One of the fundamental principles of democratic government is that it requires the consent of the governed. The citizens of a country have the right to participate in political decision-making\(^1\) and the ‘will of the people’ is the source of legitimacy of the political leadership.

Peace processes and the agreements reached through them offer opportunities not only for ending violence, but also for negotiating new political structures and relationships. Agreements often lead to significant changes to the structure of the state, systems of governance, access to resources, security and opportunities for development. The processes themselves offer opportunities for political reconciliation between protagonists, and for the consolidation of democratic politics as the dominant arena of political decision-making. Therefore, the way these processes are managed matters, and the question of participation is of particular importance.

Yet the dominant paradigm of peacemaking is what may be called ‘elite pact-making’; the leaders of the combatant groups are brought together behind closed doors, often in a foreign country and frequently with the assistance of an international mediator, to reach an agreement which satisfies the minimum demands of the negotiators. The agreement is then announced to a largely ignorant and often polarized public, who are then exhorted to accept it and expected to cooperate its implementation.

This model of peacemaking has successfully contributed to the ending of civil wars in a number of countries: Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, El Salvador. This success should certainly not be under-estimated, and neither should the enormous challenges of simply getting the armed parties to the table.

However, it is clear that this approach has some significant opportunity costs. It rarely provides opportunities for those who are not involved in the violence – including other political groupings, organized civil society or the wider public – to have a voice in shaping or endorsing the agreements. And although the end of hostilities is likely to be met with widespread feelings of relief, some may feel alienated from an agreement that is not ‘theirs’.

**Public participation: an alternative to the elite pact-making paradigm?**

In 2002, Conciliation Resources’ Accord programme undertook a project to explore whether there are alternatives to this ‘elite pact-making’ paradigm of peacemaking. We discovered a number of highly significant peacemaking experiences, in a range of different countries, where people have succeeded in ‘opening’ the political process to facilitate the participation of a broader range of social groupings.

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Each of the mechanisms documented in our Accord project engaged people from different sectors and identity-groups to deliberate the substantive and procedural issues addressed in the negotiations. The mechanisms existed in the 'public sphere': wider audiences were aware of them and had opportunities to contribute. They were reported in the media, the issues could be meaningfully debated in public and representatives had opportunities to consult with constituencies.

The cases reveal several basic modes of participation in peacemaking:

- **representative participation** through political parties;
- **consultative mechanisms** where civil society has an opportunity to voice views and formulate recommendations; and
- **direct participation**, where all interested individuals engage in a process of developing and implementing agreements to address the conflict.

CR’s Accord project contains a number of examples of each of these modes of peacemaking. All are referred to in this paper, and for each mode, there is a more detailed description of one of the particular examples.

It is hoped that the following brief glimpses into the nature of mechanisms for public participation elsewhere in the world may assist in reflecting on the opportunities for more inclusive, participatory approaches to peacemaking in Palestine/Israel. The examples are not offered as models to be replicated from one peace process to another; rather they provide ideas of how different societies have drawn on the strengths of their own traditions to create innovative mechanisms for participation. Their successes and shortcomings hopefully provide both inspiration and warning to inform conflict resolution efforts elsewhere.

**Representative participation**

In South Africa and Northern Ireland, key actors realized that an agreement was unlikely to be sustainable without the involvement and consent of all the other parties. The political negotiations were therefore designed to engage all the political groupings with a requisite degree of public support that were willing to participate in the talks. In both cases, these multi-party negotiations became decision-making bodies addressing the constitutional framework for a new post-conflict social contract.

The Northern Ireland all party talks and the Women’s Coalition

In Northern Ireland, preparations began in 1996 for the ‘all party talks’. Elections were held to ensure that there were delegations for all the main communities. Seats were allocated through a two-track system, whereby 18 territorial constituencies elected five representatives, complemented by a ‘top-up’ system which added two representatives from each of the 10 most successful political parties. This resulted in a total of 110 delegates to the talks.

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3 Readers requiring more detailed explanations of context, methodology and outcomes of individual mechanisms are encouraged to refer to the relevant articles in Catherine Barnes (ed.), *Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking*, Accord 13 (London, Conciliation Resources 2002).
The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was formed in response to the exclusion of women from the candidate lists of political parties. When their lobbying failed, a group of women formed their own coalition, including women from both the main communities. In preparation for the elections, they held meetings twice per week to debate positions and prepare their manifesto. The meetings were facilitated by rotating chairs, and participants were encouraged to bring their 'identity baggage' into the room. The Women's Coalition needed to win 10,000 votes to be eligible for the 'top-up' layer seats. Despite a lack of resources, they ultimately succeeded in gaining 1 per cent of the vote and finished as the 9th most popular political party.

During the talks, the larger parties were allowed three seats at the table, plus three back-up delegates. Smaller parties were allowed two seats plus three back-up delegates. Initially the only women at the talks, the Women's Coalition delegates ensured that they always had a nationalist and a unionist woman at the table at all times. Their back-up team of ten advisers was also similarly balanced, with delegates selected from an open meeting. Initially, they focused on procedural issues, helping to smooth the process of the talks. As the negotiations advanced, they were also able to broaden the agenda to include victims' rights and reconciliation. To ensure they remained representative of their constituency, they consulted with their membership on a monthly basis, exploring their views on upcoming agenda items and holding discussions with other NGO leaders.

The Belfast Agreement was signed in April 1998 and subsequently endorsed by a public referendum. The representative political process was a key factor in determining its acceptability to the wider public in Northern Ireland. It is widely acknowledged that the Women's Coalition played a crucial role in ensuring the inclusion of sensitive issues, demystifying the political process and showing civil society’s capacity to engage in political decision-making.

In both Northern Ireland and South Africa, there was a well-developed system of multi-party politics rooted in the vibrant political cultures of the different communities. Many parties had processes for consulting members and affiliate bodies. These factors increased the potential for parties to serve as a channel of constituency interests and values; they could both represent prevalent opinions and help to 'bring along' their supporters in the process. Over a period of time, the processes became the main political forum for addressing the issues under discussion and there were incentives for cooperative behaviour in order for each group to achieve their primary objectives. Because all political groupings could participate, it became difficult to sabotage the process; instead, the parties remaining outside the process typically became increasingly marginalized.

**Consultative mechanisms**

The Guatemalan Civil Society Assembly and the Philippines National Unification Commission were both formed to consult a broad array of constituencies and elicit their recommendations for peacemaking. The aim was to generate social consensus to inform and shore up decisions taken by the government and armed group (in Guatemala) and by the government (in the Philippines). The Guatemalan Civil Society Assembly was organized on a sectoral basis, enabling political parties, religious groups, trade unions, women’s organizations, Mayan organizations, development NGOs and others to debate possible solutions to a range of substantive conflict issues. The Philippines National Unification Commission convened provincial, regional and national level consultations, each comprising a range of social sectors, to make proposals on ending the armed conflicts and identify issues relevant to the peace process.
The peace process in Guatemala ended more than three decades of war. As with many places, the processes suffered many setbacks and a whole series of negotiation processes preceded the UN-mediated negotiations between the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), which resulted in the Peace Accords of 1996. It was in the context of the UN-mediated negotiations that the Civil Society Assembly took place, but it had some important precedents in the Grand National Dialogue of 1989. The Grand National Dialogue convened 84 delegates represented 47 organizations, including the Government, political parties, media organizations, churches, etc. The URNG not allowed to participate, and the process was also boycotted by right-wing formations such as the large agro-business sector. Neither women’s nor Mayan organizations were represented. Although security deteriorated and the GND had to be disbanded, it identified several themes of key importance in the conflict. This analysis subsequently helped to define the official negotiating agenda between the URNG and the government in 1994. Significantly, this new negotiation framework distinguished between substantive and operative themes and the Civil Society Assembly was created to discuss the former.

The Civil Society Assembly (ASC) was chaired by a Catholic Bishop, assisted by an Organizing Committee. It comprised representatives of 10 social sectors, including, for the first time, representatives of sectors representing indigenous peoples and women. The Assembly was mandated to draft consensus papers on seven substantive negotiating themes, each of which was addressed sequentially. Each sector presented its position on a specific theme and the issues were debated until they were able to prepare a consensus paper. Many of the Assembly’s proposals were adopted in the drafting of the relevant peace accord on the topic. The role played by Mayan organizations was of crucial importance and enabled them to legitimize their voice and issues in the mainstream of Guatemalan politics. However, the process also had several shortcomings. The ASC failed to sustain the participation of the agro-business elite, which led to the undermining several ASC suggestions on socio-economic and agrarian reform and land distribution. There were also poor mechanisms for communication with wider public, who remained relatively unaware of the details of the process, and who were insufficiently engaged to support the accords in the subsequent referendum.

Each mechanism created unprecedented space for non-combatants to discuss the structural causes of conflict and participants identified key issues that were later incorporated into the official negotiating agenda. Yet the difficulties in sustaining the outcomes of these processes suggests that while consultation mechanisms may provide valuable opportunities to identify issues and build consensus, they are weaker forms of participation than the 'representative' model because their recommendations are not binding.

**Direct participation**

The Malian inter-community meetings, Colombia’s Municipal Constituent Assemblies and the local and regional peace committees of South Africa's National Peace Accord all reveal another mode of participation based on the direct involvement of members of the public. In each, local civic leaders initiated and managed processes engaging all interested community members in developing and implementing agreements to address the aspects of a conflict within their control. In this way they were able to create a 'pragmatic peace' with others in their community.
A significant factor was the scale on which they operated: by working at a community level, local leaders could facilitate processes that engaged hundreds and even thousands of people in face-to-face, direct political dialogue. Those who participated in these processes tended to feel ownership of the agreements reached, creating significant social pressure for their implementation.

The West African state of Mali experienced a separatist conflict in the north of the country between June 1990 and March 1996. The conflict had its origins in the political marginalization of the northern region and particularly of the nomadic Tuaregs, who inhabit the area along with Arab nomads and the Songhoy sedentarists of the Niger River basin. Efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict began in late 1990 and culminated in the signing of a ‘National Pact’ in April 1992 between the government and the armed movements. However, it soon became clear that the National Pact process was incapable on its own of transforming the dynamics of the conflict and bringing about sustainable peace. Local combatant groups continued to fight the war and made implementation of the agreement virtually impossible.

It was only towards the end of 1994 that real breakthroughs began to occur. Recognizing that they would need to take greater responsibility for their own affairs to find a settlement of the conflict, local traditional leaders initiated peace talks in their communities. This was soon followed by a series of local meetings, leading to the negotiation of localized ceasefires that ended organized violence by April that year. It was then that a small group of civil society leaders formed a ‘facilitation group’ to provide guidance for local initiatives. They called on a trusted international NGO, Norwegian Church Aid to assist their efforts. Thirty-seven inter-community meetings were then conducted throughout the north.

The meetings were structured to meet the needs of communities characterized by levels of interdependence with regard to territory, natural resources and trading venues. Given the lack of leadership structures at this level, the facilitation group selected meeting organizers on the basis of their individual integrity, position and capacity to convene the events. They listed a series of problems arising from the war and requested that the communities develop commonly acceptable solutions to each one. The facilitation group also suggested that a diverse group of people should be involved in decision-making at the meetings, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, civil society leaders including representatives of women and youth. Local politicians, soldiers and government officials were given ‘observer’ status, to ensure that sufficient space was given to the communities to engage in and renew their traditional forms of dialogue.

Each meeting was attended by between 300 and 1800 people and typically lasted one or two days. It began with an introductory plenary, including the selection of members for topical commissions. The commissions typically focused on issues of security and development and each commission would debate possible solutions to their issue, looking for compromises between the known positions of influential figures. Their proposals would be brought back to the plenary where people could make last comments or suggestions. Then the meeting would choose members for follow-up commissions to carry out the decisions.

Although there were variations between the meetings, there were also some important trends in their outcomes. The practical results included the re-opening of markets, reduction in armed robbery and greater willingness among ex-combatants to join demobilization camps and turn in their weapons. There was also overwhelming agreement on the need to restore the authority of the state through the development of its institutions.
The role of international actors
Although the most important ingredient in each process was the activation of those involved, each mechanism needed a variety of financial, technical, and practical resources to implement it. International actors played crucial roles, whether by sponsoring or hosting preparatory or consultative meetings or by using their leverage to encourage governments and armed groups to create socially and politically inclusive processes. International observers, monitors and peacekeepers were also able to assist in addressing the ‘security first’ dilemma, by helping to create a necessary level of security to create a safe environment for participation.

Such approaches need to be rooted in a respect for the primacy of local ownership and popular sovereignty – and as such would require a paradigm shift away from current interventionist policies. The ‘international community’ needs to be encouraged to design its interventions in a way that strengthens or complements indigenous capacities for conflict resolution; respecting traditional leadership structures as well as encouraging the participation of marginalized groups. It needs to be lobbied to support fragile, local-level peace initiatives, which often offer important starting points and precedents for national initiatives. There is a crucial need to support vulnerable peace and human rights advocates, whose voices will play an important role in preparing the public for political change.

Legitimate process, legitimate outcomes?
In each of the experiences documented in our Accord project, the involvement of those outside the combatant groups imbued the negotiation of new political arrangements with greater legitimacy. It is arguable that if a process is seen as legitimate, then the outcomes are likely to be treated as such. Moreover, because each of these processes enabled wider participation in general, there were more opportunities for traditionally marginalized groups to have a voice. It was notable that, women and indigenous communities in particular were able to raise their political voice during the negotiations – creating a benchmark that carried forward into the new post-settlement political system.

Each process also managed to take the political debate out of the capital and into spaces accessible to ordinary people. In addition to the instrumental dimension of influencing decisions, this had an important symbolic value: people felt that they were being included in politics, often for the first time, and were able to take part in shaping their country's future.

All the case studies indicate that participatory mechanisms succeeded in widening the range of issues addressed in the agenda, thereby offering a greater opportunity to address substantive grievances and explore a wider range of possible solutions. This also helped to reflect the scope of public concerns and generally contributed a greater depth to the debate. Thus the agreements tended to be better at addressing the causes of conflict and they had a broad legitimacy that made them more sustainable.

Even in places where there have been implementation difficulties, it has been impossible to ignore the agreement altogether. At the very least, the agreements have remained alive in public political discourse as aspirational guidelines and have provided an important base line for the political agendas of pro-agreement activists.
Finally, each process can be seen to have emerged from the unique combination of cultural resources, political traditions and imaginative leadership of its particular context. The challenge for all of them has been to sustain the culture of inclusion they stimulated, to institutionalize broad participation in the country’s political systems and structures and to further embed the democratic values they promoted.

It seems that where a peace process enables broad-based participation and public debate, intensely conflictual issues can be reclaimed as the normal subjects of political dialogue, problem-solving and constructive action. They help to underscore that differences can be addressed through political processes instead of outside the system through illegal / violent means. The peace process therefore has the potential to be a defining moment in the transition from one political order to the next and can create movement toward a more participatory and democratic political system and society.