social groups that, at the same time that they propose technical outcomes, also demand compliance in political terms. Simultaneously, an institutional framework must exist that facilitates and promotes peace-building processes.

### **International cooperation: a strategic ally**

International cooperation plays a fundamental role during the first years of the implementation of a peace agreement. This can be explained from the fact that during that period there might be more opponents than those convinced about the need for implementing an agreement and building peace.

In this sense, civil society must understand that international aid agencies are more important at this stage in their role as political allies than as donors.

Resources are scarce but strategic. For this reason, dialogue with the international community must be for mutual understanding and the agendas and interests must be aligned, not only in terms of financial support. The greatest unity of objectives and the complementary specialized role of civil society contribute to strengthening the strategic nature of international aid in support of creating capacities among the citizenry for peace-building. This alliance is translated into a strong counterweight in the face of those opposed to peace.

## **VI. Concluding reflections**

### **The challenge for dialogue with opposing groups**

Peace-building assumes that civil society will set up processes for dialogue with opposing groups given that, at the current moment and in light of the historical trajectory of past attempts to negotiate an end to armed violence, opposition to peace strengthens in the face of noncompliance of the peace accords with the FARC-EP and the extreme political polarization around this issue and the ongoing negotiations with other armed actors. Even though no absolute truth exists after an armed conflict, a democratic society promotes the possibility of building truths and historical memory that reaffirms the identity for peace.

The bridges of mutual understanding among the different social levels that are required for peace-building are formal and informal and that difference will be strategically important insofar as searching for objectives that will transform conflicts and build peace. This strategic unity does not mean it will always have to be so because democracy means differences and involves political competition. This is not an incipient process; there already exists an accumulation of significant experiences such as the platform called “Diálogos improbables”, the “Grupo de Diálogo sobre Minería en Colombia” (GDIAM), and the research being undertaken by the Truth Commission, among many others. All of them as a group demonstrate that the effort is growing and significant in support of peace.

The risk that peace faces is equivalent to the risk faced by democracy. For a society, especially for non-organized civil society, it is obvious that peace does not only mean the end of an armed conflict but also overcoming the structural factors of inequality and exclusion that set the ground for armed violence. However, Colombian civil society has shown itself to be resilient. It has demonstrated that as its capacities increase, it also undertakes better actions, for example, the contributions that have been made in terms of actions in support of territorial peace. These visions underscore that social cohesion and socialization are effective and observable actions. All of this occurs in a context where armed violence has not ceased totally. This is the expression of vitality and resilience in Colombian civil society.

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