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Dilemmas and experiences of international support for inclusive peacebuilding

The issue of inclusive peacebuilding has moved up the international agenda in recent years. There is now unprecedented policy-level commitment among the international community to promote inclusion in conflict-affected contexts; growing evidence of the importance of inclusion for sustainable peace and development; emerging lessons on best approaches for promoting inclusion; and a recognition among international actors of the need to learn from past weaknesses in this area.

This report examines the current policy context for providing international support to inclusive peacebuilding. It identifies how international actors can strengthen their efforts to promote inclusion by learning from previous experience and drawing on new knowledge and approaches. It goes on to look at how international actors have supported inclusion in three very different conflict-affected contexts, Afghanistan, Somalia and Nepal, and asks how international actors have engaged on issues of inclusion in these contexts, what factors shaped this engagement, and what the results have been.

Introduction

In recent years growing evidence has emerged that inclusion – i.e. that all groups should participate in and have their interests addressed through political decision-making processes – is a critical factor for a successful transition out of conflict. For example, World Bank research (World Bank, 2011) analysed all post-cold war cases of civil war and found that (with one exception) those countries that avoided relapse had adopted an inclusive political settlement. Likewise, a recent study of 40 peace and constitution-making processes by the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies found that if societal actors were meaningfully included, agreements were more likely to be reached and sustained (Paffenholz, 2015b). Indeed, it is now widely recognised that post-conflict peacebuilding offers an opportunity to address patterns of political, economic or social exclusion that can drive fragility. As Kaplan (2015) argues,

precisely because they lack social cohesion and robust institutions, fragile states are organized around exclusion and inequality Inclusiveness is the most important priority for transitions because, however difficult in practice, it is the only realistic way for fragile states to break the dysfunctional societal and institutional patterns that hold back change.

Together with this knowledge, a policy context has emerged that gives unprecedented emphasis to promoting inclusion in international support for peacebuilding. For example, the 2011 New Deal¹ stipulates that assistance in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) should be structured around five peacebuilding and statebuilding

¹ An agreement among fragile states, donors, and international civil society to improve international policy and practice in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

goals (PSGs), the first of which is “Legitimate politics: foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution”. The New Deal represented a major advance in committing international actors to work more politically to promote inclusion in FCAS. However, recent reviews of its implementation suggest that, despite these commitments, in practice “the New Deal’s implementation has been dominated by technical responses. Normative commitments to inclusivity are proving difficult to translate into practice” (Hearn, 2016: 12). So, while the New Deal has positioned the politics of inclusion centrally within policy frameworks, it has not yet significantly enhanced the way international actors work on this issue.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were agreed in 2015, put issues of peace, inclusion and governance at the heart of global development commitments. SDG 16 to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” explicitly recognises the importance of inclusion to sustainable peace and development. SDG 16 is a major advance in this area, not only because it provides high-level policy commitment to inclusion, but because it creates accountability for national and international actors to deliver on this commitment and ensures that progress on this issue will be monitored and measured, while providing a powerful framework for citizens to make claims for inclusion.

Both the adoption of the SDGs and the lessons now emerging from the implementation of the New Deal have generated frank debate among international actors working in FCAS about what is required to effectively promote inclusion and why they have so frequently failed to do so. This has included analysis of how international engagement in FCAS must change in order to meet the international community’s ambitious new goals on inclusion and peace.

What needs to change

Working politically on inclusion

One of the clearest messages to emerge from such analysis is that international actors need to become better at understanding and working with the power dynamics and politics of FCAS. In particular, they need to improve their ability to situate their support for inclusion within an understanding of how patterns of exclusion and struggles over inclusion (e.g. demands for participation or for a greater share of resources) relate to the broader policy economy of peacebuilding and contestations over the post-conflict political settlement.

While many international actors recognise the importance of such a politically informed approach, in practice they frequently offer technically focused, standardised political reform packages that are based on Western models of the state and focus on formal procedures

rather than the practices of power.² Such approaches often assume that exclusionary practices can be addressed by capacity development, rather than being a problem of lack of political will.

Overcoming these weaknesses requires far better political analysis. While many international actors conduct political or conflict analysis, this is often partial in focus, undertaken only at the beginning of an intervention, conducted by individuals with limited knowledge of the context, and not used to meaningfully inform interventions. A review of the implementation of PSG1 found that “the toolkit for political analysis tends to be unfit for its purpose, due to its superficiality, static and state centred nature” and that

internal operational constraints such as high staff turnover, risk aversion, poor local language skills, short-termism, inter-donor incoherence, a lack of focus on learning and institutional incentives sharply reduce donor ability to understand and act upon the complexity of the inclusiveness and legitimacy of domestic politics in fragile societies (Van Veen & Dudouet, 2017: iii).

This suggests that international actors must find ways to improve their understanding of context, for example through long-term relationships with local research institutes, dialogue with a broader range of actors and engagement beyond the capital. They must also build their own analytical capacity and dedicate more resources to undertaking analysis and to using the findings to develop contextually relevant interventions.

However, it is not only a political understanding that is lacking, but also the ability to operate politically to promote inclusion. The review of PSG1 implementation found that while international agency staff are often aware that FCAS are characterised by hybrid political orders, low levels of institutionality and high levels of informality, nonetheless their support programmes focus heavily on the procedural, technical and formal aspects of politics, which are the areas they are most familiar with (Van Veen & Dudouet, 2017).

New approaches to working politically have emerged in recent years from the development field, which could be particularly useful for international actors seeking to foster inclusion in FCAS.³ These approaches are based on an understanding that change in complex and deeply embedded power structures, such as those that perpetuate exclusion, will be incremental, non-linear and require long-term engagement. They move away from rigid pre-planned activities and a focus on inputs (e.g. the number of “excluded” people trained/participating)

² See, for example, reviews of the New Deal by Van Veen and Dudouet (2017) and Hearn (2016).

³ These approaches, which have emerged from various research groups, include thinking and working politically, problem-driven iterative adaptation, politically smart and locally led development, and implementing development differently.

to working more flexibly with local reform agents to identify local problems and seek locally owned solutions. This “requires continually tracking shifts in the influence, alliances, motivations, ideas, and interests of key players and change agents and using that information to adjust ... strategies” (Ladner, 2016). Such politically smart approaches could help international actors to move away from pre-set assumptions about how to foster inclusion and to more effectively negotiate the complexity, unpredictability and resistance that such a move involves.

Balancing the inclusion of elites and the broader population

Another challenge for international actors is that of balancing support for the “horizontal inclusion” of elite groups and their interests with support for the “vertical inclusion” of the broader population in peacebuilding. In contexts where international actors have significant strategic or security interests, such as Afghanistan or Somalia, the focus has largely been on the inclusion of elites with the potential to undermine stability. Where international actors have fewer such interests, such as in Sierra Leone or Nepal, more attention has been given to the participation of broader sections of the population. The importance given to horizontal or vertical inclusion in peacebuilding has important practical implications for priorities and sequencing, e.g. regarding whether, when and how an initial bargain between elites should be expanded to include the broader population.

Researchers disagree over the importance and feasibility of including groups other than elites in negotiations over the post-conflict political settlement.⁴ However, international actors generally take the approach that the short-to-medium-term priority should be a bargain that includes major elite groups to establish a peaceful political order, while in the longer term more open and inclusive institutions are required to build stability and resilience. Given this approach, Rocha Menocal (2015: 25) suggests the key question for international actors is how the

boundaries of a political settlement that may have a narrower focus on elite inclusion, at least in the short term, can be expanded to address wider state/society relations and create a more broadly inclusive political order – in terms of both process and outcomes.

Answering this question requires international actors to have a strong understanding of elite-constituency relationships in the contexts in which they operate, including how changes in intra-elite and elite-constituency relations shape each other, and the implications of this for the political settlement. For example, the post-independence settlement in South Sudan included the main elites, but its failure to include the broader population made it more brittle and vulnerable to a return to violence when the elite pact broke down. Likewise, in Nigeria, the political settlement is horizontally inclusive of all major elites,

but growing conflict and extremism suggest a breakdown in vertical relations between elites and lower levels of society.

International actors should support the development of context-specific processes to strengthen, sequence, and connect both horizontal and vertical inclusion, with the long-term goal of moving from elite bargains to inclusive politics and institutions. This must involve seeking ways to enhance elite-constituency relations and incentives for elites to represent constituency interests, as well as facilitating the direct inclusion of wider constituencies in peacebuilding. It requires working with political parties, customary governance institutions, religious or customary leaders, landowners, and other such institutions through which elites and constituents relate.

Developing an inclusive process

In seeking to promote inclusive post-conflict states, international actors focus heavily on promoting inclusion within formal peace and reform processes (albeit mostly with a limited understanding of inclusion as representation). They can do this through mediation, funding, technical advice, and diplomatic pressure, particularly in their engagement with power holders and potential spoilers. This focus on inclusive processes is due to growing recognition of their value, as well as because such processes are areas where international actors frequently have leverage. According to Paffenholz (2015b), inclusive processes can send a strong normative signal, enrich and broaden the negotiation agenda, foster legitimacy and public buy-in, bring wider expertise to the process, and generate pressure on the main parties.

Choosing the most appropriate modalities for inclusion in each context is critical. The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies study (Paffenholz, 2015b) found that successful processes always involve a mix of modalities, and identified a variety of options that can be combined and sequenced in different ways. These range from direct inclusion in negotiations to observer status, consultative forums, civil-society initiatives, public decision-making through referendums and various other modalities. International actors can help identify the most appropriate inclusion modalities, drawing on experiences from other contexts. Once modalities of inclusion have been agreed on, international actors can help build the capacity of groups to participate effectively and ensure that mechanisms are in place to transfer messages from wider participation modalities to the negotiating table. Rausch and Luu (2017) stress that such transfer mechanisms are critical because peacebuilding takes place at many levels and greater emphasis is required on ensuring that messages from local communities are heard at the national level.

Promoting inclusive processes inevitably involves risks and trade-offs. A common trade-off is between the inclusion of multiple voices and the stability of the process, especially where there is a high level of resistance by the main parties. When demands for inclusion

⁴ For differing positions on this issue, see, for example, Barnes (2009) or Parks and Cole (2010).

threaten to destabilise the process, international actors frequently back off rather than making an effective case for inclusion or seeking alternative modalities for excluded groups' voices to be fed into negotiations. The Graduate Institute study found that elites tend to accept the inclusion of broader constituencies primarily for strategic rather than normative reasons (Paffenholz, 2015b). Therefore, in responding to elite resistance, international actors can suggest strategic motivations – e.g. related to increasing public buy-in or bringing in potential spoilers – rather than simply make normative arguments. The study also noted that although the inclusion of women was most strongly correlated with successful outcomes, it was the hardest to achieve (Paffenholz, 2015b). This highlights the importance of developing both strategically compelling arguments and practical incentives to promote women's inclusion.

Even where there is agreement about including wider groups, there are difficult choices about which groups to include, and risks that those chosen will be the most acceptable to the conflict parties, most vocal, or most accessible to international actors. Moreover, once wider groups have become part of the negotiation process, there are risks that the powerful parties will try to manipulate or silence them. International actors need to be aware of these risks, and should consult widely on which groups should be included and maintain close communication with them to prevent coercion.

Converting process into influence and outcomes

While international actors focus strongly on inclusive formal processes, they pay less attention to the decisions and policies that emerge from such processes, or the outcomes these produce for populations. Instead, they often assume that the inclusion of marginalised actors in formal processes will automatically result in inclusive outcomes. As the review of PSG1 found, “quantitative increases in process inclusivity, such as representation quota, consultation/meeting frequency, or participation rates, are assumed to improve input and output legitimacy” (Van Veen & Dudouet 2017: 10).

However, evidence suggests that this assumption is not well founded. For example, a recent multi-country study (Dudouet & Lindström, 2016) found that higher political and societal representativeness within the state apparatus does not necessarily translate into more inclusive policies and service delivery, or material benefits for the population. The limitations of this assumption can be seen in contexts such as Guatemala, where strong international support for inclusive peace processes did not result in significantly more inclusive political or socio-economic outcomes. Conversely, in countries such as Rwanda there have been significant inclusive socio-economic outcomes without inclusive processes.

It seems there is a need to better understand the relationship between inclusion in peace or reform processes, the inclusive content of agreements that result from these processes, and inclusive political and distributional

outcomes that follow, and to ask how one leads to another and how international actors can support all three. Inevitably, a variety of factors shape whether and how inclusive processes result in inclusive outcomes.

Firstly, there is the relationship between the formal and informal spheres and the question of where power really resides. In many FCAS, informal power relations, institutions and networks are far more powerful than formal ones. Hence, inclusive formal processes, and even the inclusive formal institutions and rules that may emerge from them, are unlikely to result in inclusive outcomes if informal power relations do not change. It is therefore important to understand how formal and informal rules relate to each other, and identify incentives that can promote a shift in informal rules.

There is also the question of who is chosen to represent the interests of a given group in peace and reform processes. For example, there is evidence that women selected to participate in such processes tend to be close allies of political leaders, socially conservative and unlikely to challenge elite male interests. Similarly, international actors in FCAS usually engage with a limited set of English-speaking, capital-based civil society organisations and hence tend to promote the participation of the elite leaders of these organisations. It is critical that international actors supporting peacebuilding reach out to and include a much broader range of actors, including those who may not share the same peace or reform agenda, but nonetheless are representative of societal groups, such as traditional leaders or social contestation movements. This can of course involve dilemmas around including those such as religious/traditional actors who can play an important role in building peace, but may themselves perpetuate patterns of exclusion.

Another barrier to achieving inclusive outcomes is the inability of groups participating in a peace or reform process to exercise meaningful influence. There can be a variety of reasons for this. The mechanisms through which participation happens can have various forms: for example, whether representatives of excluded groups are embedded within a broader delegation or whether they form an autonomous collective voice. For example, in Nepal, indigenous members of the Constitutional Assembly were chosen by mainstream political parties, which constrained their ability to advocate for their interests, as compared with representatives of some ethnic groups that had their own parties.

Lack of capacity is another major challenge in converting presence into influence. Indeed, Dudouet and Lundström (2016: 30) argue that “participation only translates into influence on decision-making if accompanied by effective empowerment mechanisms”. While international actors frequently support the capacity of marginalised actors to participate, this often involves training focused on building individual capacities. However, it is the collective capacity of groups to mobilise across different levels, overcome divisions, develop a common agenda, and challenge power structures that is most critical and

should be the focus of capacity-building. For example, in Yemen's national dialogue women formed a 30% quota, but failed to have much impact because they did not act as a unified group. Effective influence is also hindered by discriminatory norms and attitudes, e.g. towards women or minorities.

Finally, a major challenge is that, even where a process and its resulting agreement have been inclusive, there can be a lack of capacity or political will to implement the agreement. As Paffenholz (2015b: 3) argues, "most attention of the international community goes into the negotiation phase. However, many processes fail or substantial gains of inclusive negotiations get lost during implementation". This is deeply problematic, because ultimately it is not the deal that is agreed, but its outcomes that shape vulnerability to return to conflict. It is therefore essential that international actors remain engaged throughout the implementation of a peace agreement. Such engagement can include building the capacity of government to implement the agreement and of civil society and opposition forces to monitor implementation, as well as education and media work to develop a conducive environment for implementation. It is also important that international actors support the establishment of appropriate post-agreement monitoring mechanisms that have inclusion in their mandate. For example, civil society groups in Kenya played a critical role in monitoring the implementation of the 2008 peace deal.

Inclusive peacebuilding at the country level

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, the international community has provided vast resources for peacebuilding and governance reform for over a decade. However, rather than building a stable and inclusive state, this assistance has largely entrenched power distortions, inequalities and poor governance. The weaknesses of international engagement in Afghanistan highlight some of the challenges and trade-offs for international actors seeking to promote inclusive peacebuilding.

At the formal political level, horizontal inclusion has been established in Afghanistan, with elites from all major groups represented in the government of national unity, although the exclusion of the Taliban from peacebuilding initiatives over the years has created a permanent group of spoilers. However, there has been little move towards vertical inclusion that would give the wider population a meaningful voice in, and benefits from, Afghanistan's peacebuilding process. Indeed, marginalised groups such as women and young people remain largely excluded from current peace initiatives and institutions at the national and local levels.

This situation has been created by an excessive focus on the procedural aspects of democracy – particularly elections – with international actors assuming that this would

create a more legitimate and inclusive state. However, because of existing power imbalances, these formal democratic processes did not facilitate genuine political competition or result in more inclusive and representative governance, but instead allowed powerful actors to secure their interests via elections. The emphasis on formal democratic process also did little in terms of inclusiveness. Although there have been improved outcomes in specific areas – such as education – Afghanistan's governments have done little to improve services, economic prospects or security for the wider population, while donors have been distracted from these issues by their focus on democratic processes. Critically, in dealing with the Afghan government, donors have frequently acted as though its weaknesses – including its exclusionary, unaccountable and corrupt nature – were problems of capacity (to be remedied through technical support and training) rather than lack of political will.

There has been significant focus on New Deal implementation in Afghanistan. However, according to Van Veen (2016), PSG1 has been implemented in a very limited way, with no emphasis on the meaningful inclusion of non-elite groups. This is in large part because Afghanistan's

donors generally have a modest and one-sided understanding of the nature and dynamics of Afghan domestic politics ... a narrow outlook on what type of activities constitute support for the promotion of more legitimate and inclusive politics, and a limited suite of instruments for doing this (Van Veen, 2016: 2).

Another weakness in the international response has been its heavy focus on the central state and formal institutions, and its failure to take account of local voices and needs, or to engage sufficiently with informal institutions or local power holders. This is partly because security concerns mean that international agencies interact with a very limited range of Kabul-based officials and civil society elites. This approach has exacerbated the gap between Kabul and the wider population, and the exclusion of this population in terms of both voice and outcomes. Oxfam (2017) argues that international actors should increase their

focus on local peacebuilding processes, for example, by providing financial support to grassroots civil society organizations in rural areas ... [because] most conflict takes place at the local level and revolves around disputes inter alia related to land or water allocation, legal affairs, poverty, unemployment, religious affairs or the rights and obligations of customs .

Finally, Afghanistan illustrates how international actors negotiate trade-offs between short-term stability and longer-term governance and societal goals. Van Veen (2016) describes how prioritising the fight against terrorism came at the price of stimulating corruption and warlordism, enabling elite capture of international funds, and reducing the legitimacy and inclusiveness of governance. Ultimately, this approach has produced poor outcomes for the population.

Somalia

Somalia was one of the first countries to pilot the New Deal and provides an interesting study of the extent to which New Deal commitments on inclusion translate into the effective international promotion of inclusive peacebuilding in a context of weak government and significant international security interests. While Somalia is unusual in having a dedicated PSG1 working group, this group apparently focuses on a limited governance agenda related to elections and institutions rather than broader efforts to promote inclusion.

International support for peacebuilding in Somalia has generally been supply driven and based on technical blueprints, with little focus on Somali priorities. The New Deal was intended to increase national ownership. However, while it has provided more space to include a Somali vision, this has been the vision of a small group of government and civil society elites, while other voices have remained excluded. The failure to develop a more inclusive and representative New Deal country compact was in large part due to externally imposed time limits on the process, a failure to consult with regional elites and civil society, the exclusion of potential spoilers such as Islamic political actors, and the failure to address important issues such as the distribution of economic power. The result has been excluded groups resisting the New Deal agenda.

Somalia suffers from a significant gap between national-level peacebuilding agendas and local voices and priorities, and as a result local-level actors see internationally supported peace initiatives as a top-down imposition in the interests of a small elite. Gruener and Hald (2015) argue that lack of capacity at the local level exacerbates this exclusion, because only large, national-level NGOs have the capacity to handle internationally supported initiatives, while community-level capacities involving traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are typically overlooked.

International actors' security interests and anti-terror agenda overshadow all their engagement in Somalia, and – as in Afghanistan – this has not proved conducive to building inclusive and legitimate governance. Extremely tight security restrictions also severely restrict international actors' abilities to engage beyond the capital or to understand the local political context and perspective and the interests of the wider population.

The locally owned and relatively successful peace process in the breakaway republic of Somaliland provides an interesting contrast with the various failed internationally driven peacebuilding processes in Somalia. Following its secession in 1991, Somaliland's leaders negotiated a peace that has continued to hold. It appears that critical to this success was the fact that Somaliland did not receive international assistance, and hence its leaders were able to set their own agenda and timeframe for building peace. As Phillips (2013: 3) argues, Somalilanders were not pressured to accept "template"

political institutions from outside and could negotiate their own locally devised, and locally legitimate, institutional arrangements. There was sufficient time and political space for solutions to evolve, rather than an attempt to impose pre-determined institutional end points.

Moreover, incentives for elites to cooperate were local and tangible rather than shaped by ever-shifting external assistance.

What has emerged is a horizontal elite pact that includes all major groups and that maintains a balance of power between clans and sub-clans. This settlement is undoubtedly flawed in many ways: it is not in line with international norms of best-practice peacebuilding, is not inclusive of grassroots communities and voices, and is based on collusion between political and economic elites and an exclusionary distribution of economic opportunities and outcomes. However, it has brought relative peace and served better than the many peace attempts in Somalia.

Analysis of Somalia and Somaliland provides lessons about the importance of locally led processes and the dangers of externally imposed peacebuilding agendas and timeframes. As Phillips (2013: 7) comments, "Foreign development assistance should be about more than fixing institutional gaps using the technical lens of imported and transferable best practice. The case of Somaliland underlines that legitimate institutions are those born through local political and social processes." This example underlines the need to support locally legitimate processes and actors – even when these do not fit international frameworks and are uncomfortable for international actors – while still maintaining momentum towards greater inclusion. For example, this can be done by supporting those whose voices are usually marginalised in such local processes to successfully mobilise, engage with and influence these processes, as well as encouraging and incentivising the local elites leading these processes to open them up to include broader sets of actors and interests. It also raises questions about how a home-grown and relatively stable elite pact, such as in Somaliland, can be broadened to include the wider population. Also, it emphasises that New Deal implementation, even in a highly challenging context such as Somalia, must move beyond engagement with a small group of elite interlocutors and a focus on formal processes to build a locally owned and more holistic inclusion agenda.

Nepal

Nepal provides an example of a context where there has been a strong emphasis on inclusive processes and political space for previously excluded groups and where international actors have promoted an inclusion agenda, but where this has largely not resulted in inclusive outcomes.

Nepal's conflict was driven by grievances related to exclusion, and a core demand of the Maoist rebels was for a more inclusive state. The 2006 peace process placed

inclusion issues at the centre of mainstream political debate, with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) including a commitment that “the state shall be restructured in an inclusive, democratic and forward looking manner” (CPA, 2006). This was followed by a lengthy constitutional reform process that was highly inclusive in terms of representation and participation, with quotas for women, indigenous groups, ethnic groups and Dalits⁵ in the Constitutional Assembly. While this new political space enabled excluded groups to mobilise in unprecedented ways, they were ultimately unable to significantly influence decision-making, which continued to be dominated by traditional political elites. The constitution that was finally pushed through by the leaders of the main political parties, while containing some progressive elements, ultimately reflects elite interests, fails to provide the inclusive restructuring of the state that the CPA promised and has been widely rejected by marginalised groups.

International actors in Nepal have focused heavily on promoting inclusive peacebuilding. This is because they recognised that exclusion was a major driver of conflict, because the emphasis on inclusion in the CPA gave them a mandate to work on this issue, and because their own lack of immediate strategic interests in Nepal gave them space to do so. In the first years following the conflict, international actors actively championed inclusion and identity issues, frequently integrating these into political dialogue with leaders and support to peacebuilding and reform processes. They built the capacity of excluded groups to mobilise and participate in peacebuilding, and strengthened such groups’ access to state institutions and services.

This international emphasis on inclusion prompted a backlash from Nepal’s elite, and since 2012 Nepal’s governments and bureaucracy have used arguments about international interference and the imposition of Western values to push back against donor engagement on identity and exclusion issues. This is part of a broader trend in which the Nepali establishment has resisted international pressure on a range of normative issues, such as transparency and accountability, and human rights. As a result, in recent years donors have had less space to engage on exclusion or to support excluded communities. As Neelakantan et al. (2016: 10) argue,

from 2006 to 2012, international donor partners referred heavily to the language of social inclusion and targeted programming for historically marginalised communities and regions ... [but] some donor projects aimed at inclusion and federalism came to be heavily criticised by parts of Nepal’s traditional establishment for having stoked ethnic sentiment or promoted ethnic federalism, and donors subsequently backed away from the inclusion agenda.

5 Members of the lowest caste in the country’s traditional caste system.

In the face of this resistance, Nepal’s donors have been largely reluctant to continue championing inclusion issues, and have prioritised improving relations with the government. Partly for this reason, international actors were initially supportive of the new constitution, despite its failure to live up to inclusion commitments. As protests grew, international actors increasingly raised concerns, although the International Crisis Group reports that this was done in a way that was overly cautious and poorly coordinated (ICG, 2016).

There is no doubt that international actors in Nepal showed significant commitment to promoting inclusion, particularly in the early years of peacebuilding, and that their support was critical to empowering excluded groups and deepening the debate on inclusion. However, they did not develop effective strategies to deal with elite resistance, nor did they always recognise the way in which inclusion issues were embedded in broader contestations over the political settlement. For example, women’s demands for citizenship rights were rejected because of elite desire to push back against a specific ethnic group and promote an exclusive definition of Nepali identity. Critically, international actors frequently failed to effectively link the support they gave to marginalised groups to their broader peacebuilding and statebuilding programmes, resulting in inclusion issues becoming somewhat “siloed”. These actors also focused strongly on inclusion in formal processes and did not sufficiently take account of either informal power dynamics or discriminatory norms as factors preventing marginalised groups from translating participation into influence.

Conclusion

Many of the ingredients required to improve international support for inclusive peacebuilding appear to be in place. There is unprecedented high-level policy commitment on the issue, along with new monitoring frameworks that are being developed for SDG implementation. There is also appetite among international actors working on peace and development to prioritise this agenda, as well as an honest recognition of where previous initiatives have gone wrong. Moreover, new evidence is emerging, including lessons from New Deal implementation, that provides valuable insights on what has and has not worked in various contexts.

As the three cases above illustrate, the way in which international actors approach the issue of inclusion, the priority they give it, how they define it, and how they seek to foster it varies widely among contexts and depends on a range of internal and external factors. However, there does seem to be growing agreement that effective support for inclusive peacebuilding – no matter the context – requires a few core elements. These include a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how patterns of exclusion and demands for inclusion relate to the political economy of peacebuilding, and, flowing from this, a politically informed and contextually relevant approach to working on these issues. It also includes a broadening of

focus to look beyond inclusion in formal, national-level processes and institutions, and also address informal and local processes, institutions and power dynamics, and to prioritise inclusive outcomes. To do this, international actors will need to engage with a much broader range of actors and more widely outside the capital, as well as stay involved to support implementation over the longer term.

Ultimately, to be able to deliver on their commitments on inclusion, international actors will need to invest in their internal capacity to understand and work effectively on the politics of inclusion in FCAS, and incentivise their staff to prioritise this. They will also need to be willing to take risks to promote inclusion, recognising that the long-term benefits of genuine inclusion can outweigh short-term gains, whether in terms of security and elections in Afghanistan, speedy aid processes in Somalia, or relationships with elites in Nepal.

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