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CIVIC ECOSYSTEMS INITIATIVE COLLABORATION

CIVIC ECOSYSTEMS IN PEACE PROCESSES

COLOMBIA, AFGHANISTAN, SYRIA

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RATIONALE

Peace processes tend to be interpreted through the narrow lens of those who are directly involved in the negotiations. This narrow focus reflects a set of assumptions about: (1) who has the power to influence the process and shape its outcome; (2) what are the stakes involved; and (3) where are the spaces for engagement. There have been various efforts to develop more inclusive and participatory approaches to peace-making but they also tend to focus on the negotiations.

In contrast, an ecosystem lens brings into focus the wider systems that shape peace processes and directs attention to the emergence of civic openings and opportunities there. It reveals how diverse civic actors, ideas and practices can become activated at different levels and moments, influencing the environment in which peace processes occur as well as their internal dynamics – thereby potentially affecting peace outcomes.

The goal of this collaboration is to gain a dynamic understanding of the role of civic ecosystems in peace processes and use it as a basis for developing new thinking and approaches to peace-making.

SCOPE

In this collaboration we apply an ecosystem lens to the peace processes in Colombia, Afghanistan and Syria. Engaging with these three cases allows us to map civic ecosystems that arise and play out in very different contexts, analyse them individually and comparatively, and draw out some of the broader implications for understanding – and strengthening – the role of civic ecosystems in peace processes.

COLOMBIA

Colombia is a particularly useful case for developing a dynamic understanding of civic ecosystems in peace processes. We can trace how a civic ecosystem emerges, evolves and adapts over time, and track how civic actors, ideas and practices influence the peace process across different phases – before and during the negotiations and through the period of implementation. The Colombian case allows us to explore how a civic ecosystem is constructed through the interactions of grassroots, national and international actors, and how ideas such as ‘territorial peace’ and ‘non-repetition’ are developed and leveraged by different actors. It also provides an opportunity to consider the potential gains in sustainability resulting from the diversity and interdependence of civic actors in peace processes by examining, for example, local and transnational networks involving rural farmers, ethnic minorities, women’s and LGBTI groups, and the private sector.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is an example of a locally-driven civic ecosystem that interacts with a heavily internationalised ‘peace’ process. We can investigate how civic openings that emerge at the local and national level may be closed down or subverted, prompting civic actors to adapt their strategies. In the Afghan case we can observe a process of transnationalisation of a civic ecosystem as a way of bypassing blockages and creating alternative channels for influence. A useful example for analysing these dynamics is the transnational mobilisation of women’s networks and activists connecting to civic actors in the Afghan diaspora as well as domestically to women in rural areas, in government and the private sector, and internationally to leaders and allies in positions of power in different parts of the world.

SYRIA

The Syrian case is interesting because it suggests that even though mechanisms created specifically for civic actors to influence the political process may not achieve their intended goals, they may still have important unintended consequences for the wider ecosystem and the environment in which the peace process takes place. We can examine these kinds of effects and consequences in the case of the Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) established by the UN in response to demands from civil society. From an ecosystem perspective, Syria is also interesting because of the proliferation of local ceasefires and peace agreements – providing another entry point for developing a civic ecosystems approach to peace-making.

INSIGHTS

This collaboration aims to generate three types of insights:

Firstly, to develop a dynamic understanding of civic ecosystems in peace processes, including how civic ecosystems emerge, evolve and adapt in response to opportunities and blockages in the process and the external environment.

Secondly, to identify some of the mechanisms and pathways through which civic ecosystems can influence peace processes and affect their outcomes, including their indirect impact and unintended consequences.

Finally, to consider what factors can enable or constrain the potential of civic ecosystems to contribute to peace processes in productive ways, and what approaches and strategies may help to unlock that potential.

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