

National Dialogue in Guatemala

Presentation to the Peacebuilding Commission Working Group on Lessons
Learned
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Definitions

- National Dialogue:
 - a multi-stakeholder engagement (state and society)
 - A deliberative process (debate and decision making)
 - Issues of national scope (visions, agendas or policies)
- Scope: National Dialogue experiences in Guatemala between 1996 and 2006

Definitions

- Peacebuilding:
 - Strengthening the capacity of a society to resolve conflict without recourse to coercion or violence.

Peacebuilding

- Peacebuilding involves
 - **Tangibles:** ingredients necessary for a peaceful society. (WHAT)
 - **Institutions:** structures of governance (parliaments, ministries, electoral bodies, police, courts, etc.)
 - **Policies:** guidelines for sectoral development (security sector, land access, rule of law, gender, etc.)
 - **Intangibles:** social and political processes that hold together institutions, policies and society. (HOW)
 - **Trust** at the individual, social and political levels
 - **Legitimacy** of political institutions and political action

On the context

- 36 years of internal armed conflict
 - More than 200,000 victims
 - A militarized state
 - A polarized society
 - An authoritarian political culture
 - A legacy of poverty, discrimination, exclusion, underdevelopment
- 10 year-old democratization process (1986-)

On the context

- 1996 Peace Accords
 - Ended armed confrontation
 - critical issues for consolidation of peace identified
 - Agenda for transformation of the state. 10 specific agreements on issues like human rights, demilitarization, indigenous rights, social and economic development, etc.

The challenge

- Problem:
 - Turn the Peace Accords from an agreement between two parties to a national agreement
 - Turn the issue-specific agreements into policy (action)

National Dialogues

- National Dialogues were used as a mechanism to address these issues:
 - Developing a common vision
 - Legitimizing a national agenda
 - Developing sectoral policies

National Dialogues 1996-2006 (a partial list)

NATIONAL AGENDA AND/OR COMMON VISION

- War Torn Societies Project
- Encuentros para la Actualizacion
- Vision Guatemala
- Inter-party dialogue
- Dialogue Roundtables

SECTORAL POLICIES

- Fiscal Policy
- Indigenous rights
- Demilitarization, defense and public security
- Education
- Health and Nutrition
- Social services

National Dialogues 1996-2006

- Different configurations and modalities
 - Convened by Government, convened by Civil Society, convened by the International Community
 - High level of local ownership (even if convened by international community, through local actors)
 - Different degree of external support
 - External support from UN, from OAS, from international ngo's, from bilateral countries

Assessing National Dialogues: Definitions

■ Dialogue Results

- Outputs > the specific products achieved through the dialogue process:
 - Reaching understandings (perceptions and knowledge), Agreements (intentions and goals), Proposals (actions)
- Outcomes > the contribution of the process to the peacebuilding needs:
 - Transforming attitudes, instilling skills, creating channels of communication, accruing legitimacy

Assessing National Dialogues: a cumulative balance

- “Good” dialogues
 - Outputs (policy impact):
 - better understanding of issues and challenges
 - better understanding of reciprocal needs and positions
 - shared principles, goals
 - concrete policy recommendations, draft legislation
 - Outcomes (process impact):
 - A political elite (political parties, civil society) more skilled and confident in dialogue
 - Channels for inter-sectoral communication (within society, between society and state)
 - Civil society strengthened and legitimized as a partner in policy making

Assessing National Dialogues: a cumulative balance

- “Bad” dialogues
 - Outputs (policy impact):
 - no policy impact (no results or irrelevant)
 - negative policy impact (“illegitimate” results through imposition, manipulation of participation, etc.)
 - Outcomes (process impact)
 - enhanced mistrust
 - entrenched conflict
 - political cynicism

Assessing National Dialogues: a peacebuilding balance

- *Overall, National Dialogues have contributed to the strengthening of Guatemalan society's capacity to address conflict without recourse to coercion or violence.*
 - Root causes of conflict have not been resolved; new problems emerge; political system still dysfunctional; but
 - 13 years on: no relapse into conflict; no political violence;
 - agency for change is active

Lessons Learned

1. National ownership is collective ownership

- Government ownership is not synonymous with national ownership
 - not about who convenes, but how the process is implemented
 - Inclusiveness, participation, balance and fairness
- National ownership: from design to implementation

Lessons Learned

2. Strong methodology, strong results

- Improvisation and superficiality breed failure, specially if compounded with political opportunism
- Successful dialogues combine a strong political mandate + capable technical secretariat
- Learn from best and worst practices, don't copy

Lessons Learned

3. Dialogue methodologies: mix and match.

- “Scenario” methodologies> established a sense shared interests and common destiny; framework for collective action
- Research-based methodologies> de-politicized issues, increased understanding, led to proposals
- Political negotiation methodologies> broke agreements; led to action (but as stakes are higher, subject to more pressures)
- Think strategically. Combine

Lessons Learned

4. Plan for the outcomes

- Outcomes have longer “shelf life” than outputs
- Invest time and resources working on the “intangibles” -attitudes, skills, perceptions, etc.- both as a preparation for the outputs, and beyond them
- Best dialogues designed a follow-up strategy , building on the outcomes to ensure further output impact.

Lessons Learned

5. Dialogue is a tool, not the solution.

- Part of a peacebuilding strategy, not a strategy by itself
- Not a panacea, and can lead to negative outcomes (Dialogue Fatigue; Cynicism)