Chapter V

Engaging Citizens in Post-conflict Reconstruction: Decentralization for Participatory Governance

As earlier chapters have noted, post-conflict reconstruction is most successful when all segments of society are engaged in the process. Therefore, as part of their efforts to rebuild robust public administration systems, post-conflict countries must seek to involve citizens in decision-making. One key strategy in this regard is decentralization—the transfer of powers, functions, responsibilities and resources from the central government to local authorities or other subnational entities. In practical terms, decentralization involves striking a balance between the claims of the periphery and the demands of the centre.

This chapter examines decentralization as a mechanism for institutionalizing engaged governance and promoting sustainable peace. It analyzes the concept of decentralization, the challenges in implementing it, and the experiences of several post-conflict countries. The chapter then discusses the importance of engaging two particular constituencies—women and minority groups—in governance, highlighting challenges as well as strategies for success.
1. Decentralization in post-conflict contexts

Overcentralization and monopolization of power by the central government are a source of conflict in many countries. To counteract the tensions caused by elitism and authoritarian rule, many post-conflict governments have implemented decentralization strategies as a means to ensure that services reach communities and that the voices of local people are heard in the development and reconstruction process. When local governance structures exist, citizens and groups can articulate their interests, mediate differences, receive services and exercise legal rights and obligations. Increasingly, decentralization is also regarded as an effective instrument for building and sustaining peace. This is because decentralization creates a situation of engaged governance, where the concern of everyone is not who has power over whom, but how the power is exercised for the well-being of all the people. It is this peaceful power-sharing among all stakeholders that holds the country together.

However, decentralization does not automatically predispose a country towards peace, democracy or development. If handled poorly and without proper accountability mechanisms, decentralization can reallocate power and resources in a way that leads to power struggles, thereby creating instability or even renewed conflict.

All the same, there is a case for designing decentralized systems in post-conflict countries. Decentralization provides a structural arrangement for the orderly negotiation and shared exercise of power, and it facilitates the involvement of the local people in policy decisions about their country’s development. Moreover, it offers a means of allocating resources effectively, improving service delivery and enhancing the prospects for peace.

Horizontal decentralization

Decentralization can take two forms. Under vertical decentralization, the central government hands down certain powers, functions and resources to local governments. Under horizontal decentralization, governance responsibilities are spread more broadly across the society, and civil society organizations (non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, community groups, etc.) are empowered to plan and manage affairs themselves. There is a concerted effort to involve all citizens in public administration, including women, people with disabili-
Vertical decentralization promotes participation by representation

Horizontal decentralization is when vote is reinforced by voice and direct participation

Decentralization is an ongoing process requiring legal frameworks, strengthened capacity, accountability, and engagement

...ties, youth and other groups that were marginalized before the eruption of conflict. With horizontal decentralization, multiple constituents participate in formulating policies, identifying priorities, planning actions, budgeting and implementing and monitoring programs.

It is important to clarify that vertical decentralization also offers opportunities for citizens to participate in government decision-making—but indirectly, through their elected representatives. In order to promote direct community engagement, vertical decentralization needs to be accompanied by horizontal decentralization. The latter enables people to exert regular influence on their leaders to shape their decisions and demand accountability from them. Indeed, horizontal decentralization requires “structuring local governments in such a way that they are legally obliged to seek and promote the participation of local communities” in making and implementing decisions (Kauzya 2007a, p. 5). The underlying concept is that community members have more experience and knowledge about their needs than anyone else, and therefore they are in the best position to devise appropriate responses.

Elements of successful decentralization

Decentralization is not a one-time action but an ongoing process that requires innovative ways of structuring and institutionalizing the interface between people and their local governments. The elements of successful participatory governance at the local level include the following:

- Legal frameworks and structural arrangements to devolve power not only to local governments but also to local communities;
- Strengthened local government capacity to perform governance functions (including revenue generation, provision of local services, personnel management, planning and decision-making, government performance monitoring, investment management for development, and local fiscal management);
- Local government responsiveness and accountability to both citizens and the central government (evidenced by transparency, dissemination of information to the public, accessibility of public meetings and records, etc.);
- Enhanced role for civil society, with civil society organizations and the private sector working in partnership with local and national governments; and
- Evidence of government intent to improve the quality of life in local communities, and demonstrable progress in doing so.
2. Challenges in decentralizing

After conflict, it is through local governments that citizens receive basic services and goods. But effective service delivery is not the only responsibility that local governments have to the communities they serve. They also need to provide a means for citizens to participate in the post-conflict reconstruction of the economic, political and social fabric of the country. Decentralization may present ideal opportunities to create a new basis for state-society relations.

However, this is a mammoth task, because local structures “are often at the frontlines of fighting between warring sides and may be destroyed during conflict” (United Nations Peacebuilding Commission 2007b, p. 2).

Because of the diversity of post-conflict scenarios, it is impossible to make an exhaustive list of the challenges involved in decentralizing. However, under no circumstances can decentralization be initiated without political will. This means that central government leaders must be committed to sharing power and authority. In addition, civil servants must be ready and willing to facilitate the transfer of power, authority, functions, responsibilities and resources. Lack of bureaucratic buy-in can derail decentralization policies. Yet central government officials often do resist the decentralization process, suspecting that it will mean some loss of power for them. To overcome this attitudinal constraint, it is important to conceive decentralization policies with the extensive involvement of civil servants at the national level. They need to understand the policy objectives, implementation plans and coordination roles, as well as the benefits of the reforms.

Another challenge in decentralizing is ensuring that civil society has sufficient capacity and will to responsibly handle the power transferred to it from the central government. Experience shows that local communities, particularly those traumatized by conflict, do not always accept decentralization policies automatically. In countries used to highly centralized governance, people are accustomed to receiving services from the central government, and so they tend to perceive decentralization as a move by the State to abandon its service provision role and neglect the people. Governments must therefore clarify the objectives and benefits of decentralization and undertake local capacity development.

Central government leaders must be committed to sharing power and authority.
It is also imperative to implement decentralization carefully so that local elites cannot abuse their authority over local resources. Otherwise, local corruption can pose a serious threat to post-conflict reconstruction. Another challenge in decentralizing is the expense. The costs associated with creating additional layers of governance can be significant for post-conflict countries with few resources. Security concerns and mistrust between the central power and local actors may also limit the effectiveness and extent of citizen participation in local government structures, hampering social reconciliation and development efforts.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some challenges identified by an expert panel organized by the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (2007a, p. 2). These include:

- Inappropriate or ambiguous legal frameworks that fail to provide guidance on the relationship of local authority to the central government, the services it should deliver, and how it can raise and distribute revenue;
- Weak institutional frameworks for implementing the existing legal frameworks;
- Political and social dynamics that, if not taken into account, can result in failure, since successful decentralization in post-conflict societies depends on repairing social cohesion as well as rebuilding institutions; and
- Difficulty identifying legitimate local authorities to deal with, since it may not be clear who holds power or who is a trustworthy partner.

3. Decentralization experiences in selected countries

Decentralization strategies need to be tailored to the specific circumstances of every country, especially in the case of states recovering from devastating conflict. Although approaches will vary according to the local context, it is instructive to study what has—and hasn’t—worked in the past. Therefore, we briefly examine the experiences of six conflict-torn countries—four in Africa (South Africa, Rwanda,
Uganda and Mozambique) and two in Latin America (El Salvador and Guatemala)—that have used decentralization to promote participatory governance.

**South Africa**

In 1994 South Africa’s first democratically elected government initiated a post-conflict recovery process. In response to popular demand for decentralization, the Government undertook an extensive negotiation process that went on alongside negotiations for a post-apartheid national constitution. The negotiations were crucial for mobilizing all South Africans to accept the principle of empowering local communities and dismantling the apartheid system that had left the country with racially divided business and residential areas. The new legal framework required each municipality to prepare an Integrated Development Plan created with the participation of the entire municipality and all stakeholders.

The structural arrangement that facilitated the formulation of these plans was the Integrated Development Plan Representative Forum. Forum participants included local council members, traditional community leaders, senior officials from municipal government departments, representatives from organized stakeholder groups and various resource people. The Forum provided a structure for discussion, negotiation and joint decision-making. It also ensured proper communication between all stakeholders and the municipality, as well as monitoring of planning and implementation processes. Community members felt empowered to participate and influence the social, political and economic decisions that concern them. Thus the Forum structure institutionalized participatory decision-making in local governments and enhanced peaceful interaction.

**Rwanda**

In Rwanda, unlike South Africa, the push to decentralize came from the top. After the genocidal conflict in 1994, the Government undertook decentralization as part of peacebuilding. Old politico-administrative structures, leadership groups and mentalities were replaced by new ones more suited to promoting peace and social reconciliation. Participatory decision-making, based on local leadership, was encouraged through the establishment of Community Development Committees (CDCs) attended by all community members of voting age.
Gender issues were also mainstreamed in development planning, and it was initially mandated that women should represent 33 per cent of local government council representatives.

Although political will was responsible for initiating the decentralization, civic will was cultivated through extensive consultation and sensitization. Community development was conceived as a dynamic process in which members of a given community analyze their environment, define their needs and problems, elaborate collective and individual plans to address them, and implement the plans using community resources complemented, where necessary, by resources provided by the central government or private sector organizations (Kauzya 2007a). CDCs were instrumental in engaging the community with its own development and efforts to reduce poverty. Community members submitted proposals to the local government council and shared responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and controlling development activities. Emphasis was given to accountability, transparency, responsiveness of the public administration, sustainable capacity development at the local level, and efficient service delivery.

**Uganda**

After 1986, Uganda enacted substantial decentralization reforms that were engineered from the top through consultations and pilot programmes. The reforms were aimed at enhancing State capacity and avoiding continued conflict arising from ethnic divisions. A pilot decentralization exercise in 13 districts, conducted in 1993, helped obtain support for broader decentralization. Participatory governance at the local level was also recognized by the 1995 constitution.

As in Rwanda, participatory decision-making was instituted at the community level. Uganda’s Local Government Statute provided the legal basis for establishing village-based councils composed of all villagers of voting age, led by an elected chairperson and an executive. Quotas mandated that women must represent one-third of the representatives in local councils, and other formerly marginalized groups must be represented as well.

Decentralization was beneficial for peacebuilding, as it strengthened institutions, increased citizen participation in development, encouraged accountability through improved local monitoring, and improved service delivery. Policy shifts in the implementation of decentralization have also started addressing local economic develop-
ment in order to create more employment opportunities, increase local incomes and expand the local revenue base (Mutabwire 2008). However, some challenges remain. Uganda needs to reduce administrative fragmentation and expand decentralization to the whole country (Northern Uganda only recently brokered peace). Moreover, there is a need to accommodate political competition while encouraging a shift away from ethnically based political identifications, which have been so contentious in the past (HPCR n.d.).

**Mozambique**

The 1992 Rome Peace Accord marked the end of a 16-year civil war that affected almost all of Mozambique, destroying the social fabric of the country and marginalizing much of the population. Soon after, in 1994, consensus started to emerge on the need for a political framework characterized by inclusion and geared towards poverty reduction to ensure long-lasting peace. Political inclusion was understood to require political and administrative decentralization in the country. Accordingly, a legal framework for establishing local governance was developed in the constitution and in Law 2/97.

However, because of disagreements between the leading and opposition parties, only a fraction of the country’s municipalities were allowed to elect their own leaders and form local governments. In most of the country, subnational power remains concentrated at the district level, where officials are appointed by the central government and not legitimated by the local communities. Furthermore, local governments lack mechanisms to raise their own resources. Sitoe and Hunguana (2005, p. 13) conclude that decentralization in Mozambique “is not yet a clear expression of political will geared towards the consolidation of democratic governance in the country”. However, decentralization has allowed some citizens to become active participants in governing their cities or townships—most notably in the municipality of Dondo.

**El Salvador**

The Government of El Salvador, supported by the national association of municipalities, promoted decentralization and community participation immediately after signing the Peace Accords in 1992. The aim, after 12 years of civil war, was to embark on a peacebuilding and unification process whereby the Government would regain citizens’ trust,
be more responsive to their needs and encourage citizen participation in government decision-making by gradually moving towards decentralization. This entailed the creation of more autonomous and inclusive municipal governments.

Since 1992, when the key policy directions were established, some progress has been made (Pereira 2003). With international support, programmes were piloted to foster community participation in identifying priorities, developing local plans, and defining local service requirements; these programmes engaged citizens through mechanisms such as budget hearings and radio talk shows. Participatory strategic planning processes were also replicated nationwide and made a condition for financing infrastructure projects.

Challenges included changing individual, group and institutional attitudes to be more favorable towards participatory governance. For instance, most mayors were willing to hold the public hearings mandated for municipalities to become eligible for central government funds, but they were not initially inclined to involve the community in key policy decisions. Similarly, municipal councils were originally slow to accept the idea of citizen advisory groups.

**Guatemala**

Peace accords were signed in Guatemala in 1999 at the end of 36 years of conflict and authoritarian rule. The Guatemalan case is informative because of the “extraordinary degree to which decentralization is associated with the incorporation of civil society generally, and long-marginalized indigenous populations in particular, into the decision making processes of government” (Bland 2002, p. 1).

As part of the peace agreement, the Government agreed to reform the municipal code to ensure local input into local decisions through the *cabildo abierto*—the Guatemalan equivalent of the town meeting. The Government also committed to restoring local development councils, in view of their important role in ensuring that community groups—associations of indigenous people, campesino organizations, women’s groups, etc.—participate in the formulation of local investment priorities. Municipal technical and planning units were also considered to be instrumental for establishing a dialogue with local organizations and communities and promoting participatory means of addressing municipal concerns, prioritizing projects and reaching consensus on investments.
Guatemala thus created multiple opportunities for citizens and civil society groups to interact with the State. The emphasis on citizen participation has helped prevent or resolve some conflicts and laid the foundations for a more peaceful society. However, “the legal reforms that have formally opened space for citizen participation in municipal affairs have not had, in practice, the desired impact” (Bland 2002, p. 3). The local development councils have been criticized as complex and difficult to implement. Mayors are reluctant to convene town meetings, and in any case, they are not obligated to act on community input they receive. Municipalities lack autonomy because the functions of different levels of government are not clearly defined. Thus the Guatemalan Government needs to go beyond the creation of participatory mechanisms and move towards institutionalizing them.

4. Engaging women in governance: Challenges and strategies

Typically during conflict, as men are drawn into the fighting, women take on new roles as community leaders or non-traditional workers. However, once the conflict ends, stereotypical attitudes about women’s capacities for leadership and decision-making often resurface. Research shows that “during and immediately after the conflict there is an expansion of women’s roles in the public arena that is often followed by a decrease in women’s opportunities and a retraction of women’s space for public action in the post conflict stages of reconstruction” (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005, p. 9). www.peacebuildinginitiative.org.

Traditionally, women were viewed as mere victims of conflict. The fact that they were effective local leaders—actively engaged in rebuilding communities, mediating, promoting peace, rehabilitating victims and overcoming trauma—remained largely undocumented. As a result, despite their vital contributions during the conflict and recovery periods, women were excluded from the negotiating tables and left out of the ensuing peacebuilding processes. In Mozambique, to cite just one example, women played a criti-
cal role during the liberation struggle that brought independence to the country, but they were totally absent from the Rome peace process that ended the civil war.

Arguably, peace cannot be lasting unless both men and women can participate in peacebuilding, influence reconstruction and development efforts and equally enjoy their benefits. Gender-specific issues need to be addressed as part of the formal post-conflict decision-making process in order to affect policy and programming development. This principle is reflected in Security Council resolution 1889 (S/RES/1889 – 5 October 2009) which urges Member States, United Nations bodies, donors and civil society to ensure that “women’s empowerment is taken into account during post-conflict needs assessments and planning, and factored into subsequent funding disbursements and programme activities (..)”. Hence, both men and women need to be participants, voicing their respective needs and priorities on an equal basis within a spirit of coexistence, nonviolence and inclusiveness.

Unfortunately, the exclusion of women from decision-making processes means that their needs and concerns may be neglected. “As a result, resources may be inaccurately targeted and the protection problems women and girls face regarding their security and their access to services may be exacerbated” (UNHCR 2008). The absence of gender perspectives may significantly slow down reconstruction activities, jeopardize democratic inclusiveness and lasting peace, and further erode women’s power within fragile and divided societies. This ultimately has negative effects on economic growth, prosperity, the recovery of human capital and overall development.

Therefore, special attention must be paid to engaging women in post-conflict reconstruction. This is a position that the United Nations advocated at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action stated that women should be assured of equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, and that efforts should be made to increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. The Platform also highlighted the importance of gender balance in governmental bodies and in public administration. These provisions were reaffirmed in 2000 by United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, and by world leaders at the 2005 World Summit.
Challenges impeding women’s participation

Many post-conflict contexts are characterized by unequal power-sharing between men and women. Women often have the burden of ensuring the subsistence of their households—they are frequently the sole breadwinners, struggling to provide food and water under difficult security conditions. They are also the primary caregivers for elderly relatives and children, and often, as in Rwanda, for displaced people and orphans. This is a responsibility made more arduous by the injuries and disease commonly suffered during conflict. Because of the heavy demands on them, the majority of women have very limited opportunities to get involved in national or even local decision-making.

In addition to increased care burdens, women also experience lack of empowerment and equal rights. They are often denied access to land and other property, for example, which has a detrimental effect on power relations between men and women.

According to the Peacebuilding Initiative, even when “women's rights and priorities have been incorporated in peace agreements and post-conflict legislative and policy reform, these formal measures do not necessarily translate into better access for women to decision-making processes, nor to increased protection from violence at the community level”. URL: www.peacebuildinginitiative.org. As acknowledged in United Nations Security Council resolution 1820, persistent violence, intimidation and discrimination are additional obstacles to women’s participation and full involvement in post-conflict public life.

It must be noted that women are not a monolithic group and their needs are not homogeneous. In post-conflict societies in particular, women may be divided by competition for resources and by tensions over tribal affiliation, ethnic identity, religious affiliation or social status. Such divisions diminish trust among women, which weakens collective efforts to incorporate their needs and rights within new social structural, economic, political and social frameworks.

Lastly, women’s participation in public administration is hampered by a lack of opportunities for women to network and develop formal leadership skills. In Rwanda, for example, women were traditionally not encouraged to attend political gatherings or speak in public. The society was highly patriarchal, and women were accustomed to expressing themselves indirectly through another person, preferably a man. In addition, they often lacked the education or information to feel confident publicly voicing their ideas (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005).
A number of countries have made a concerted effort to empower women and widen opportunities for their participation in the post-conflict reconstruction process. For example, governments have instituted decentralization policies, as discussed earlier in the chapter, to make governance opportunities available at the local level. They have passed laws, adopted constitutional provisions and enacted electoral, judicial and military reforms aimed at ending gender discrimination and opening more doors for women.

Another effective strategy to bring women into public administration is to set quotas for their participation. Rwanda, for example, mandated that 30 per cent of the positions in government decision-making bodies be filled by female representatives. (For a review of Rwanda’s comprehensive efforts to engage women in governance, see box V.1.) Uganda’s 1995 Constitution states that women should...
make up one-third of the membership of each local government council. The introduction of quotas in Burundi resulted in women comprising 30 per cent of parliamentarians and seven of 20 ministers in 2006. For the first time, women were also elected as chiefs of communes (Klot 2007).

Quotas—whether voluntarily adopted by political parties or constitutionally or legislatively mandated—have certainly helped women gain access to leadership positions. However, greater female representation does not necessarily equate to higher empowerment. Gender quotas tend to reduce concerns about women’s participation to a superficial, numerical approach. It is important to know whether a country is truly committed to involving women in governance or just filling its mandatory quotas. In Sudan, Congo and Uganda, for example, women activists criticized affirmative-action programmes they felt were implemented simply to draw donor funding and media coverage. The programmes, they argued, were vague, inappropriate, poorly monitored and not sustainable (see the Peacebuilding Initiative15). According to a UNIFEM16 study on women, war and peace, “quotas must be seen as a temporary solution to increase gender balance ... They are a first step on the path to gender equality, both a practical and a symbolic measure to support women’s leadership”.

Beyond the use of quotas, a crucial step is to enhance women’s leadership capacity. In this regard, greater partnership with existing women’s organizations can be an important strategy. Civil society women’s groups provide avenues for advocacy, mobilization and social networking. They thus widen opportunities to advance gender mainstreaming, on the one hand, and offer opportunities for women to practise leadership, on the other. In addition, capacity-building can be done by government agencies that focus on improving women’s lives. Some countries, for example, establish a Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Ministry of Gender Equality or a State Secretary for Women. In certain circumstances, temporary units that oversee the immediate post-conflict needs of women can also contribute to developing women’s leadership capacity.

Finally, the application of information and communication technologies in public administration and governance can help women participate in decision-making. This is a particularly useful strategy when

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15 Beyond victimhood”, 2006, 16
16 Sirleaf and Rehn, “Women War peace”, 2002, 81

As women were a driving force in peacebuilding, some countries prioritized gender equality by establishing gender mechanisms

ICT can foster women’s participation

Quotas have limits. They must be seen as temporary solutions to increase gender balance
security concerns restrict physical mobility, as happens often in post-conflict situations. In such circumstances, “cyber centers” can provide women with access to Internet resources in a safe environment.

5. Engaging minority groups in governance: Challenges and strategies

Just as it is vital for women to participate in post-conflict governance, so it is vital to engage minority groups, particularly in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural societies. The State “must be a polity that is shared by all citizens of the country” (Daskalovski 2007, p. 207). When a group of citizens does not identify with the symbols, legal systems and institutions of a State, its legitimacy is critically undermined. This triggers social unrest that can slow down reconstruction and development processes or even escalate into violent conflict.

Minority groups, by virtue of being in the minority, are always at high risk of becoming marginalized by the dominant groups in society. If their perspectives and needs are not taken into consideration during post-conflict reconstruction, then policies and programmes designed to address the needs of the majority can prevent them from enjoying peace dividends and can even harm their interests. In the mid- to long term, marginalizing certain groups can cause imbalances in economic and social development that lead to structural socio-economic disparities and mounting unrest, especially when coupled with uneven resource allocation within a country.

Challenges impeding the participation of minority groups

When a country has a diverse population, differences in ethnicity, religion and culture can create tensions. Some groups may feel socially excluded and aggrieved by a perceived lack of respect for their cultural identity and heritage. In other cases, conflicts arise over control of resources or access to opportunities. In Indonesia, for example, various ethnic groups clashed over ownership rights to local land and forests. They felt threatened by a lack of transparent government practices in allocating mining and forestry rights and by the arbitrary setting of territorial boundaries (Hadi 2005).
The potential for mistrust between communities intensifies as they become more ethnically or religiously homogenous, especially if there are few channels for communication between different groups. Creating separate political districts as a way of dealing with issues of power-sharing and resource allocation only increases the risk of conflict, as stronger religious and ethnic lines are drawn.

When violent conflict has an ethnic or religious dimension, social cohesion can be profoundly damaged, but the bonds within ethnic or religious groups can actually be strengthened, thus the social pressures that led to or emerged during the conflict continue to affect socio-politico-economic life even after the formal cessation of hostilities. Several post-conflict transitional governments have sought to achieve social cohesion by dividing power among different ethnic or religious groups. However, “constituting a government along these lines, especially in societies where such identities have previously not been sharply drawn, or where different groups have suffered from relatively unequal access to opportunity, may heighten division among groups” (United Nations 2007, p. 15).

The question, then, is what should States do to reconcile and bring together antagonistic communities polarized along religious or ethnic lines? How can governments engage them in rebuilding and developing the country for the good of all?

**Strategies for engaging minority groups**

Studies conducted by the United Nations show that local governance can give voice to the local population and enhance their participation in reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts. Thus decentralization, as discussed earlier in the chapter, is a key strategy for helping minority groups become invested in post-conflict public administration. And if power and responsibilities are to be shared, then decentralization must be accompanied by capacity development for members of marginalized groups. Training and education should focus on leadership development, partnership building and conflict management and resolution.

When local governance is firmly established, political leaders need to create platforms aimed at engaging citizens in community dialogue and participatory decision-making to ensure social cohesion and ethnic harmony. Religious, traditional and community leaders are among the non-state actors who can help foster dialogue and reconciliation. Working to-
together, civil society actors and public officials can create what Chapter III called “an infrastructure for peace”—mechanisms, systems and processes that stimulate dialogue and help solve day-to-day disputes within society.

The trust and participation of minority groups cannot be taken for granted, however; it needs to be nurtured. To bring about social cohesion, efforts must be made to strengthen a sense of national identity forged around shared goals and values rather than affiliation with a particular ethnic group, tribe or religious group. Local governments can also promote social integration by organizing cultural festivals, sports contests and traditional folklore and music performances, as well as collectively supported initiatives. When people feel themselves to be part of a joint enterprise working towards a common purpose, they are more willing to put the public good above the interests of their own group.

A key to creating such social cohesion is rebuilding inter-community and inter-ethnic dialogue and trust. One promising strategy involves community-led reconciliation and recovery programmes that help communities mend relations and move towards peace by rediscovering their “interconnected nature and responsibility for each other’s welfare” (Pottebaum and Lee 2007, p. 4).

Post-conflict leaders must also “proactively address the root causes of conflict and diminish tension and destructive competition among interest groups” (United Nations 2007, p. 16). This is not a task for the government alone; civil society groups can make major contributions to identifying, analyzing and addressing the causes of conflict. Their engagement is critical to ensure that actions are responsive to people’s needs, and that all segments of the population take ownership of the solutions and share responsibility for sustaining them.

In many cases, enactment or revision of laws and regulations is needed to promote minority groups’ participation in public administration. For example, after the violent conflict in 2001 between different ethnic groups in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), the Government took legal steps to ensure the minority rights of ethnic Albanians. Among other things, the principle of ethnic neutrality was incorporated into the constitution. New rules in Parliament required that “laws affecting an ethnic minority population must be passed by the majority of members of that ethnicity, in addition to an overall majority” (Daskalovski 2007, p. 206). In addition, special measures were implemented to achieve greater representation of minority groups in public office at both the national and local levels.
Governments may also create special structures to engage minority groups in governance. Guatemala, for example, set up a system of urban and rural development councils as the main means for the Maya, Xinca, Garifuna and non-indigenous population to participate in public administration.

Indonesia used a combination of strategies to encourage minority group participation after the collapse of President Suharto’s regime in 1998. Minorities had been marginalized for decades, and ethnic or religious conflict affected several parts of Indonesia, particularly the eastern provinces. The Government of Indonesia National Mid-Term Development Plan (2004-2009) identified stronger social trust and harmony among community groups as a priority. One of the focus areas of the Plan was increased community participation in public policymaking and overcoming social problems (Hadi 2005). The new legal framework gave full autonomy to (rural) districts and (urban) municipalities to manage a number of services and duties, and it clarified the fiscal roles and responsibilities of central, provincial and local governments. Key responsibilities for local development and community welfare were assigned to local governments, with the goal of attaining social cohesion and ending sectarian tensions through strengthened vertical and horizontal relationships. This prompted the institution of a village council, called a *Badan Perwakilan Desa*, which was responsible for drafting village regulation and overseeing the budget. This structure proved instrumental in achieving decentralization objectives in those instances where its members represented different village groups.

Research conducted in the country identified the municipality of Solo—located in Central Java province, 60 kilometers from the city of Yogyakarta—as an example of best practice (Widianingsih 2006). This municipality needed to address a high level of diversity that contributed to conflict and social disintegration. To do so, the local government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, adopted in 2001 a model of direct community involvement in development planning. This approach eased tensions in the city by emphasizing citizens’ rights to equality and freedom of expression through participatory development. This helped foster better relations among different ethnic groups, and despite practical problems, community involvement continued to increase in 2003 and 2004.◆
6. Lessons learned

- Participatory governance at the local level facilitates the involvement of local communities in policy decisions about their own development, thereby creating a shared commitment to peaceful progress that reduces the likelihood of violent conflict.
- Successful decentralization depends on political will, civic will and capacity development at the local level and careful implementation to ensure appropriate power-sharing arrangements and allocation of resources.
- Peace cannot be lasting unless both men and women participate in shaping post-conflict reconstruction and are able to equally enjoy its benefits. Barriers to women’s participation include traditional notions about gender roles, women’s caregiving burdens and their inexperience in leadership positions. Nonetheless, women’s participation can be increased by enacting reforms to end gender discrimination, setting quotas for female representation in government and undertaking capacity development efforts to strengthen women’s leadership skills.
- Peace cannot be lasting unless minority groups are engaged in post-conflict governance, especially when ethnic or religious divisions were a root cause of the conflict or a contributing factor. It is important to foster dialogue and reconciliation among antagonistic groups, build a shared national identity that trumps ethnic or religious ties, and take concrete steps (such as constitutional reforms or the creation of special mechanisms) to protect minority rights and engage minority groups in participatory decision-making.