



Inclusive Peace
setting change in motion

Business Actors

in National Dialogue and Peace Processes

February 2023

This document presents country cases where business actors have been involved in national dialogues and peace processes. The overview reveals that business actors and entrepreneurs rarely initiate such processes but have found various ways to contribute to them nevertheless. Business actors have served as intermediaries between political opponents or conflict parties in some cases.

Direct Participation:

Driving political transition: South Africa (1988-1994)

- Realising that only a negotiated end to apartheid could prevent South Africa's crippled economy from collapsing, South African business leaders began to meet with representatives of the apartheid regime as well as various formal and informal groups, including black political activists, to set the stage for a peaceful political transition.
- Business leaders later formed the "Consultative Business Movement" (CBM) which both ANC representatives and members of the Apartheid cabinet respected as a fair intermediary. The CBM engaged in shuttle diplomacy to mediate between the two political sides.
- In 1991, the CBM joined forces with the South African Council of Churches to organise the first formal peace process. Until 1994, the Executive Director of CBM took the lead on the secretariat and administrative support for the peace process, first in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), later in the Multi-Party Negotiation Process that culminated in South Africa's 1994 general elections.

Making National Dialogue Work: Tunisia (2013)

- The Tunisian National Dialogue aimed at overcoming the political deadlock between the ruling Ennahda party and left-wing/secular opposition forces.
- The dialogue had been initiated by a Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet consisting of four major civil society organisations which helped mediating between the government and the opposition. The quartet was led by the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) which was closely affiliated with Ennahda whom they convinced to participate in the dialogue.
- The National Dialogue produced a new constitution and resulted in regular parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014. The Dialogue Quartet was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2015.

Supporting the President: El Salvador (1990-1994)

- Moderate businessmen supported President Cristiani's call for national dialogue to end conflict and embark on an economic reform program. They joined Cristiani's negotiation team during the formal peace talks with the insurgents and stayed engaged throughout the peace agreement implementation phase.

Paving the Pathway Towards Peace: Guatemala (1989-1994)

- In 1989, the National Reconciliation Commission (CNR) kicked off the Grand National Dialogue (GND) to discuss key topics for peacemaking. The GND featured 84 delegates representing 47 organisations, including cooperatives and the Federation of Small Businessmen and Producers. Large businesses and landowners boycotted the GND though.
- As part of the 1990 Oslo consultations, representatives from five social sectors, including the business sector, were invited to meet with the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (UNRG) and discuss topics that the formal peace talks would need to cover. The exchange resulted in the "Unilateral Declarations between the Business Sector and the UNRG".
- In 1994, the government and the UNRG formed the Civil Society Assembly (ASC) to discuss and formulate joint positions on substantive issues that Track 1 peace talks covered, including socio-economic issues and agrarian reform. The ASC also reviewed the agreements concluded by the formal negotiation parties. Small business cooperatives were part of the ASC.

Consulting from the Inside: Bahrain (2011)

- Startled by the protests in the streets, the Bahrain king organised a national dialogue in 2011. The National Dialogue featured 300 representatives from various backgrounds, including civil society groups, unions, business associations and the chamber of commerce and set out to discuss potential national reforms that would help to address looming social grievances. Opposition groups were largely excluded from the dialogue.
- Four working groups were set up to discuss political, economic and social issues, respectively, as well as women and family. A general committee that comprised the 300 representatives mentioned above used the working groups' suggestions to formulate recommendations for action.

Consulting from the Outside: Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (2008)

- The government and the opposition party launched a National Dialogue to discuss pathways towards sustainable peace, stability and justice after episodes of severe post-election violence in 2007/2008. There were regular public consultations with various actors of Kenya's civil society, including the business community, though they did not directly participate in the negotiations.

Indirect Participation:

Nurturing Trust Between Conflict Parties: Mozambique, Colombia

- In Mozambique, the executives of a mining conglomerate established friendships with and served as intermediary between the two conflict parties, i.e., RENAMO and FRELIMO. These trust-building exercises paved the way for peace negotiations further down the road. In Colombia, business associations organised spaces for various actors including rebel groups, church leaders and minority groups to exchange and build trust.

Advocacy for Peace: Northern Ireland (1994) / Sri Lanka (2001)

- In Northern Ireland in 1994, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) published a paper that calculated the staggering economic losses caused by the prevailing sectarian conflict. The CBI used this research document to enhance public support for peace. In Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka First, which united various Colombo-based trade associations, launched a public campaign for peace that stressed the high economic costs of the ongoing conflict.