

Civilian Agency in Post-Accord Societies: Implications for Policy (Interim Report)

ABOUT THE RESEARCH:

Approximately 2 billion people live in regions plagued by violent conflict; by 2030, 50% of the global population will be affected by violence and instability. Current post-conflict peacebuilding strategies are failing to secure durable, stable peace after the formal end to violent of conflicts. Over half of peace accords collapse within five years: poor quality peace often prevails, often shaped by ongoing violence, economic precarity and climate crisis. Much of international peacebuilding architecture and process is outdated and has not kept up with the changing nature of post-accord conflict, contributing to peaceless post-accord societies.

While research and policy has focused on top-down pro-peace mechanisms and strategies, little is known about how people get on with life in post-peace accord societies. Our research in Colombia, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland provides granular-level insights into how civilians endure 'peace'. At the micro-level of individual interactions, people have to 'get on with it', putting food on the table, getting kids to school and sustinaing daily tasks. This often occurs against a backdrop of continuing threat of violence, stigmatisation and difficult economic circumstances. Through their micro- actions and communications, civilians 'make' local level peace and give it shape. Where a minimum level of security exists, individuals might thrive, sustaining the peace accord. They may be social entrepreneurs or charismatic community leaders who take important pro-social, pro-peace steps at the inter and/or intra-group levels. By their actions, they may craft initial steps to normalise inter-group relations, becoming local exemplars who might be imitated. However, course, others will suffer constraints in the form of the continued presence of armed groups, crime, poor economic prospects, and inter-group suspicion. People may willingly or unwillingly participate in and perpetuate these conflictive/divisive dynamics. So peace arrives slowly or partially, if at all.

With support from local partners the "Getting on with it" project has been recording how people in four locations each in Colombia, Lebanon and Northern Ireland navigate through life in post-peace accord contexts. We have used daily pattern of life interviews, community mapping and visualisation, and walking interviews to try to capture coping mechanisms at the micro-level and a picture of life in places where a peace is either fragile or elusive. We spoke to over 350 civilians about their experiences and daily lives and this report sets out our principal findings and their policy implications.

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