



The CPS approach: dialogue

Social transformation presents a challenge to any society. Demographic change, upheaval in economic systems, inclusion of minorities, and moves to break with certain role concepts and clan structures often influence each other. This may make it necessary to renegotiate social and political participation within existing systems. In many countries where the Civil Peace Service (CPS) works, established structures become or remain unable to keep pace with ongoing change. Without scope for inclusive societal discourse, negotiation processes have either already been derailed or risk becoming violent. This is where the CPS comes in.

By promoting dialogue processes, the CPS creates space for a wide range of actors to make their voices heard, take steps towards greater interaction with one another and learn to understand each other. By building trust and facilitating peer-to-peer communication, the CPS aims to generate momentum for dialogue that fosters basic mutual understanding, prompting actors to change their attitudes and behaviour as a result.

In this context, conflict is seen as a driver of transformation and change and is tackled through dialogue, becoming the element linking the parties engaged in it. During the course of dialogue, conflict is then progressively replaced by mutual understanding and empathy. The CPS supports and facilitates a wide range of dialogue processes, starting from the assumption that personal change also leads to long-term institutional, local and, by extension, societal transformation.

Being fundamentally willing and open to engage in a discussion that has the potential for a peaceful outcome is crucial. 'A true discussion is one in which each partner acknowledg-

es and affirms the other's existence, even if they hold conflicting positions. While such a discussion by no means makes these conflicting positions disappear altogether, it can ensure that they are dealt with humanely and that efforts are made to overcome the conflict.'¹

Starting points and approaches

The CPS works on a cross-party basis at the interface between human rights work and conflict transformation. This requires openness to dialogue with all parties to conflict. The CPS is committed to the principles and standards of human rights. On the basis of a participatory analysis of existing power relationships and imbalances in power, and depending on the specific context, the CPS strengthens the weaker party or parties to conflict in line with its/their needs. This enables these groups to become involved in the dialogue process or even to campaign for and support the development of just and participatory relationships, institutions and mechanisms in the first place. To this end, the CPS works in particular to strengthen civil society organisations that campaign for the rights of disadvantaged population groups.

The CPS also promotes capacity development for state institutions in their role as responsible organisations, creating the conditions for equal dialogue between a range of stakeholders.

Dialogue work focuses consistently on the specific needs of people in specific situations². Consequently, local

¹ Martin Buber, speaking after winning the Peace Prize of the German book trade in 1953.

² See 'Democratic Dialogue - A Handbook for Practitioners', UNDP, OAS, IDEA, CIDA

knowledge is indispensable and plays a key role in ensuring that dialogue processes are effective. CPS experts work with local partners to promote and strengthen dialogue processes, networks and cooperation arrangements with a view to ensuring the highest level of participation by all parties involved in complex conflicts. They also provide long-term support and advice to local organisations, with a focus on processes. Having an external perspective, they can provide significant impetus and encourage self-reflection among the actors. They offer guidance in methods of non-violent conflict transformation and encourage parties engaged in conflict to move away from competing against one another in favour of considering options for working together. Depending on the context, dialogue may also be used as part of measures to prevent violence, such as in the integration or reintegration of refugees and/or ex-combatants.

- Supporting dialogue between state institutions with expertise and responsibilities in the area of conflict transformation in order to encourage early and comprehensive interventions to de-escalate conflict
- Building capacity in the area of non-violent conflict transformation, e.g. by providing instruction in mediation and dialogue techniques to partner institutions or to schools
- Promoting South-South exchange in the area of dialogue, informed by relevant practical experience

The priority areas for CPS's work are:

- Promoting and supporting multi-stakeholder dialogue
- Providing impetus and organising and offering (long-term) opportunities for dialogue
- Networking with relevant actors and institutions
- Carrying out capacity development as a counterpoint to asymmetrical relationships
- Supporting round-table discussions in specific conflicts
- Strengthening partners by providing them with careful, targeted feedback and helping them reflect on their actions

<http://www.pnud.cl/publicaciones/Manual-Dialogo-Democratico.pdf>

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Ethiopia

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Jockeying among different ethnic groups for political participation and material resources repeatedly gives rise to tensions within Ethiopian society. The South of the country, where some 56 different ethnic groups live side by side, is a major hotspot of regional conflict. Against this backdrop, the CPS is helping the parties involved in conflict to communicate with one another and strengthening existing potential for conflict mediation. The traditional authorities in particular are key pillars of society and play a significant role in promoting peace. The Konso people, for instance, live close to the Segen River in southern Ethiopia. Despite fertile soils, resources are still in short supply for the 300,000 or so people who share the region's farmland and water resources. With a view to transforming resulting conflict in a non-violent manner, the CPS brought Konso Chief Kalla Gezahegn on board to help develop methods that combine traditional and modern techniques of conflict transformation. 'I feel a sense of responsibility for the people and want to convince them to resolve conflict peacefully and to work to ensure lasting peace. I think the main way I can help to mediate in conflict is to use my natural authority as Chief,' says Kalla. But how can Kalla best leverage his legitimacy to benefit all parties?

The CPS has been working in Ethiopia since 2008. Together with Kalla and representatives of a further 20 Ethiopian authorities, it collaborated with a consultancy

organisation, Inmedio, to develop a mediation approach specific to the situation in Ethiopia that combined the experience of traditional mediators with Western methods. Facilitated mediation proved to be a particularly useful technique.

Working with its partners, the CPS rolled out a nationwide training programme to promote and develop this approach. However, the seminars it organised offered more than just an opportunity to learn and practise the art of asking meaningful questions: being supra-regional in nature, the programme brought together participants from many different clans and social strata. This created a safe space for dismantling stereotypes and tackling real-life conflicts. The Addis Mediation Group was set up in the wake of this training programme. Having compiled its knowledge in a manual, the group is now working to pass on mediation expertise to decision-makers to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities more effectively.

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Bolivia

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Early in 2009, the Bolivian Government held a referendum on a new constitution that formed the basis for a pluri-national, pluri-cultural and communitarian state. The implementation of the new constitution and the associated restructuring of the state are bringing to light a number of structural inconsistencies between the government, indigenous organisations and other civil society actors. In the lowlands especially, conflicts of interest have intensified. The new constitution also offers an opportunity to establish dialogue processes as an instrument of democratic nation-building.

The CPS has been promoting the non-violent transformation of conflict over land and local powers and the exercise of participation and human rights since 2008. CPS experts are working at local and regional level to support dialogue processes, helping to ensure that all population groups are included in, and contribute to, the process of reforming the legal system, as for example in San Ignacio de Velasco.

This small town is located in the Eastern Bolivian lowlands, far from the capital and close to the Brazilian border. The regional population makes its living from forestry, a national park, illegal cocoa farming, and organised crime. Cultural life in the town revolves around a Jesuit church and an annual Baroque festival. Now San Ignacio de Velasco wants to become autonomous and adopt the principle of local democracy. Under the 2009 Bolivian constitution, this requires it to draw up a municipal charter. However, the process of giving everyone a greater say also entails conflict. Rather than commission

outside experts to draft the document, the local council decided to go ahead and draw up the charter in dialogue with the local community, as recommended by two civil society organisations. For San Ignacio de Velasco, this involved all population groups coming around the table to discuss what the new charter should look like, with their deliberations facilitated by a trusted third party. This role was taken on by the CPS, whose experts facilitated and supported the dialogue process. Although the process faltered in early 2013, its results and achievements remain considerable. The local elite recognise indigenous groups, smallholders and landless peasants as community stakeholders and involve them in decision-making processes. Organisations such as the Fundación Tierra (Land Foundation) that had previously been very confrontational have now abandoned their antagonistic approach and established themselves as credible facilitators in land disputes. In addition to working on the municipal charter, the actors are now independently starting further processes, such as a dialogue initiative on the distribution of water resources.

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Philippines

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The Mindanao archipelago in the southern Philippines is the least developed region in the country and the weakest in structural terms. Unequal distribution of land and resources and discrimination against large sections of the population underpin a range of violent conflicts. The Philippine Government and various rebel and separatist groups have been engaged in armed conflict with each other for decades, the most notable clashes at national level taking place between the Maoist New People's Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). There are also numerous conflicts between ethnic groups, clans and families, with considerable potential for violence in some cases.

In March 2014, the Philippine Government and the MILF signed a peace accord agreeing the gradual establishment of the autonomous Muslim region of Bangsamoro.

The MILF's struggle for independence focuses on the unequal distribution of land and other resources as well as on the persistent economic, social and political marginalisation of the Muslim population. However, in many areas, it is Mindanao's highly diverse indigenous population that is facing the greatest degree of marginalisation. They are poorly organised and represented, and little if any account is taken of their specific interests and legal entitlements. The indigenous population is not being sufficiently integrated into the ongoing peace process between MILF and the Philippine Government, leading to its fears of continued discrimination in the new autonomous region of Bangsamoro.

It is self-evident that a formal peace agreement alone is not enough to secure lasting peace. The mutually influencing nature of conflict dynamics at local, regional and national level is hindering efforts to put a permanent stop to the violence. Consequently, the CPS is strengthening civil society in its role as an independent actor, promot-

ing peace and non-violence and encouraging constructive dialogue between state and civil society at local, regional and national level as well as between the different parties engaged in conflict. The CPS and its partners are networking those campaigning for peace and supporting them in their advocacy and media work. CPS experts are initiating dialogue processes between citizens, civil society, the government and armed forces, thereby helping them to get to know each other, understand one another's positions and establish mutual trust.

At municipal level, indigenous groups are being educated about their rights and about the administrative regulations governing resource depletion, empowering them to actively pursue their interests. For their part, municipal administrations have begun to draw up conflict-sensitive municipal development plans. Actors trained in civil conflict transformation mediate effectively in disputes over land or in conflict between clans and families. This serves to promote mutual understanding and overcome prejudices. In this way, the CPS's long-term work is creating structures that enable distribution conflicts to be addressed without any escalation in violence.

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