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# The Impact of Civil Society Movements on Conflcit

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THE IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS ON CONFLICT

Nicholas B. Rinehart

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
Sustainable Development at SIT Graduate Institute, DC Center in Washington, DC, USA

July 28, 2017

Suzanne Simon, Ph.D.

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Nicholas B. Rinehart

July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017

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### **Abstract**

This research inquiry examined the relationship between increased democratic participation of civil society and conflict. The working hypothesis guiding the paper was that an increase in mobilized civil society participation will lead to a decrease in conflict at a societal level, if primary and secondary organizational tensions and conflicts of interest are mitigated, measurement standards of participation and integration at various levels of government are established, and elements and methodologies of conflict resolution and transformation are integrated into the activities of mobilized civil society actors. After extensive review of existing literature on civil society and participation, organizational theory, and conflict transformation theory, it was concluded there was a gap in existing literature on the benefits of applying conflict transformation theory to civil society activities, and in the social and psychological reasons on why people chose to participate in democratic processes and civil society institutions. The main inquiry method, a series of qualitative interviews conducted with 19 members of civil society strengthening initiatives in the Montes de Maria region of Colombia, was designed to attempt to quantify civil society participation and provide additional data on the effectiveness of a peace building approach that incorporates mediation, dialogue, and conflict transformation. The findings from codification of collective responses of five control questions showed that there was relative success in achieving these outcomes, but some of the lessons learned included that civil society strengthening is a long and complex process and limited data availability and limited time to conduct this study, as well as lack of study on the more intricate personal and power dynamics within civil society organizations, can create more questions than answers that call for further research.

## Introduction

In the aftermath of World War II, there was an agreement amongst the victorious allied powers and the developed world on the need to rebuild. The subsequent result of this consensus ushered in the “era of development” during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, characterized by the implementation of economic restructuring of the Global South, where the majority of “underdeveloped”, or “developing” countries were deemed to exist. The adaptation of free trade policies and structural adjustment programs was seen as the way to inject the stagnant economies of the Global South with some life. While it is true that these developing countries experienced exponential growth in industry and increased effectiveness of the means of production, the existing social inequalities continued to be exacerbated, and go unaddressed. As a result, the 1980s saw a period of neoliberal economic austerity policies implemented to combat the resulting inflation created by these structural adjustment programs. Spending on healthcare and social welfare programs were cut, further escalating the existing tensions between the rich and the poor populations, and igniting protests against the ruling class. In many instances, it was common to see violent, state sanctioned repression against the poor populations.

These conditions still exist, with a history of domestic and international actors that have not held the perpetrators accountable for the countless human rights violations they have committed. This potential for conflict has been percolating in the Latin American context for almost an entire century, and has created a lack of trust between government institutions and the middle and lower class populations. However, within these conditions, there has been an exponential rise in the number civil society organizations and movements across Latin America. As a result, international organizations and grassroots nonprofits have committed time and energy to strengthen civil society movements as a means to advocate for greater democratic

involvement and participation in areas such as local community development, greater transparency and accountability, and peace building and conflict resolution.

This research paper examined the relationship between increased participation in civil society movements and conflict. The proposed hypothesis was that an increase in civil society participation leads to a decrease in conflict, if citizen participation is clearly defined and nongovernmental organizations and grassroots organizations comply with that definition. The research paper also showed the essential need to incorporate theories and methodologies of conflict transformation in civil society movement activities. Through an extensive literature review on topics including, but not limited to, civil society participation, the relation between civil society involvement and conflict, conflict transformation theory, community security, and public participation, this research paper shows that there was a need to define the measurement of integration and means of participation at various levels of government, and showed the necessity of civil society participation to improve community security.

The primary research methodology for this inquiry was a coding analysis of a series of 19 qualitative interviews conducted with members of two civil society movements in the Montes de Maria region of Colombia: the *Agora Ciudadana de San Jacinto de Bolivar* (Citizen Agora of San Jacinto de Bolivar), and *El Proceso Pacífico de Reconciliación e Integración de la Alta Montaña* (Peaceful Process of Reconciliation and Integration of the High Mountain). The interviews were conducted during the author's professional practicum with *Sembrandopaz*, a local Colombian nonprofit that works in civil society strengthening and peace building primarily in five communities within the region.

### **Literature Review**

Before examining the relationship between civil society organizations and movements and the relationship to conflict, it is important to examine the working definitions of civil society offered by contemporary literature on the subject. According to List and Doerner (2012), civil society is defined as “the arena, outside the family, the state and the market which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations, and institutions to advance shared interests” (p. 4). This working definition was utilized by and applied to the Civil Society Index (CSI), a research project designed by the organization CIVICUS to measure the strength, integration, activity, and influence of civil society in multiple countries around the world. As an organization, CIVICUS created a global network of local, regional, and national members and partners that works in strengthening civil society initiatives around the world, “especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens’ freedom of association are threatened” (List & Doerner, 2012, pp. xii).

According to other contemporary studies of civil society, similar definitions were utilized when discussing the implications of civil society actors in the policy-making arena and in the international development sector. Develtere and Peels (2008) offer a definition of civil society that is practically identical to the definition posed in the Civil Society Index project; they define civil society as “these organizations that are situated outside of the state, the market, and the family, where people associate to advance common interests” (p. 334). The article further elaborated on their concept of civil society by explaining the importance of distinguishing civil society actors from other non-state actors, such as private actors and trade unions. In addition, the CIVICUS Index for measuring civil society integration and activity was mentioned as one of



the better-developed methodologies for analyzing the dimensions of involvement and integration of civil society across different countries (Develtere & Peels, 2008, pp. 334-343).

In their explanation of the CSI civil society definition, Doerner and List (2012) offer justification for use of this definition based on three points of reasoning: 1) the definition allows for focus on the conceptualization of civil society as a political term, 2) less emphasis on organizational form and more emphasis on the highlighting of function and roles improves the chances of capturing a broader spectrum of organizational forms, features, activities and phenomena, and 3) the fact that the definition acknowledges that “civil society is not a homogenous and united entity, but rather a complex arena where diverse and often competing values, ideologies, and interests interact and power struggles occur” (p. 4).

There are a number of strengths in the second and third points of reasoning offered by Doerner and List on the emphasis of function and roles over organizational form, and the complexity and diversity of civil society that makes it hard to measure and quantify. The third point of reasoning offered is especially important, as it emphasizes the concept of potential for conflict that can arise amongst various actors who are supposed to be united by a collective interest. Despite the validity of the viewpoint that address the presence of competing values, ideologies, and interests amongst civil society actors, there is a gap in the majority of contemporary literature and research on civil society where this tension is not appropriately addressed. Thus, in addition to examining the link between organizational theory and civil society participation, how to measure participation and integration of civil society effectively, this literature review will also address the need to incorporate theories of conflict transformation and mediation into the organizational activities and management of civil society entities.

The first condition posited by this paper states that an increase in civil society participation will lead to a decrease in conflict if a comparative analysis between the functionality of civil society organizations and organizational theory exists, and the above tensions are addressed. The potential creation of broader organizational forms based on emphasis of function and roles of civil society over organizational form, coming from a reputable and formidable alliance such as CIVICUS, offers additional justification on the need for an analysis of civil society movements in relation to contemporary thinking on organizational theory, as well as the potential for new insights in the field of organizational theory.

Based upon the relevant literature on the structure and inter workings of civil society and the literature on theory behind organizational structure, there are some considerations and similarities to make between the two. The first consideration is the concept of controlling the human factor. Jaffee (2001) identifies the “unique nature of the human factor” as one of the primary tensions involved in the organizational transaction, defined as “the exchange relationship between the provider and the recipient of a labor, service, or product” (p. 21). He then goes on to explain that this tension most often manifests itself within the organization between the owner/supervisor and regular employee, commonly referred to as *intra-organizational* tension. There is no guarantee that the worker will complete his or her job effectively despite having the physical and mental capacity to do so, due to differences in backgrounds, culture, experiences, perceptions, and expectations. Therefore, according to Jaffee (2001), this diversity makes managing workers much more difficult due to a number of hidden personal factors that the “whole person” of the employee bring to the table, thus affecting their response to different managerial techniques and stimuli (p.23).

A second type of comparison that can be made between standard bureaucratic organizations and civil society movements is the relationship between the sociological theory behind the bureaucratic organization and the realistic day-to-day operations and unintended consequences that occur. Chief among these consequences that have relatively strong implications on the effectiveness of a civil society organization or movement are Alvin Gouldner's concepts of *primary* and *secondary organizational tensions*. Gouldner defines primary tensions as the organization's dependence on the cooperation and energy of organizational members who do not own or lead the organization and may have different interests, in spite of the organization being designed to "control physical and human factors of production in order to achieve the goals of the organizational owners." Secondary tensions, therefore, are generated as a result of attempting to manage the primary tensions. These usually manifest themselves in standard supervisory procedures (Jaffee 2001, p. 97). The primary tension is further explained as an example of the "agency problem", where it is assumed that the "agents", or workers, will not have the same interests as the "principals", or employers and leaders. To provide a contextual example, the article offers the existing tensions between the obligation of public officials, the agents in this scenario, "to uphold the public trust and confirm with the wishes of the principals, who are the citizens and taxpayers" (Jaffee 2001, p. 98).

According to the literature, a common theme amongst civil society actors apparent in the literature is the distrust between them and local governments and public officials due primarily to corruption and self-interest. While this example given gets the point across, the inverse relationship is more often interpreted as the primary tension in everyday public official organizational function, where the citizens are the agents and the public officials are the principals. It would have been beneficial for Jaffee to highlight this inverse example to show

how primary and secondary organizational tensions are applied in everyday organizational function. Regardless, the insight into the control of the human factor and its application to the function of civil society is an important connection to make; a majority of the research reviewed for this paper showed two things: 1) community organizations and neighborhood associations, all subject to the bureaucratic organizational structure and the sociological theories associated with it, are inherently included in the definition of civil society, and 2) the tension of controlling the human factor manifests itself in unifying and creating buy-in from civil society actors from diverse backgrounds and regions under one common cause. However, as the review will further examine, in any given conflict or post-conflict context, applying organizational theory and analysis to civil society initiatives is a very difficult feat to achieve due to the inherent complexity all civil society movements and a variety of competing self-interest.

The second challenge in establishing effective mobilized civil society participation is developing a system or methodology of measuring participation at the state or federal level. Existing literature and studies on the challenge of measuring civil society activity showed a variety of tools that have been developed to address this challenge. One of the more internationally recognized methods is the aforementioned Civil Society Index (CSI), developed by CIVICUS. The 2008-2011 CSI cited by Doerner and List (2012) measured civil society activity using five dimensions:

Civic engagement, or the formal and informal activities taken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels of social and political engagement, 2) Level of organization, which looks at organizational development and the degree of institutionalization of civil society as a whole, 3) Practice of values, which is treated as an empirical indicator because the CSI does not assume that civil society is made up of

progressive groups by definition, nor does it take for granted that civil society is able to practice what it preaches, 4) Perception of impact, or the level of impact that civil society has on policy and social issues as well as on attitudes within society as a whole, and 5) the External Environment, where the social, political, and economic environment in which civil society exists is given consideration. (p. 18)

These dimensions were measured using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, such as population surveys, case studies, focus groups, and interviews, and were complemented by analytical country reports provided by national partners, further justifying the need for considerations and analyses of the social, political, and economic contexts when attempting to work with any civil society organization. The strategies for engaging civil society will differ across every country across these four dimensions, so the methodology employed by the CSI, with the addition of this fifth dimension, allows for significant data collection.

In addition to the CSI methodology, there are a multitude of other systems designed to measure a certain aspect of participation and integration of civil society. Recently, there has been a trend of large international development agencies designing a means to quantify active civil society participation, an important factor in development projects. USAID has developed a dataset, the NGO Sustainability Index, which provides indicators to measure the levels of political activity, the effectiveness of legal framework to protect civil society organizations, openness of public institutions towards civil society, and dialogue with policy makers. The World Bank Governance Matters VI Indicators are another means used in international development to measure the levels of involvement of civil society in policy decisions and general governance; these six indicators include voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.

Also, along with the efforts of international development organizations, dataset were created to account for politically active ethnic minority and marginalized groups, such as the one compiled by Minorities at Risk that examines the levels and depth of inequalities in political participation between minorities and the dominant group, as well as the type and extent of these discriminations and the policies in place that perpetuate them (Peels & Develtere 2009, pp. 341-344).

While there are many datasets, not limited to the ones listed above, that help quantify civil society participation, the first gap worth noting is a lack of study and existing literature that helps facilitate understanding of which one is the most effective. It is assumed that depending on the needs and collective interest of any given civil society organization in a certain context, the data collections amassed by these organizations can be accessed and utilized to draft policy advocacy strategies to campaign for more involvement. However, as contemporary literature on policy advocacy work shows, access to information is an example of hidden power that is used as a means of exerting control over the lower classes, so therefore the marginalized civil society actors that demand greater political participation most likely lack the technological means and social standing to access this information. In addition, it is not known whether these datasets are available to the larger public. Greater research is needed to address this unequal distribution of information on civil society

A second gap in the literature worth mentioning is the lack of comparative studies between the benefits and challenges of having many indicators and methods of measuring participation versus adopting a universal measurement system. One of the universally accepted limitations of current civil society measurement systems and data sets is that they are only confined to one context; the USAID NGO Sustainability Index was created to address

governance and accountability issues based on data primarily for countries in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. As mentioned before, it would not be advisable to assume these indicators would be appropriate to examine in other contexts (Peels & Develtere 2009, p. 344). Another limitation is the lack of data on civil society action and democratic participation at the collective level, with datasets primarily focused on political participation of individuals. The majority of existing literature on the subject came to universal conclusion that more research about collective civil society participation and quantitative data used to measure the relation of civil society activity to accountability and rule of law are always welcome.

Despite the shortcomings of attempts to measure civil society participation and integration, researchers have observed a positive trend towards participatory decision-making processes at the organizational level for the majority of civil society initiatives. However, there would be a great deal of benefit to dedicating more studies that examine the psychosocial reasons as to why people do or do not participate politically. For instance, the primary benefits would be a collection of data that civil society organizations and international facilitator organizations can refer to during evaluation of a development project designed to improve governance and accountability; knowing motivational and psychological factors about political participation or lack thereof would contribute to more effective activities and outputs. According to Ulbig & Frank (1999), lack of political participation can be attributed to the seemingly inseparable link between conflict and politics. A large number of people avoid political involvement simply over the fear of and “distaste for disagreement” (p. 267). In the following section, the benefits of incorporating methodologies of conflict resolution and transformation into dialogue and mediations between various civil society actors, as well as between civil society and institutions, will be examined.

The contemporary studies and literature available show consensus how difficult it is to establish a universal definition of conflict. At its most basic level, it can be interpreted as lack of compatibility between two or more subjects (Doerner & List, 2012, p. 37). When applied to the field of international development and international relations, conflict is usually seen as a disagreement between countries or between governments and insurgent groups. In each instance the two factions are at odds over a diverse array of issues, such as distribution of resources, power, ethnic identities, and land. In many instances the roots of conflict go back for decades and even centuries, and the traditional systems in place can perpetuate deep-rooted inequalities that create a lasting sense of tension where conflict can arise at any time.

According to relevant literature on the topic, this is where civil society actors can play an impactful role in resolving conflict: where governments and institutions cannot or choose not to intervene to mediate and resolve the destruction of social fabric and psychological consequences associated with conflict, civil society can step in and reach and connect with those affected by armed conflict on a more personal level. Doerner & List (2012) highlight two other ways where civil society engages in conflict and post-conflict countries: as “conduits of change” that lobby for more equal treatment and other human rights endeavors that “help heal divides that lead to conflict and the impacts thereof” (p. 39), and as “conflict preventers, peacemakers, and peacebuilders” that “engage in early warning activities, preventative diplomacy through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops and mediation, negotiations (peacemaking), networking, and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding” (p. 39). For these approaches and interventions by civil society actors to be effective, it is imperative to base these facilitations, mediations, and healing activities on the theories and teachings of conflict resolution and transformation.



Conflict transformation can be interpreted as a branch of conflict resolution or as a similar approach, but the relevant literature shows that there are certain aspects that distinguish the two from each other. In his work *The Little Book on Conflict Transformation*, John Paul Lederach, one of the leading theorists on the concept of conflict transformation, discovered early on that *conflict transformation* is a more accurate term to use in place of conflict resolution because it is about engaging in “constructive change initiatives that include and go beyond the resolution of particular problems”, which can often seem like “another way to cover up” the underlying socio-political issues and prevent change that is really needed from happening (Lederach 2003). Beginning with the notion that all parties involved must start by acknowledging conflict as being “normal in human relationships” and “a motor of change”, Lederach advocates establishing a foundation of “a positive orientation towards conflict” and being open to discuss and establish dialogue between parties in conflict that has the potential to bring constructive change. By focusing on four dimensions of human relationships which are most impacted by conflict and change (personal, relational, structural, and cultural), as well as viewing conflict transformation as “a circular journey with a purpose”, Lederach offers multiple frameworks that are “short-term responsive and long-term strategic” by emphasizing the development of capacities to “hear and engage the voice of identity and relationship” and begin to create lasting meaningful change and positive identity association in the midst of social conflict (Lederach 2003).

A significant challenge that remains, as described by Lederach and other contemporary works on conflict transformation, is that of creating spaces and opportunities for divided populations to address the underlying issues that were at the origins of the conflict and begin to repair the social fabric and improve security within their own communities. Relevant literature in

the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding suggests the design of participatory approaches within international development projects as one solution to creating spaces where affected populations are engaged and empowered to repair social relations and work together as a collective to have a say in the process of rebuilding and re-developing their communities. Participatory community-based approaches are especially advocated for in the field of community security, which by definition consists of “people-centered” approaches that involve “bringing together a wide range of state and civil society actors” to help build “the capacity and willingness of communities, local authorities, and security providers to address their own sources of insecurity” and “identify root causes of insecurity collectively” (Bennett et al., 2014, p.3). While participatory approaches have been shown to be mostly successful, there are still many small intricacies and aspects of conflict resolution that need to be addressed concerning the internal functions of public gatherings and public space initiatives.

Amongst the studies dedicated to analysis and real life application of conflict resolution, dialogue, and mediation in public disputes and public participation events and engagements, there are important steps that should be taken in regards to obtaining constructive change through conflict transformation. The first step to make is building trust amongst and between the civil society groups and organizations that are being engaged in transforming conflict. This has been considered an invaluable first step in the majority of conflict resolution theory and practice for more than three decades, starting with Morton Deutsch’s theory on collaboration vs. competition in the 1980s (Hansen 2008) to more contemporary work in considerations of social psychological theory in relation to conflict resolution practice, such as why people choose to participate in democratic processes in the first place (Ulbig & Funk 1999), and how the strengths

and weaknesses in the trust department of relationships between combating groups, as well as between these groups and international actors, need to be considered (Babbitt & Hampson 2011).

In addition, the literature shows that by acknowledging the relationship between conflict and communication, and adapting the transformative mindset that seeks to minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize mutual understanding (Lederach 2003), the involved groups can start to move away from a destructive “us vs. them” relationship and towards mutual understanding and a collaborative process that helps lead to defining underlying conflict of interest tensions as “a mutual problem to be solved by collaborative effort”; further, it “facilitates recognition of the legitimacy of . . . other’s interests and of the necessity of searching for a solution responsive to the needs of all” (Hansen 2008, p. 434). One of the more common methods seen in the literature on conflict resolution and mediation techniques is the creation of public space and opportunities for dialogue for civil society actors and local government officials, for example, to partake in with the goal of collaborating to prevent further conflict from escalating. Intergroup dialogue can be beneficial to the participants in a plethora of ways: it can promote generous listening and reflection; it help mold participants’ commitment to the process and recognition that long-term change can happen in their hands; it allows participants to be open to others, open to the complexity of the human being, and develop a sense of security and trust (Dessel & Rogge, 2008, pp. 225-226).

While there is a fair amount of literature that concludes emphasizing the necessity for these types of spaces, very few studies have been undertaken to determine the effectiveness of such a participatory approach. Those that have attempted to do so acknowledge that the presence of a mediator is vital in overseeing and facilitating these discussions because calling a process participatory does not always make it so: analyses of these processes need to ensure that they

enact/reshape relations of interdependence and power, and examine rhetoric and intentions as well as design and process conduct (Forrester 2009). The power analysis needs to also examine not only the dynamics between the participants representing institutions and those representing marginalized civil society groups, but also between the facilitators and the participants, and between different civil society actors at different levels of socioeconomic status goes hand in hand with a concerted effort to make sure that participation is not merely “recording” each claim by diverse groups just to make them feel involved (Forrester 2009). Another important function of the mediator is assuring that parties are not negotiating around their own self – interests, which can happen very frequently.

Relevant studies have concluded that dialogue methods in resolving conflict are particularly important in community settings, although there is a call for more rigorous evaluation to show progress and outcomes. A lack of results and quantitative data that show progress in participation effectiveness and progress towards a more conflict transformative approach is especially hard to measure when examining civil society organizations, more particularly with urban social movements, such as the ones found in Latin America during the 1970s, who wanted to create lasting influence on political parties and promote equal democratic representation and address social inequalities, but were considered to be outside the norm of a traditional civil society organization because they pursued their collective interests in “uninstitutionalized ways” (Schonwalder, 2002, p.11). The use of public forums to facilitate engagement between social movement actors and local government officials is seen as unconventional, and would meet a substantial amount of resistance from officials in certain countries in Latin America that are already disinterested in engaging with civil society actors that represent marginalized populations, but as a form of unifying diverse civil society stakeholders

to take collective action to address causes of conflict and build peace, studies have shown based on theory it can be effective.

### **Method**

A qualitative study was conducted during the researcher's time spent as an intern working with a nonprofit in the Montes de Maria region of Colombia that specializes in civil society strengthening and peace building. A series of qualitative interviews were performed with a total of 19 members of two different civil society groups. 12 of the 19 were conducted with members of the *Agora Ciudadana San Jacinto de Bolivar* (Citizen Agora of San Jacinto de Bolivar), and the remaining seven were conducted with members of the *Proceso Pacifico de Reconciliacion e Integracion de la Alta Montaña*, or *PPRIAM* (Peaceful Process of Reconciliation and Integration of the High Mountain Zone).

Each participant was asked the same set of control questions selected from the initial survey with the purpose of codifying and evaluating their experience in their respective civil society movements. The four control questions asked included the following: 1) When did you start becoming involved in the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM? What benefits and personal gains had you gained from participating? ; 2) What activities have been proposed or completed as a group within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM? ; 3) Do you feel each of the four pillars identified as essential to Colombian civil society (schools, churches, neighborhood associations) are equally represented within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM? ; 4) What, if any, difficulties or conflicts have you experienced within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM, and what have you learned from the difficulties? How have these conflicts been resolved? Do you feel that an increase in participation will lead to a decrease in conflict overall in society?

The responses were then collected and analyzed side-by-side, and common themes and conclusions were drawn in response to the five questions listed above. The researcher also added an analysis of the emotional reactions recorded from ethnographic observations from the interview, as well the monthly meetings of these groups, to further offer data on the social and psychological aspects of participation.

### **Results**

The collection of responses to the five key interview questions mentioned in the “Methods” section is listed below. The questions will be listed as an individual subsection, and the summaries of responses will be listed under each one.

#### **Question One: When did you start becoming involved in the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM?**

#### **What benefits and personal gains had you gained from participating?**

In the case of the interview participants from the citizen agora, 10 out of the 12 participants answered that they were invited to the preliminary gatherings in two ways. The first means was through invitation of Sembrando Paz, a local community organization located in El Carmen de Bolivar, a neighboring municipality to San Jacinto that acted as the facilitator and initiated the creation of the citizen agora project. The founder of Sembrando Paz, Dr. Ricardo Esquivias, lived in San Jacinto for many years and had many connections amongst the various civil society organizations in the urban center and the surrounding communities. The second means was through engagement and association with a well-known community organization in San Jacinto, ASOPASBOL (*Asociacion de Productores Agricolas de San Jacinto Bolivar*). The idea of the citizen agora was introduced to executive members of the association, and through word of mouth and their own community contacts, they aided in socializing the idea.

In the case of the interview participants from the PPRIAM, all seven interviewed explained that they became involved through a combination of friends and family that were already part of the movement, being sought out and engaged and motivated to participate from the leaders of the movement, and after participating in a highly successful peaceful march in 2013, organized by the PPRIAM, to Cartagena, where the governor of the department of Bolivar resided, to demand reparations for their communities.

The participants from both movements mostly shared common benefits gained from participation. Some of the benefits mentioned included: learning how to share knowledge and experience with others; how to replicate the skills in community engagement and organizing, conflict resolution, and peaceful dialogue they had learned and put them into practice in their own communities; how to focus on gaining consensus out of peaceful negotiation; learning how to have empathy, and being open to learning and being taught by others; learning about other experiences of other communities; and how to be a good leader and confidant and how to stand in solidarity with others. In addition, all 19 participants shared that their experiences in participating in these civil society groups has brought many positive gains in their personal lives, such as: the ability to be more vocal and less timid in expressing one's ideas; a new sense of purpose, excitement, and passion; more wisdom and understanding; how to work with more reason and a level head instead of reacting emotionally; how to have more patience; and how to be a better person, and how to love people, value family, and relate with others in a positive way.

**Question Two: What activities have been proposed or completed as a group within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM?**

Amongst the members of the citizen agora who were interviewed, more than half listed the community diagnostics and needs assessments for each surrounding community of San

Jacinto as an activity that had been completed. This was the first step in forming the citizen agora, and the diagnostics served as the primary means to identify community leaders in the four pillars of Colombian civil society: churches, schools, neighborhood associations, and community organizations. Each current member of the agora represents an association from one of these pillars. Another activity that was mentioned by a majority of the citizen agora participants was the creation of a work plan for 2017 that included a list of activities they hoped to accomplish. The work plan involved dividing up the members of the agora into various subcommittees that were each focused on developing plans of action for activities in a variety of thematic areas, including environmental conservation, involvement of youth and women, and community security. By creating these subcommittees in addition to the coordinating committee, they would allow for more participation and leadership opportunities for all members.

More than half of the interviewed members of the citizen agora and the PPRIAM mentioned the series of trainings and workshops on nonviolent conflict resolution and community organizing capacities as another activity completed. This was determined by the majority of the participants to be a very essential part of building capacity for effective community organizing. The final activity reported by the participants from the citizen agora was the solicitation of local government officials through sending a letter demanding copies of the municipal development plans for them to examine and shape their subcommittee activities around.

For the interviewees from the PPRIAM, in addition to the community diagnostics and needs assessments, almost all reported that their current activities were mostly centered on the socialization phase and introduction of the agora methodology to the members of other communities who didn't show as much of active participation in the movement. More than half



also mentioned the peaceful march that took place in 2013 and a protest where they created a human chain in 2015 in the main plaza of El Carmen de Bolivar to advocate for reparations of displaced persons in the region as other forms of activities they had completed.

**Question Three: Do you feel each of the four pillars identified as essential to Colombian civil society (schools, churches, neighborhood associations) are equally represented within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM?**

When asked this question, the majority of participants from both movements responded that the four sectors of civil society, as identified by the citizen agora methodology of Sembrandopaz, are an adequate representation. The participants felt these sectors adequately represented Colombian civil society because they are essential pillars to maintaining a strong, vibrant presence in all the communities. The majority of the community members are involved in some type of group or organization, and all present their complaints/concerns to the neighborhood associations, therefore the neighborhood associations are very knowledgeable of what goes on in each community.

A few participants in both the citizen agora and PPRIAM mentioned that church leaders had not attended a majority of the meetings, nor have they been represented adequately. These same participants also said there was inadequate representation on behalf of schools. A few reasons given as to why this is included that the church rejected the invitation to participate in the citizen agora. In the case of the PPRIAM, a couple participants mentioned in their interviews that some church leaders felt that the social mission was not in agreement with God.

With regards to the lack of representation of school teachers in the PPRIAM, the few members of the coordinating committee that were interviewed mentioned that there is still a need

to introduce the concept of building an agora-like structure within the movement. Activities centered on this need had not been planned out during the time the interviews were completed.

**Question Four: What, if any, difficulties or conflicts have you experienced within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM, and what have you learned from the difficulties? How have these conflicts been resolved? Do you feel that an increase in participation will lead to a decrease in conflict overall in society**

There were many common difficulties faced amongst the members from both groups. These included: Difficulties in access and lack of attendance to the meetings, such poor road conditions and high costs and other challenges with transportation; Getting consensus, buy in between social leaders and members of the community; Loss of credibility of institutions due to distrust amongst the community members; A majority of participants have not internalized the concept, and do not feel the same sense of urgency to act; Lack of financial support, resources; and a lack of a strong presence of women and youth involvement in the respective movements

Very few participants mentioned any conflict that had occurred within the citizen agora, or with in the monthly meetings. When conflict or disagreement does arise, however, more than half of the participants stated that they felt comfortable enough that the committee would hear both sides, and all opinions would be out on the table, and the conflict/disagreement would be resolved through constructive, peaceful mediation and dialogue. Each participant explained that everyone puts in their point of view, and then the group came to a consensus on how to move forward on a particular issue

The majority of the participants felt that increased participation would lead to a decrease in conflict. The responses from all 19 participants show that this process is a very slow one and it will take a lot of time and effort to develop a strong civil society, but they all mentioned there

were committed to it, and saw it as the only way to begin to rebuild and reconcile after nearly half a century of armed conflict.

### **Discussion**

This section, as with the previous one, will be broken down into subsections with each individual questions as the headings. The implications from each question and how they relate to the current literature and previous work in the field of civil society and conflict resolution will be discussed.

#### **Question One: When did you start becoming involved in the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM?**

#### **What benefits and personal gains had you gained from participating?**

The responses compiled for this question serve as additional data that can help support any existing literature on the social-psychological reasons as to why people participate. In addition, the responses can be used as a dataset of existing qualitative research to expand on what the benefits of civil society participation are for marginalized populations in a post-conflict context. This could be beneficial to future inquiries in the field because, amongst the literature reviewed for this inquiry, there were very few methodologies mentioned in various sources that looked at the benefits gained from increased democratic participation on the part of civil society actors and members of grassroots movements and organizations.

As one participant explained during their interview:

The information that I learn, I share with my community, and the community is gaining more desire to continue understanding and learning, because before they did not know what the (government) administration was, or how it functioned, and with the information we receive, the trainings the Agora gives us, the workshops we attend, . . . . I bring it back to the community, because the people there, they want to share their experiences, and every time I attend the meetings in San Jacinto and then return, the first thing they do is ask me, ‘what good information did you bring us today? What is there to know? . . . . Why do you think that they want to learn now and didn’t want to learn in the past? It is

not that they didn't want to learn in the past, only that we didn't have the same opportunity that the Agora provides us in these moments.<sup>1</sup>

The quote above shows not only the positive impact gained from the trainings and workshops, but helps to prove that if development projects engage community leaders and empower them to be decision makers and provide them with information that they want to know, it can lead to a ripple effect amongst the rest of their community members. Because there is already pre-established trust of this community leader who is sharing knowledge and information, as opposed to an employee of an international NGO from a different country, a positive response to the call to participation is much more likely.

The results compiled from the interviews can serve as data for future studies that aim to affirm the positive outcomes and benefits from applying conflict transformation theory into practical uses. Throughout the interview series, the positive impact on the personal lives of the participants in the citizen agora and PPRIAM cannot be emphasized enough. According to one participant of the PPRIAM:

(This experience) teaches one to know their strengths and weaknesses . . . . many times one will act based on impulse, based on emotions, and personally I have learned to work more with reason and leave my emotions and impulses at the wayside and try to be more centered.<sup>2</sup>

The commitment demonstrated to a more centered approach to community development and public mediation and dialogue illustrates the importance of a transformative approach to conflict; keeping emotions in check helps one to view conflict as a normal part of human interaction and prevents the creation of the destructive "us vs. them" dynamic that is at the root of so many social conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Interview conducted in El Carmen, Bolivar, Colombia on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### Women's Participation

A final implication worth mentioning in the discussion of the benefits of civil society participation is the positive implications it can have towards the inclusion of women. Obtaining increased inclusion of women is a primary objective for almost all global development projects, and demonstrating how empowering women to have a larger role in decision-making for their respective communities and promoting space where women feel safe to participate and voice their opinions can create long term positive impact and foster an inclusive environment.

When asked how has participation in these civil society movements impacted her life, one female participant affirmed that has brought a great deal of personal benefits in a short amount of time:

In my life, well, (it has brought) learning that has helped me a lot, it has helped improve my quality of life, such as my way of speaking, my way of being, or rather it has helped me become a different person and focus on something for my future.<sup>3</sup>

Another woman interviewed as part of the study described a similar impact on her personal life, explaining how it has helped her:

Be tolerant, have the capacity to express yourself, and get rid of the fear of public speaking, even though I am a teacher, I am timid, because even though I have the knowledge I am scared to express myself, that's how I was before when I was studying, I didn't like to present . . . with this (experience), it has taught me to overcome the fear I have of speaking in public.<sup>4</sup>

While these two instances illustrate the potential for improved inclusion of women in these civil society spaces, and in Colombian society overall, there were a few limitations in the study that are worth mentioning on the topic of women's inclusion. First, of the 19 participants that agreed to be interviewed, only six women agreed to participate. Second, of those six women,

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<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

three occupied leadership committee positions within their respective movements, and one had leadership experience as part of a women's group within her community, so it is reasonable to conclude that they were more eager to participate because they were more reasonably empowered due to their more prestigious positions within each movement.

The other two women interviewed that were not in leadership positions emphasized the importance of increasing participation as well; one specified that she wanted to see more activities catered towards involving women, such as arts and crafts and more creative projects. However, in spite of the collective agreement that there needs to be more participation opportunities for women, it was barely mentioned amongst the groups during the monthly meetings. In the case of the PPRIAM, there was only one woman who served on the coordinating committee, and in many instances the general audience of community and civil society leaders consisted entirely of men. With the Citizen Agora, a larger number of women attended the monthly meetings, but more often than not the women in leadership roles did a majority of the participating. The other female participants usually sat quietly and either became shy when requested to participate, or just refused all together. Based on these observations, more needs to be done within these spaces to address the underlying traditions and cultural customs associated with women's and men's roles, the themes and associations with *machismo* in Colombia and Latin America, and the need for the male leaders of the coordinating committee to stand in solidarity with women and create an all-inclusive environment where women are treated as equal.

It would have been beneficial to interview more female attendees to develop a larger sample size and obtain more accurate data, but it proved difficult because the number of women was consistently lower than the number of men in each of the monthly meetings. In more general

terms, the relatively small sample size of 19 participants was another limitation in getting an accurate reflection of the benefits of participation as a whole for all members of the two movements. It is likely that an expansion of the number of participants to 30 or 40 would have resulted in a wider range of responses and experiences, with the possibility of seeing some more critical reflections on the civil society projects to create variety from the positive benefits. The length of stay for the researcher was only 90 days, and that served as the primary barrier to that expansion, as great difficulty was faced with communication about time and date of interviews, access for adequate transportation to the communities, and inability to build trust and camaraderie amongst the community members to create the comfort of being interviewed.

**Question Two: What activities have been proposed or completed as a group within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM?**

The set of activities listed in the majority of responses to question two provide a useful case study for further justification on how international NGOs can structure their approaches in engaging with civil society organizations. The emphasis on the preliminary community diagnostics and needs assessments as an activity performed within each community illustrates how important getting to know the specific local, regional, or national context is. The process of identifying community leaders and engaging with them to assist in their respective communities to find out what the needs are helps to establish repertoire and trust between the local and foreign entities. Furthermore, by enlisting community leaders to help in a needs assessment performed by an international organization, new participatory activities and processes can develop and foster even greater collaboration. The results obtained from these qualitative interviews further supports the idea that community needs assessments need to be done in part by the community, for the community.

Results also illustrated the difficulties faced in attempting to begin working and developing activities as a group, and the difficulties associated with attempting to communicate with local governments to gain legitimacy as a civil society organization or entity. The creation of various subcommittees within the citizen agora designated to work on particular issue areas is an effective way to promote and foster participation from all members, but during activity planning sessions within the agora's monthly meetings, it was observed that many committee members struggled to get any of the planned activities done due to either lack of clarity or consensus on how to proceed in completing them, or lack of or difficulties with communication with other committee members. It is reasonable to conclude that the difficulties faced shows that more capacity building and training needs to be done with members that aren't part of the coordinating committee.

Another activity mentioned that both movements completed was sending a letter to local government officials requesting copies of the annual municipal development plans in order to shape their activities and trainings around them. While the majority of the participants lamented the slow government response, the attainment of the development plans will help in shaping their subcommittee activities in coordination with what the local government already has planned, with the long term goal of fostering the spirit of collaboration, communication, and open dialogue between the two entities.

**Question Three: Do you feel each of the four pillars identified as essential to Colombian civil society (schools, churches, neighborhood associations) are equally represented within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM?**

All participants in the interview process felt that the inclusion of neighborhood association leaders and community organization representatives in the citizen agora and the PPRIAM was



very important because these entities consist of active and passionate community leaders that already are well respected and are well versed in the needs within their communities. As explained in the definition of civil society offered by the CIVICUS Civil Society Index, it is crucial to engage with those institutions and existing actors outside of the state and the market. That's what neighborhood associations and community organizations are. The results reached that show the necessity for involvement of community based organizations and neighborhood associations can serve as vital data for other civil society organizations and grassroots movements that seek to transform marginalized communities and fight for equal representation. Although the degrees and levels of engagement will undoubtedly vary from context to context, the results serve as viable qualitative data that show the positive results of engagement with these two civil society entities.

The difficulties faced in getting the educational institutions and churches within the surrounding communities of San Jacinto and El Carmen to participate illustrate the need for further research and expansion of the inquiry into the political reasons why some churches refuse to participate, as well as some political barriers that educational institutions might face in having their staff participate. Despite the fact that there were only a few participants that lamented the lack of participation on the part of schoolteachers and church leaders, the implications of their lack of participation were too great to not mention.

One leader of the PPRIAM that was interviewed explained it best:

The moment that we really have this representation, representation from the neighborhood associations, community organizations, churches, and educational institutions, we would be unstoppable, perhaps we would be a very solid organization, very powerful, but it is difficult because sometimes, educational politics differ a little bit from Christian beliefs and politics . . . . For a few Christians the movement is not in God's plan, but also for others it is a way to do God's work, to serve, to help . . . . we have a lot of opinions for and against, there's a lot of clash of ideas and opinions, but the idea is that when we had representation of all four sectors of civil society united, we

would be a social and political model at the territorial level, and at the country level we would be recognized as such.<sup>5</sup>

The varying reasons for and against participation on behalf of the churches offers further justification for examination and analysis of what factors motivate individuals and groups, such as churches civil society actors and organizations, to participate in the first place. The response from this participant's interview hints at one possible explanation: an example of the current modern day manifestation of a long and complicated relationship between religion and politics in Latin America that dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the case of Colombia, the Catholic Church, still the predominant religious authority, was inherently connected to both the liberal conservative political parties of the country. According to Lewis (2014), the two parties still maintain "loosely organized electoral alliances, run at the top by competing elite lineages and drawing support. . . . on a basis of enduring local and seigniorial loyalties" (p. 58). These loyalties include that of the Catholic Church, and undoubtedly other religious denominations.

Based on this insight, as well as insights from the qualitative interviews and observations of the context in the Montes de Maria region, it is apparent that the elites and owners of the large agricultural estates stand to benefit from preserving existing institutions. They perpetuate the existing inequalities and lethargic government processes that prevent the marginalized peasant farmers from organizing and improving their living standards. As a result, it is reasonable to conclude that some church leaders benefit from the existing inequalities as well, and choose not to participate in these movements. To explain their actions, they put it under the guise that disrupting the status quo and standing up against structural inequalities and evoking the teachings of liberation theology is not what God intended. Furthermore, a statement such as this,

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<sup>5</sup> Interview conducted in El Carmen, Bolivar, Colombia on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017

or non-participation as an important member of a vibrant civil society organization, is inherently political; it is basically condoning the actions of a population that has been violated and repressed for half a century, purely based on self-interest. The tie between religion and politics is very dynamic and constantly changing, and this is the current manifestation of it in this region in Colombia.

Another possible reason for the lack of participation of the church is the wide variety of denominations present in the region. All of the participating members of the Citizen Agora and the PPRIAM are members of a church, with the most prominent being Pentecostal, Evangelical, or Seventh-Day Adventists, with a few of the Catholic faith included in there. During the same interview quoted above, one possibility raised as to why the church leaders did not want to participate was due to a lack of unity and agreement based on the different denominations. This is despite the fact all denominations are a form of Protestantism. Similarly, past project evaluations of early attempts by Sembrandopaz to create these civil society forums cited a lack of unity and consensus and willingness to coordinate amongst the participating church leaders. It is reasonable to assume that politics played a role in both of these instances. Going forward, these civil society-strengthening projects would benefit from further investigation into the underlying causes of lack of participation on behalf of churches, although there seems to be a plethora of local knowledge and theories surrounding this topic already. It would be worth investigating further.

Aside from limitations on time and length of the study and a relatively small number of participants, another notable limitation seemed to be a lack of understanding of the question on behalf of the participants. Through observing of each participant's reaction to the question and facial expressions, it was concluded that there was confusion on how to answer the question from

some participants, and others answered yes without really giving it much thought, almost as if they couldn't imagine the movement consisting of any other types of entities, such as having women's organizations or youth organizations as stand-alone entities. Recommendations for continued study into the equal representation of the four pillars would include more attention to the phrasing of the question, building more trust amongst members of each respective movement to the point of accompaniment on outreach to church leaders to understand reasons why they chose not to participate, and more in-depth study of the political context in the region and the history of church and state relations.

**Question Four: What, if any, difficulties or conflicts have you experienced within the Citizen Agora/PPRIAM, and what have you learned from the difficulties? How have these conflicts been resolved? Do you feel that an increase in participation will lead to a decrease in conflict overall in society**

Due to the common difficulties that were expressed across both movements from almost all the participants, this study adds to any existing data and studies done in the region by local organizations, government institutions, or other international NGOs on the infrastructural problems that plague the communities of the Montes de Maria. Many participants lamented the lack of adequate access to transportation, financial resources to afford transportation, and the subsequently low turnout to the monthly meetings:

The question of attendance, we have been complying mostly, then suddenly it became a little complicated for many of us. For those of use who do not live in the urban center, (the main difficulty) was the travel from the communities because of the poor conditions of the roads; similarly, it is difficult for us who are here at the meeting when one compatriot didn't arrive because of the poor road conditions, but regardless, if we were nearby those communities, we went to find them and tell them what themes and topics were discussed at the meeting.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Through this difficulty, along with lack of financial resources and support from government institutions and international institutions, the participants have learned, in ways they may have not know before, that working with local government is a slow and arduous process, and due to corruption and misuse of funds, very little can get done. So, the people have resorted back to doing what they've always done: coming with alternative solutions of information sharing for those who cannot attend the meeting. These creative alternatives need to be applied to international aid interventions as well. USAID-funded projects had been assigned to the same region as recently as 2012 to address infrastructure development and improving local government and community relations. However, one fatal flaw was that a majority of the road building was assigned to the Colombian military, which already had tense relationships with a majority of the community members after years of mistreatment and mistrust.

The response by the majority of participants that very little conflict had arisen within the monthly meetings shows a commitment to the principles of conflict transformation that views conflict as a normal part of human relationships and an avenue for constructive change of a certain point of view. One participant supported this tenant of conflict transformation theory best by explaining:

With dialogue, we have spoken, each person has presented their point of view one way or another, because one idea isn't perfect, nor is no one person perfect, so we always discuss faults or mistakes, when there is a fault, we try as best and as hardest as possible to dialogue with people and we eventually have to come to a conciliation.<sup>7</sup>

Another participant echoed similar sentiments during their interview, emphasizing how dialogue is important for the good of the collective and to keep each movement focused on the overall mission and long term goals of peace:

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<sup>7</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

We haven't had any conflicts, conflicts like that, we discuss themes, and each one participates and gives an idea or a concept that we can review, but serious physical conflict like that we haven't had, and I do not think we ever will, if we continue to have discussions on a topic where everyone participates and shares their opinion and everything is accepted . . . we have discussed various topics and we do not view that as a conflict, just a topic where it is needed that everyone participates and opines in order to be able to have a better grasp of the concept.<sup>8</sup>

The member of the coordinating committee that was first quoted above also provided a noteworthy quote that may illuminate some bias of the coordinating committee towards the regular attendees that do not hold a leadership role:

Many people have not internalized it . . . they have put the concept of the agora in their hearts, some of the participants, or it is to say that they do not have the feeling of pertinence. For these things one must have a feeling of pertinence, to want and love it, in the same way that one wants and loves a person, they should want to do the things they're doing so that they can grow and develop, that's where I've seen some difficulties in some people, not in everyone . . . the majority of us are complying.<sup>9</sup>

Quotes such as the one above illustrate a grasp of the theories and concepts associated with conflict transformation, and provide data and information on the potential for success of a practical application of conflict transformation theory in the activities of civil society organizing and grassroots movements. However, it is important to note that this is only one person's interpretation and application of the trainings and teachings of conflict transformation. It would have benefitted the researcher to ask a follow up question to this response along the lines of "What happens when people do not participate?" In addition, the two quotes above came from members of the citizen agora in San Jacinto that serve on the coordinating committee, so for future study and research it would be necessary to examine the power dynamics established between the committee and the regular attendees, and if participation and the giving of opinions are more common amongst the committee members as opposed to regular attendees.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Interview conducted in San Jacinto, Bolivar, Colombia on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### Conclusions

The collection of responses on the benefits of civil society involvement and participation can serve as supportive data for reference by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that implement projects focused on civil society strengthening and fostering good governance. The data shows a majority of desired outcomes that many international development agencies can hope to attain when working in capacity building and empowering marginalized populations, such as new and increased knowledge of local government processes, and how to share this knowledge and replicate those capacities in community organizing and democratic participation into their home communities.

The information on the types of activities performed and the difficulties faced would be useful to international development organizations in the implementation and design of program activities, and useful as research that contributes to “lessons learned” in monitoring and evaluating in comparison to past projects they have performed. The information on types of activities can also be useful for other civil society organizations that are recently formed or well established, and need ideas and strategies with how to tackle their issues. Knowledge sharing and collaboration is key to building a vibrant civil society.

The series of responses to control questions three and four show that infrastructural problems still exist, and future international interventions would find these interview responses useful in monitoring and evaluating the previous projects, and also for examining what specific policies and politics to target to address these issues of access that are preventing civil society organizations from expressing their right to assemble.

A positive outcome of this research would be the dissemination of this information to the civil society group, and to *Sembrandopaz*, the facilitator organization, in order to recommend

future activities and meeting agendas that help to address these biases, as well as others that could potentially cause conflict within the groups. Another outcome would be addressing potentially unequal power dynamics within the group, based on race, gender, and position of leadership within the movement. This could be done either through a workshop or an open discussion around the topic. The limitations of a greater number of participant responses to the questions posed in this research present another challenge to the validity of the data, so it is recommended to further continue the inquiry with a larger number of participants, somewhere in the 30-40 range as mentioned before.

### **Reflection on Sustainable Development**

The push for completion of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals has been centered around an agenda of implementing projects that achieve sustainable results within three pillars: environment, economy, and equity. As stated in prior sections in this research paper, the majority of conflicts arise over questions of equity: throughout the history of many developing countries, the control of natural resources and the means of production has been in the hands of wealthy elite landowner class that exploit and oppress the poorer class and marginalized populations. These tensions often result in violent uprisings, and, in the case of Colombia, has created a half-century's worth of death, displacement, and rupturing of social fabric.

In order to prevent conflict from arising again in conflict-ridden countries, sustainable development initiatives have to start by targeting the deep-rooted political, economic, and social causes of conflict. Effective projects and policy recommendations will only be successful through engaging with civil society organizations in the affected communities. These organizations (neighborhood associations, community organizations, worker's unions, churches,



etc.) act as the voices of their communities, and have a lived experience that must be acknowledged and given an equal say at the table.

This research shows the positive potential for what can happen when civil society is engaged in a meaningful and thoughtful way, and also offers one method of engagement that leads to a positive and transformative orientation towards conflict. By offering space for civil society actors to gain capacity in community organizing, peace building through conflict transformation and mediation, the foundations can be laid for true sustainable change.

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**Annex 1: Preguntas de Entrevista para evaluar el proceso de  
la Ágora Ciudadana San Jacinto/PPRIAM**

¿Cual sector se representa? (Junta de acción comunal, iglesia, escuela, organización de base)

¿Como se escuchó de la ágora ciudadana/PPRIAM? Cuando empezó a participar?

¿Como ha pasado su experiencia con la ágora/movimiento pacifico? ¿Que ha aprendido durante esta experiencia? ¿Que ha aprendido sobre usted mismo?

¿Cuales son las actividades que Ustedes han hecho? ¿Cuales son algunos que Usted quisiera explorar?

¿Usted siente que los cuatro sectores de la sociedad civil (escuelas, Iglesias, JAC, organizaciones del base) han sido representados igualmente? Si no, ¿cuales sectores de su comunidad no están bien representados en sus reuniones? ¿Por que?

¿Por que es importante tener participación ciudadanía en el nivel municipal/local del gobierno?

¿Cuales son unas dificultades que ha experimentado en la ágora/el PPRIAM , si hay?

Si haya un conflicto dentro de la ágora, o sobre cualquier cosa, ¿como han resuelto el conflicto?

¿Cual es su expectativa? ¿Que espera de todo de ese proceso?

**Annex 2: Interview Questions to Evaluate the Progress of the Citizen Agora in San Jacinto  
and the PPRIAM**

What sector of civil society do you represent? (Neighborhood association, church, school, community organization)

How did you hear about the citizen agora/PPRIAM? When did you start to participate?

How has your experience with the citizen agora/PPRIAM been so far? What have you learned during this experience? What have you learned about yourself?

What are some of the activities your group has done? What activities would you like to explore?

Do you feel that the four pillars of Colombian civil society (schools, churches, neighborhood associations, community organizations) are equally represented? If not, which ones are underrepresented and why?

Why is it important to have citizen participation at the local/municipal level?

What are some of the difficulties you've faced in the citizen agora/PPRIAM, if any?

If there is a conflict within the agora/PPRIAM, or in regards to another topic, how has it been resolved?

What are your expectations from this process?