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RECONCILIATION¹

In post-conflict societies where past injustices remain unresolved, there exists a latent risk of renewed outbreak of violence, years or decades later. Reconciliation has, therefore, become increasingly important in the context of conflict prevention and development co-operation

This issues brief outlines the importance of measures to deal with issues of truth and justice and foster reconciliation in post-conflict situations, and offers recommendations for practical implementation in development co-operation projects.

Underlined words are hyperlinks to other topics available at www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/issuesbriefs.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Reconciliation after violent conflict is a task for generations of society and cannot be enforced from outside. The role of development co-operation in reconciliation is necessarily limited.
- Development agencies can, however, facilitate reconciliation processes by creating a favourable, stable and secure environment in which it can take place.
- Reconciliation programmes have to be planned and implemented on the basis of a sound conflict analysis and according to the cultural, social, economic and political context of the conflict-affected communities.
- Development programmes can be designed to support the search for the telling and documentation of truth, to achieve justice, and to contribute to the healing of individuals and society as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Development co-operation (DC) is increasingly being implemented in post-conflict contexts. While the physical reconstruction of infrastructure and the re-building of basic administrative and governmental structures are often the focus of international engagement, less attention is usually given to the re-building of societal links. A society in a post-war country is frequently fragmented. The causes of conflicts often continue to exist also after

¹ The drafting of this issues brief was led by Germany's International co-operation enterprise for sustainable development (GTZ).

war, and may even have been aggravated by atrocities, violence, pain and losses experienced during the war. A post-war country is therefore extremely vulnerable to the recurrence of violent conflict.²

Thus, the concept of reconciliation has become increasingly important in the context of conflict prevention and DC during the last decade. "Reconciliation" is a potentially problematic term – it has no clear definition and in most languages there is no literal translation of the term as such. Still, the concept of former hostile groups and communities with conflicting interests trying to re-build a peaceful relationship with each other exists all over the world. There is agreement that:

1. Reconciliation is a long-term process and a task for generations of society.
2. Reconciliation cannot be initiated or sped up from outside, but must be owned by the people who are seeking to be reconciled.
3. Reconciliation is a task for society as a whole, not only a task for specific groups. It has to take place at all societal levels – from high-ranking politicians and officials to grassroots workers.
4. Offenders are usually more "open" to reconciliation processes than victims. It is important to analyse who wants to be reconciled and for what purpose. Beside moral arguments, it is not fruitful to put pressure on the victims if they are not ready to be reconciled.
5. Every reconciliation process is unique, because the cultural and conflict-related context is always different. Therefore, a proper conflict analysis is needed to design the reconciliation process.

Stability, truth, justice and healing are relevant topics in reconciliation processes.

KEY CONCEPTS

Stability

A precondition for reconciliation is a peaceful environment with minimum standards of [security](#) and stability. Reconciliation needs depth, insight, reflection and self-evaluation on the part of the individuals and the society as a whole. If violence and insecurity still prevail, reconciliation cannot take place. Supporting human security – including protection against violence, poverty, hunger, and illness – and establishing rule of law are important contributions to reconciliation.

Truth

There are different perspectives on if and how truth – in terms of revealing the conflict history and the atrocities of the past – relates to reconciliation. Truth alone does not result in reconciliation. Some believe that truth could hamper reconciliation, because important persons or groups would not be ready to reconcile if doing so would reveal their activities in the conflict. In this regard it is very important to bear in mind that there is no one single truth! However, victims of a conflict – and perpetrators might be victims, too – may find some benefit from expressing what happened and obtaining public recognition of the atrocities they suffered. In this regard, truth can be

A stable environment is vital for enabling a reconciliation processes to take place

"Truth" is often highly complex. Careful attention is necessary to ensure that one perception of "truth" does not hamper reconciliation.

² Conflicts are an unavoidable part of processes of social change in all societies. This issues brief deals with violent conflict but, from here on, uses "conflict" as shorthand for it.

Justice, and perceptions of it, is fundamental to reconciliation processes

Psychosocial support must be designed very carefully according to age and gender...

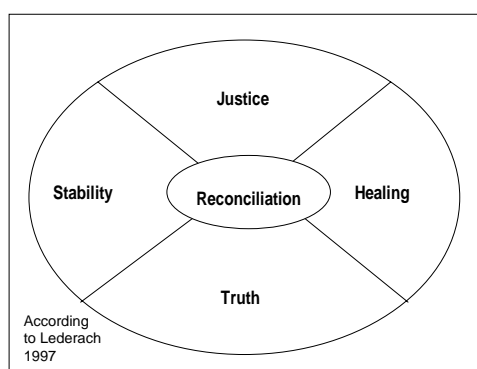
an important aspect of healing. Also, truth in the form of documented atrocities and crimes can be a precondition for justice.

Justice

Justice very often stands at the centre of reconciliation discussions. There are different forms of justice: 1. *retributive* or *rectificatory*, based on prosecution, 2. *historical*, based on truth-seeking, 3. *compensatory*, based on reparations, 4. *restorative*, based on mediation, 5. *distributive*, based on addressing conflict roots, especially social injustice. Retributive justice is needed, at least in the case of war crimes and serious human rights violations, but compensatory, restorative and distributive forms of justice can also be key to efforts to advance reconciliation in post-conflict contexts.

Healing

People involved in violent conflict have witnessed and experienced violence, destruction, displacement, and personal loss. The ability of individuals and society to cope with such extraordinary painful experiences is limited. The break-down of coping strategies often triggers psychosocial trauma.



Traumatized people are less able to reconcile, because they are trapped in their experiences of violence and loss. Therefore, reconciliation must include providing psychosocial support for the affected communities. Psychosocial support must be designed very carefully according to age and gender in addition to the specific cultural, social and political context.³

Supporting “Justice and Reconciliation” in Rwanda:

In 1999, the Rwandan National Unity and Reconciliation Commission requested the German Government to support its work. The project, jointly developed by the commission and the German Technical Co-operation (GTZ), supported the Commission in documenting and recording statements and information about the genocide, in formulating a national reconciliation policy, in lobbying and advocacy work with the government and other key actors, and in monitoring the implementation of the policy recommendations.

Besides supporting the Commission, the German government also assists in reforming the judiciary system, especially in terms of criminal prosecution. At the middle and grassroots levels, women and youth groups are empowered to express their opinions publicly and to participate in the political decision-making processes.

³ See the tipsheets produced by the DAC Network on Gender Equality (www.oecd.org/dac/gender).
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KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN GETTING INVOLVED

1. Analysing the problem:

Understanding the context (including the country's power relations and institutional architecture) is central to the successful design and implementation of appropriate reconciliation processes. Programs based on over-simplified analysis run the risk of reinforcing old or creating new inequities and grievances.⁴

2. Identifying entry point:

Given the fragility and volatility of post-conflict situations, timing and modalities of reconciliation are of crucial importance. The following major aspects should therefore be considered by outside agencies:

Before the end of hostilities: Even before the formal end of violence, the groundwork towards reconciliation should be undertaken. Issues can include the protection of civilians from violence by working towards the application of international humanitarian law and human rights; developing the capacity of non-state and state actors for dealing with issues of truth, justice and healing; and support of peace journalism in order to deconstruct enemy images.

Immediately after violent conflicts, activities that guarantee a minimum level of the rule of law should first be promoted. This includes, above all, protection of individuals from arbitrary violence. Peace processes are usually supported by the population when they guarantee a minimum of personal security. It is also very important to prevent existing conflicts from escalating into renewed outbreaks of violence. The longer past injustices remain unaddressed, the greater the risk that people will take the law into their own hands, and violence will recur. Measures to establish the rule of law, to strengthen the judiciary and to start addressing the past and foster reconciliation by supporting fact-finding about injustices on all sides must therefore be commenced at an early stage, with a view to demonstrating that past injustice will not be forgotten or ignored.

In the medium term, i.e. during the first months and years after the end of a conflict, the practical support of victims is a top priority (trauma counselling for victims and surviving dependants, resettlement of refugees, reconstruction etc.). Parallel to that, measures to clarify and deal with the past, and to foster reconciliation, can be commenced. As the past is brought into focus, perpetrators confess their crimes (and are convicted and punished), and efforts to re-establish social justice become perceptible. Willingness to talk about the past usually grows commensurately. Whilst some measures to address the past and foster reconciliation can and should be commenced immediately after the end of a conflict, legal measures to address conflicts often require initial groundwork, e.g. rehabilitation of the judicial system. Nevertheless, it is important that legal measures be implemented as swiftly and effectively as possible, in order to prevent a sense of impunity.

The timing and modalities of reconciliation are of crucial importance

...to help prevent the recurrence of conflict – which remains a major risk in the short and even medium term.

⁴ Example agency guidance on conflict analysis is provided on the DAC's CPDC webpage at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/analysis>). The DAC Network on Governance is looking at political economy analysis to identify good practice in using the different approaches being developed such as drivers of change (go to <http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance>). See also www.conflictsensitivity.org

Context-specific processes are key.

Reconciliation processes should not be limited to formal structures and mechanisms.

DC can help support reconciliation efforts as well as help to stabilise a post-war country.

In the longer term, expectations of measures to confront the past and foster reconciliation will rise. As soon as basic survival is no longer at stake, justice and [political participation](#) become increasingly important themes. It is then essential to push ahead with activities to address past injustice; tackle the perpetrators; re-establish social justice; promote pluralism and political participation; and facilitate economic, political and social development.

Every approach must bear in mind internationally-recognised principles, whilst seeking solutions that are in harmony with the people concerned, their respective cultures and the practical options available in the given situation. Special care must be taken in all different phases to ensure that measures to address the past and foster reconciliation do not exclude whole sections of the population, with special attention given to the victims and their families – including women, who are often silent victims.

3. Engaging stakeholders:

The selection of partners is crucially dependent on the political structures and the constantly shifting power relations in the country concerned. Measures to support state structures, for instance, make no sense where those structures have no interest in addressing the past and promoting reconciliation or where informal institutions are the main determinants of community life.

When selecting non-governmental partners (including [civil society groups](#)), care should be taken to avoid siding with a biased or partisan position. However, in the sensitive sphere of measures to address the past and foster reconciliation, as well as measures of political development in general, efforts should seek to involve in the dialogue other governmental and non-governmental actors operating in the same field. This will generate not only greater impacts, but also greater acceptance, which is critical in a sensitive area such as this.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

Reconciliation as an “objective” of DC programmes:

As the process of reconciliation can take generations and requires a personal choice by the victim, the role of development co-operation is necessarily limited. Although reconciliation cannot be achieved through DC, programmes can help support reconciliation efforts as well as help to stabilise a post-war country. Direct contributions are also possible:

DC can support the search for, telling of and documenting of truth. It can:

- ⇒ Support Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.
- ⇒ Facilitate public acknowledgement of past injustices and atrocities.
- ⇒ Support the establishment of memorials and exhumations of mass graves.
- ⇒ Help document human rights abuses.
- ⇒ Train human rights investigators and journalists.

DC can help to achieve justice. It can:

- ⇒ Advise on restitution and reparation legislation, on the legal rehabilitation of victims and on the development of amnesty procedures.

- ⇒ Help organise access to files and the establishment of appropriate procedures and institutions.
- ⇒ Support investigation and prosecution of crimes (e.g. support and train public prosecutors, judges and lawyers, or investigation and prosecution units).
- ⇒ Support the establishment and activities of ombudspersons.
- ⇒ Support alternative local justice and traditional dispute resolution.

DC can contribute to healing. It can:

- ⇒ Raise awareness about the reasons for, and effects of, traumatisation.
- ⇒ Establish centres where people can come together and feel “protected”.
- ⇒ Train local experts in psychosocial counseling to individuals, families and communities.
- ⇒ Empower victims’ groups and support networking between them.
- ⇒ Introduce psychotherapy into the medical services of a country.
- ⇒ Supervise local and international personnel dealing with traumatised people.
- ⇒ Give support to reintegration of victims, offenders, returnees etc. in the communities.

Reconciliation as a cross-cutting issue

There may be good reasons not to directly support a reconciliation process. Still, the way DC programmes are implemented can influence the reconciliation process. In post-war countries where a society is deeply divided, DC should regard reconciliation as a cross-cutting issue that must be designed and implemented with conflict sensitivity. Some *Dos and Don'ts* are associated with this:

- ⇒ Do not deepen divisions – if possible, select target groups, partners and staff across existing conflict lines (“Do No Harm”).
- ⇒ Give opportunities to conflict actors to contact and act across dividing conflict lines.
- ⇒ Create room and atmosphere for encounter and [dialogue](#).
- ⇒ Respect the potential unwillingness or inability of victims to participate actively in programmes, do not press them to participate, but give them the opportunity.
- ⇒ Advocate [democratic](#) and human rights values.

1. Invitation by the partner country

Ownership and political will is always important, but it is mandatory for reconciliation processes. Reconciliation must be in the hands of the people reconciling. If they are not willing to reconcile, donors must wait until sufficient local appetite for it has emerged.

2. Comprehensive conflict analysis

Before determining how to support a reconciliation process, a sound conflict analysis has to be undertaken. Reconciliation programmes based on over-simplified conflict lines do not build trust within the society that knows better.

The way DC programmes are implemented can influence the reconciliation process, as well as the dynamics of conflict and peace.

3. Assessment of reconciliation needs

Based on the conflict analysis, it is possible to establish [peace-building](#) and reconciliation needs. Special emphasis should be given to needs in the topics described above – truth, justice and healing – at all levels of society, across age, gender and particular condition.

4. Timing

Timing and sequencing of a reconciliation process is very difficult. Reconciliation cannot start when the overall setting does not guarantee a minimum standard of stability and security.

5. Selection of partners

To balance and cross-check different interests in reconciliation, it is advisable to work with a wide range of different partners. DC organisations should establish and preserve the image of an “honest broker” in reconciliation and should not be associated with a one-sided interest in reconciliation.

Multi- and bilateral organisations have to carefully assess their own stakes and image. Governmental as well as non-governmental organisations should be involved. It is important to assess the motivation for reconciliation of every partner involved.

6. Implementation and monitoring

Close monitoring of the programme's quantitative and, particularly, qualitative outcomes, is important for several reasons. First, reconciliation processes are highly political and therefore always in danger of being instrumentalised by political actors. Second, assessing the impact of reconciliation programmes on public opinion is extremely helpful to steer activities and to stay in touch with other developments in society. Third, monitoring data can be used to inform the public about results and impacts and to establish transparency among the different partners.

It is essential to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of assisted processes.

Facilitating “Peace and Reconciliation” in Guatemala:

Since 1995, the German government has supported the Human Rights Office of the Catholic Church in Guatemala and their project “Recovery of Historic Memory”, in which 6,500 civil-society witness statements about human rights violations have been collected. It has also supported the Guatemalan government's official Truth Commission. Though the commission was seriously understaffed and operated within a very limited budget, it published a report in 1999 documenting 35 years of human rights violations, including the systematic genocide perpetrated on the Maya.

Today, the German government, through GTZ, supports the implementation of the commission's recommendations and the institutionalisation of a national peace process; the empowerment of excluded, mostly indigenous groups; and the promotion of peaceful, inter-cultural co-existence. GTZ also implements a psychosocial component for victims' groups and advocates the public acknowledgement of past injustices and atrocities through exhibitions, memorials and media campaigns.

FURTHER INFORMATION

During the last decade, a variety of organisations – think tanks, non-governmental organisations, church-based groups and development agencies – have developed conceptual and practical knowledge on reconciliation processes. It is advisable to consult them during planning, implementation and evaluation of reconciliation programmes. The following list is indicative and not comprehensive.

Websites and reference documents can be found through www.oecd.org/dac/conflict/themes.

See also OECD (2001), [The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict](#).

Links

[Conciliation Resources](#), UK

[International Center for Transitional Justice](#), US

[Institute for Justice and Reconciliation](#), South Africa

[Transcend: A Peace and Development Network](#)

[Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation](#), South Africa

[Search for Common Ground](#), Belgium

[Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe](#)

[Initiative on Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity](#), UK

[East Timor Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation](#)

[Sierra Leone Truth & Reconciliation Commission](#)

[Report of the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)

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