Civil society and peace processes in Kivu

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Misunderstanding of the nature of civil society in the Kivus and exclusion of grassroots representatives are implicated in the failure of the peace processes in DRC.

Recent research into the role of civil society in DRC suggests that international organisations involved in the Congolese peace process have tended to assume that civil society in the Kivus mirrors its Western counterpart, in which ‘civil society’ represents the needs of the people to the state and keeps the state accountable to the people. Civil society in the Kivus, however, developed quite differently, with today’s distinctive social and bureaucratic structures having been shaped by the colonial administration of earlier years.

One tier of these structures, carrying the official title ‘Civil Society’, comprises a network of national, regional and provincial entities which are little more than one of many branches of patron-client networks throughout the country. With the influx of international aid and humanitarian intervention throughout the conflict, a second tier developed: local NGOs and associations which are in practice run by international actors and which at times do not necessarily take into account the needs of the local population. However, there are also grassroots local NGOs which do address local needs and are primarily funded by their own members from income generated by second or third jobs.

Building peace

The primary goal of including civil society in any peace process is to ensure that the peace process addresses the roots of the conflict and the needs of those most affected by the conflict. However, building such a peace process requires a nuanced approach to the inclusion of civil society. It involves distinguishing whether or not civil society representatives are truly connected to the population or are simply the puppets of political élites or international organisations.

This is evident in the Congolese case where more recent forms of the peace process tried to create mechanisms for inclusion of civil society. Before 2008 the peace process focused primarily on brokering agreements with militia leaders and senior political leaders. The Goma Agreement in 2008 was the first to include civil society leaders, and to directly request their input. Hundreds of civil society leaders attended a conference to present their concerns for consideration at the table. There was a failure, however, to include grassroots civil society groups; the peace process catered primarily to the élites in the country and had little effect on realities on the ground. Peace processes need to occur both from the top down and from the bottom up.

Grassroots leaders tend to use bottom-up approaches to resolve conflict at the local level – and in implementing pragmatic responses to the enormous physical and psychological trauma that war has produced. However, they had no access to the peace process. Primarily, the official network (which included leaders of NGOs either run by international organisations or controlled by them) attended a conference to present their concerns for consideration at the table. There was a failure, however, to include grassroots civil society groups; the peace process tended to focus on the élites in the country and had little effect on realities on the ground. Peace processes need to occur both from the top down and from the bottom up.

I interviewed representatives of groups who were present at the peace talks as well as some who had been excluded from the talks. The interviewees represented a range of groups. Some belonged to the official ‘Civil Society’ bureaucratic network while others were not part of this ‘official’ network but were leaders of NGOs either run by international organisations based in Europe or local to the area.

The interview questions focused firstly on the structure of civil society and secondly on understanding the degree of participation that each specific representative discerned his or her group had in the process. Descriptions of ‘un-civil’ groups within civil society in the wider literature shared similarities with what I found in DRC but the strongest evidence was that uncovered in the course of the interviews. And the consensus of the interviews was that, in the Congolese context, the peace process has met with little success not only because it faces immense challenges due to the regional dynamics of the conflict but also because it has primarily existed in top-down form and failed to integrate bottom-up processes. It has failed not only to include the right members of civil society but also to ensure that the shape of the peace process matches the society to which it hopes to bring peace. It is necessary to understand the multiplicity of ways that civil society can be defined in any given context, and to have a more nuanced...
approach to civil society inclusion for more sustainable peace processes.

Civil society in the context of the Kivus has developed separately from its European and North American counterparts as a hybrid of deeply entrenched patrimonial associations, transnationally controlled NGOs and small local associations. It is important to take these realities into account when designing mechanisms for civil society inclusion in a peace process.

The Data Centre for IDPs in North Kivu

Laura Jacqueline Church

Effective provision of aid and protection for those displaced in eastern DRC requires reliable data – which the new Data Centre in North Kivu is helping to provide.

For example, there are ‘commuting’ IDPs, people who shuttle regularly between different locations, including their homes and camps. And there are multiple displacements where, if not detected, agencies run the risk of multiplying by the number of displacements rather than counting the displaced individuals. Further challenges include differing methodologies, unknown sources of information, and lack of adjustment for births and deaths.

In order to deal with these challenges, the Commission for Population Movements (CMP) was launched, led by OCHA. The CMP works in cooperation and collaboration with many of the humanitarian actors and agencies to compare and consolidate data. Discrepancies and data shortages continued, however, and in 2008 an innovative project was launched to address this information shortage: the Data Centre for IDPs.

The Data Centre, run by UNOPS, is located in Goma and monitors the provinces of South and North Kivu. The project is funded by UNHCR as part of the agency’s CCCM (Camp Coordination and Camp Management) responsibility but all UN agencies are encouraged to be partners in the project – and any humanitarian agency can request data from the Centre. On a technical level the project works in direct cooperation with and support of the provincial authorities, the camp managing agencies (local and international) and UNHCR in providing for the needs of IDPs. The Centre aims primarily to:

- undertake individual registration of camp-based IDP populations, including new arrivals, departures, births, deaths, etc
- maintain an up-to-date and real-time database that allows for population tracking and the production of disaggregated data on IDP populations
- manage population movements from, to and between IDP camps by ensuring individual documentation, such as Voluntary Return Attestations, etc
- produce accurate beneficiary lists for assistance purposes, taking into account family size, special needs, and vulnerability criteria such as defined by the humanitarian community in DRC
- help develop a strong humanitarian data analysis capacity within the framework of the Congolese government’s stabilisation plan for eastern DRC (STAREC)
- ensure individual registration of Congolese refugee returnees in order to facilitate verification in the countries of asylum and to assist UNHCR North Kivu in planning for protection and assistance activities

commonly referred to as ‘host families’. Collection of data in a camp is relatively easy but data collection among host families – where resident and displaced populations cannot easily be distinguished – is much more difficult, and DRC’s complex displacement patterns make it yet more difficult to arrive at correct and coherent figures.