Achievements

○ The project created a space for learning between the organisations in the four countries, which has strengthened their peacebuilding practice. It has enabled reflection on the gains, difficulties and experiences of contributing to and supporting peace processes.

○ Relationships built through constructive dialogue with state and international institutions created new opportunities and synergies in all four countries. This is particularly meaningful in these contexts, where state-society relationships are intensely fragmented and fragile.

○ The project contributed to the design and creation of conflict prevention mechanisms, tailored to the needs in each country. It supported the development of mechanisms to monitor and verify change, including indicators to measure capacities for peace (detailed overleaf).

○ The project strengthened the work of civil society, in particular connections and collaborations among networks and groups of civil society organisations (CSOs) – locally, regionally, nationally and across Latin America among the four organisations.

Insights

Flexibility in the design of projects can allow partners who are in tune with local needs to best direct and manage the work. Local partners were able to put in place processes or mechanisms that they identified as relevant and needed in their own contexts, such as dialogue sessions between communities and government actors in Peru and El Salvador.

The introduction of peacebuilding approaches opened up opportunities to transform relationships. In these Latin American countries, where there are few ‘peacebuilding’ organisations, but a strong civil society focused on the defence of human rights, a peacebuilding approach proved useful for partners. For instance, some partners began to accept the need for engagement and dialogue with state and security actors – something they had hitherto been unwilling to do.

Where civil society capacity is already strong, the most useful international support can be facilitating exchange and lesson learning. Given that the CSOs implementing the project are well established and experienced, the most useful ‘capacity building’ that Conciliation Resources could provide was creating the opportunities for lesson sharing as well as providing accompaniment: challenge, expertise and advice.
Measuring capacities for peace

Conciliation Resources’ local partner organisation Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE) spearheaded an initiative which supports Colombian citizens to think ahead towards the implementation phase of the Colombian peace process. They analysed the ‘capacities’ necessary for society to transition towards peace and prevent the recurrence of armed violence.

Government representatives, civil society actors, and representatives from local peasant, afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, as well as religious figures, came together to develop indicators to measure positive change in a range of areas. Some of these ‘capacities for peace’ indicators looked at the empowerment of civil society; the transformation towards a state which is respectful of human rights and the environment; and the construction of active citizenship. Both the joint process and the significance of the result – the set of indicators - were valued by those who took part.

“The indicators allow us to have a much wider perspective which is not just about security but also about peace, and to start to look at what capacities are required and how to build them.”

Marta Cecilia Gualteros
Director of the Foundation ‘Progresamos’, Chamber of Commerce, Palmira, Colombia

Lesson learning as capacity building

The Capacities for Peace project enabled those involved to share learning across the four Latin American countries through a regional joint planning meeting and a joint analysis meeting held in Colombia for the civil society organisations working on the project:

- Partners from El Salvador and Guatemala appreciated learning from the practices and methods employed by Colombian civil society to ensure public participation and gender equality were integrated into the Colombian peace process.
- Colombian partners valued the lessons from El Salvador that demobilisation processes should be designed to take into account the political aspirations driving those who have taken up arms.
- Guatemalan partners shared insights particularly relevant to the Colombian context on the importance of guarantees for the implementation of peace accords, including monitoring mechanisms and the need to embed agreements within legal and constitutional frameworks.

“I want Colombians to learn from what we did not manage to achieve in Guatemala.”

Henry Morales, Executive Director, Movimiento Tzuk Kim Pop, Guatemala

Lessons from the Capacities for Peace project have been published by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld in, ‘Effective local action: from early warning to peacebuilding’, February 2016.