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# Gendered political settlements and peacebuilding: mapping inclusion in practice

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**Abstract:**
*This paper looks at practice-research methods used by Conciliation Resources (CR), an international peacebuilding organisation, as part of the Political Settlements Research Project. Between 2015 and 2017, Conciliation Resources and its partners convened three learning workshops in Nepal, Colombia, and Bougainville. The workshops 'tested' understandings of political settlements in conflict-affected contexts, with a specific focus on gender, through participatory practice-based research. The paper explores how co-learning approaches were developed and designed between CR and its partners: including how questions of inclusion, gender and political settlements were adapted to specific contexts; the approaches and methods developed; and the challenges and potential for research to influence peacebuilding practice. It also provides a critical reflection on the processes and outcomes of co-learning between international and local partners.*

## Introduction

As a practitioner peacebuilding non-government organisation (NGO) Conciliation Resources (CR) focuses on supporting inclusive peace and conflict transformation practices. It works primarily through 'accompaniment partnership', working with civil society partners in conflict-affected contexts by 'offering solidarity, facilitating dialogue and bearing witness, as well as providing technical support and access to resources'.[1] Any research that CR engages in is therefore intended to be knowledge creation *with* in-country practitioners. Unlike conventional social science, its purpose is not primarily or solely to understand social arrangements, but also to contribute to ongoing conflict transformation efforts of specific in-country actors. In this way it is similar to participatory action research, identified as the 'transformative orientation to knowledge creation, in that action researchers seek to take knowledge production beyond the gate-keeping of professional knowledge makers'.[2]

This article looks more closely at how CR approached the design and conduct of practice-research on gender in conflict-affected contexts during the four-year Political Settlements Research Project (PSRP).[3] Funded by UKAID, a north-south consortium of five organisations used mixed methods to explore the potential for peace processes to shape political settlements to make them more inclusive.

As the sole practitioner partner in the PSRP consortium, it was envisaged that CR's practice-

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[1] For further information on CR's approach to partnership see Conciliation Resources, *Partnership in Peacebuilding: Lessons from Conciliation Resources' Practice* (Conciliation Resources, May 2018). Available at www.c-r.org/resources/partnerships-peacebuilding
[2] Hilary Bradbury Huang, 'What is good action research? Why the resurgent interest?' *Action Research*, 8(1) (2010): 93-109.
[3] For further information on the PSRP see: http://www.politicalsettlements.org/

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led research would complement academic-orientated research, and so strengthen its policy relevance. Such an approach is not without tensions and practical and ethical challenges, particularly given the diverse audiences for the research. The types of questions and issues that might interest a government donor are not necessarily priorities for in-context actors seeking to affect change in their immediate environment. In addition CR and its partners may have different policy and programming priorities for research work – from each other as well as from policymakers. The types of change sought – at individual, group, community or systemic level – differed between and within the various groups who had a stake in the research.

Furthermore, there are nuanced questions of power that emerge when conducting research in conflict-affected contexts. These include questions of the nature and quality of meaningful participation of in-context partners. While CR has a model of partnership that explicitly attempts to address questions of power imbalance between international and local actors, there are inevitable challenges to engaging in practice-research – particularly when exploring gender in conflict-affected contexts with groups, for example, indigenous women, that have experienced marginalisation from formal as well as informal political, social and economic processes. Careful consideration was given to how research design and analysis could prioritise certain perspectives over others (usually excluded views) unless explicitly addressed. Language was also key: while the research community speaks about participatory methods, there is a fierce debate occurring in the peacebuilding sphere whereby 'participation' is often a byword for numerical representation in rather than substantial influence on decision making. One partner consistently commented: 'we do not want to participate in other people's processes, we want to shape the processes themselves'.

This article looks more closely at the process of an international practitioner peacebuilding organisation conducting research on gender issues in conflict-affected contexts. It explores how conceptual and scholarly concepts of political settlements, inclusion and gender were framed and adapted to respond to practical, on the ground peacebuilding practice as well as how processes of co-design, co-facilitation and co-analysis developed, the tensions that emerged and how they were navigated. It further considers how such research can balance different audience demands, as well as maintain a commitment to action. While imperfect, the approach resulted in frank dialogue between and within diverse partners to achieve practical analysis that, while directed to a policy audience, enabled clear problematising of and critical commentary on opportunities and challenges for gender inclusion in peace transitions.

**Framing gendered political settlements**
Political settlements are defined as 'the forging of a common understanding usually between elites that their best interests or beliefs are served through acquiescence to a framework for administering political power'.[4] Political settlements research is therefore interested in how political and economic power is organised, and the formal and informal bargains that shape this.[5] Donors and practitioners are increasingly interested in how political settlement analysis can help them promote more inclusive and hence more stable political settlements. Yet this view of inclusivity is primarily linked to elites – other non-elite groups tend not to feature in political settlement analyses. Furthermore, political settlements analysis has remained isolated in development discourse where it is arguably a sub-field within political economy analysis, largely ignored by other overlapping fields concerned with protracted social conflict.[6]

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[4] JD John & J Putzel, *Political Settlements* (Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2009).
[5] See: Christine Bell, 'What we talk about when we talk about political settlements' (Political Settlements Research Programme, Working Paper 1, 1 September 2015); and *Building Peaceful States and Societies. A DFID Practice Paper* (London: DFID, 2010).
[6] Christine Bell & Jan Pospisil, 'Navigating inclusion in transitions from conflict: The formalised political unsettlement', *Journal of International Development*, 29(5) (2017): 576–593.

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In response, the PSRP considers the opportunities afforded by peace transitions to promote inclusive change, as well as the dilemmas faced by those supporting it. In particular it looks at the tensions between two forms of inclusion:

- 'Horizontal' inclusion between political and military leaders who have been former opponents, and
- Vertical inclusion between rulers (often in the form of new power-sharing coalitions), and the ruled (wider social groups and individuals).

*Gender and inclusion in peace transitions*
As moments for potential social and political change, war to peace transitions are processes in which the political settlement is in flux and potentially subject to renegotiation. Peace transitions often involve the reform of political, security and justice institutions, redress for past injustices, and efforts to promote socio-economic development. They are characterised by significant social mobilisation and activism, often by women, in informal (faith, customary and local-level) political spaces at the subnational and national levels, and are often accompanied by transnational civil society action.[7]

Increasingly, inclusion of a diverse range of actors is highlighted as a major component of transition processes in support of sustainable conditions for peace and development. Evidence shows that the normative participation of women in formal peace negotiations can positively impact the initial cessation of violence and the sustainability and effectiveness of peace agreements.[8] International normative commitments to gender inclusion are widely accepted and increasingly shape the design and implementation of many contemporary peace processes and peacebuilding programmes. At a global policy level there has been heightened interest in promoting inclusion of a range of actors, particularly women, with an aim to increase the sustainability and effectiveness of peacebuilding. Targeted policy and aid instruments have been developed to achieve this. In line with other international research on the effectiveness of progressive international norm development, such as the 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, we examined to what extent standards (such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) provide leverage to women and other excluded groups in the continuous bargaining processes of the 'formalised political unsettlement'.[9]

Yet there is much less evidence on the gendered nature of transitions and the roles women and other excluded groups play at all levels of the peace process. Practical experience shows that efforts to promote gender inclusion are hugely challenging with recurring dilemmas such as: how to balance demands for process versus outcome or stability versus inclusion; whether participation or influence is important (or possible); and whether early, front loaded or incremental inclusion is more effective. There is also limited research on identifying differences among women's experiences and interests in peacebuilding and statebuilding that result from class, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, religion or other relevant cleavages, and how these feature in context-specific socio-

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[7] See: Zahbia Yousuf, *Navigating Inclusion in Peace Transitions: Beyond Elite Bargains* (London: Conciliation Resources, 2018) and Sophia Close, *Gendered Political Settlements: Examining Peace Transitions in Bougainville, Nepal and Colombia* (London, Conciliation Resources, 2018).
[8] Thania Paffenholz, et al., *Preventing Violence Through Inclusion: From Building Political Momentum to Sustaining Peace* (Geneva: Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative/The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, November 2017).
[9] For explanation of this concept, see Bell & Pospisil, ibid; and the Introduction to this special issue.

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political histories of fragility and conflict. Understanding the wider social norms as well as concrete interest structures that shape the resistance to gender-sensitive approaches is vital to achieve change in gender power relations and to foresee and mitigate the force of this backlash.

CR's research on political settlements was specifically interested in how different non-elite groups in society push for inclusion; the tensions that emerge; and their priority areas going forward. The practice-research drew on concepts from the PSRP research including Bell and Pospisil's 'formalised political unsettlement' and O'Rourke's 'gendering political settlements'[10] alongside CR's own analysis of supporting inclusive peace processes.[11] The former asserts that peace processes are rarely able to fully address and settle the root causes of conflict, and instead tend to formalise unsettlement – translating the disagreement at the heart of the conflict into a set of political and legal institutions that 'contain' conflict rather than establish shared values.[12] This echoes the idea that transitions may be opportunities for change whereby institutions allow for continued negotiation and bargaining in ways that are less violent than before.

Yet peacebuilding approaches to date have not achieved the radical transformation of the system needed to achieve gender equality. It is still unclear how far national and international interventions have shifted existing power structures (specifically the relations between women and men, and gender and sexual identities) to allow for sustained access and influence for a diverse range of actors to the political settlement.[13] It is also unclear how international interventions might best support domestic reform constituencies within the given political settlement. The post-conflict political settlement often maintains and reinforces hierarchical and patriarchal decision-making systems and does not resolve violent masculinities. MacKenzie and Foster highlight that the 'return to normal' after conflict is linked to particular forms of gendered political order that rely on patriarchal constructions of gender norms.[14] O'Rourke points out that by 'thinking and working politically' international policy can better understand and engage with the meta-conflict dynamics that drive elite bargaining around peace and write women out of the ethnic or resource distribution dynamics that primarily drive political violence.[15]

*Gendered political settlements in 'practice'*
Political settlements inquiry, with the question of political power at its root, is driven by the desire to understand how formal structures and institutions are shaped and controlled by informal and formal actors and interests. Yet the focus on elites neglects broader societal power relations and the extent to which gendered relations between male actors structure who gets political, social and economic goods, when and how. Moreover, social movements and civil society actors are largely absent from analysis. In line with the approach taken by Bell, O'Rourke and others under the PSRP, and as a peacebuilding organisation interested in supporting inclusive approaches to conflict transformation, CR's research approach sought to bring greater understanding of the gendered aspects of political settlements.

The practice-research was therefore distinct from conventional political settlements analysis in two key ways:

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[10] Catherine O'Rourke, 'Gendering political settlements: Challenges and opportunities', *Journal of International Development*, 29(5) (2017): 594–612.
[11] See: Yousuf, above n 7; Close, above n 7.
[12] Bell & Pospisil. above n 6.
[13] This report uses the term 'gender and sexual minorities' to refer to the wider group who may not be encompassed by the acronym 'LGBTQI+' (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex).
[14] Megan MacKenzie & Alana Foster, 'Masculinity nostalgia: How war and occupation inspire a yearning for gender order', *Security Dialogue*, 48(3) (2017): 206–223.
[15] O'Rourke, above n 10, at 607.

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- Rather than elite interactions, incentives and interests, CR's research looked at how those impacted by the diffusion of power understand it, rather than seeing through the lens of those who wield power.
- It incorporated a deliberate focus on the interaction between elite/non-elite and formal/informal institutions. While informal and social norms, values and institutions, including identity-based considerations are recognised as potential factors in how political settlements operate, there has been little systematic analysis of this.

The research focused on practical understanding of how those living in conflict affected contexts understand and identify elements of the political settlement operating in their context as well as how they attempt to change and influence it; their experiences to date in pushing the inclusion of excluded agendas within such political and socio-economic parameters; and their priority areas going forward.

The emphasis on practical programming also required framing political settlements analysis to respond to the issues faced by CR's partners at a particular moment in the emerging or consolidated peace process. This included uncovering gender dimensions missed by political settlements analysis, for example in the private sphere. In each context, detailed examples were given of how intersecting patterns of multidimensional and persistent gender discrimination (for example, sexism, bigotry, ableism and racism) form 'overlapping structures of subordination'.[16] CR's work is grounded in the understanding that multiple forms of discrimination are related to intersectional gender identities, where gender interacts with age, class, ability, race, sexual orientation, and other power systems, producing a multitude of masculinities and femininities in each context. While constructions of gender vary between places and change over time, we understand that gender is consistently a factor that determines who has access to power, authority and resources. The approach also incorporated a focus on understanding the strategies used by different groups to navigate gendered processes and structures to effect, influence and shape change. This understands change as not necessarily linear, but also happening across a whole system of relationships, from household to national level, between individuals, within groups, between communities, as well as between society and state.

**Research approach**
CR's research approach acknowledged that much in-context research to date has been conducted by researchers who are not from those contexts. Methods and theoretical approaches have been used to describe the local experience, but local participants have usually not been involved in data collection and analysis. Some of these processes have been extractive, often solely benefitting the researcher. The research approach taken sought to shift this power dynamic and prioritise the practical knowledge and experiences of our partners. This involved co-design and co-facilitation of research activities, and co-analysis and co-writing of the main report output with partner organisations. In line with principles of action-research, the workshops were designed to allow for 'self-reflective enquiry…in order to improve the rationality and justice of their [participants'] own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out'.[17]

Yet, in part, research design was constrained by prior donor commitments. The format and structure of research activities was pre-determined to a certain extent by the project proposal. The main research activity as set out in the research proposal was a two-day workshop in each chosen context, and budgets reflected this.  This limited the possibility for flexible and

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[16] Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, & Leslie McCall, 'Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis, *Signs*, 38(4) (2013): 785–810, at 797.
[17] W Carr and S Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1986).

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iterative design and research processes, including partners' ability to shape the design. Furthermore, it was not possible for all research participants such as sub-partners to be involved in all stages of research design and implementation. For example, CR only had direct conversations with immediate partners – although they in turn consulted with their own colleagues and partners as well as potential workshop participants, which informed discussions with us. Workshop design also included the possibility for participants to engage in live adaptation of format and structure, particularly from day one to day two.

*How we chose contexts*
Contexts were chosen based on two main criteria. One was consideration of how practice-based research might inform the broader PSRP project. The original intention was that the workshops might generate further questions, from grounded experience, for the project's gender stream to consider and/or to complement the academic-led research being conducted. Contexts were chosen where there have been significant efforts made to promote the inclusion of women in peace agreements and political structures with differentiated impact. This allowed us to explore the effectiveness of particular gender interventions by local, national and international actors in ensuring inclusivity both of women and of gender issues, in terms of inclusion in peace agreements, post-agreement political legislation and institutions, and importantly, the lived experiences of women and men.

The three contexts chosen – Bougainville, Nepal and Colombia – have seen many years of conflict between government and armed groups and are now in the post-agreement phase of peace transition. The 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) led to a re-negotiation of political institutions and structures, with the BPA creating an Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARB) and Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG). In Colombia, peace talks between the Government and the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) culminated in peace accords in 2016, and early phases of implementation have begun. Nepal's Comprehensive Peace Agreement was concluded in 2006 and has subsequently seen two Constituent Assemblies set up in an attempt to introduce social and political reforms.

Equal consideration in choosing contexts was given to programmatic value. The workshops were to directly benefit and feed into Conciliation Resources' programme work. CR has a programme in two of the contexts (Bougainville and Colombia), and although it does not have a programme in Nepal it was engaged in a two year project exploring questions of inclusion in the country's war to peace transition, working with a local research institute.[18] Before a decision was made on comparative analytical focus, discussions took place with programme teams on:

    (a) whether practice-research on gender and political settlements was relevant to the context and the programme's current work, overall strategy and direction; and,

    (b) whether there was capacity within the team and partners to carry out such activities. For example, one team argued that the issue was very relevant for the context but that partner capacity in the next year would be limited, whilst another team felt the questions were too sensitive at this moment for their context and it would be too difficult to bring the right people together for this type of discussion.

The following sections explore further the ways in which the intended research approach was possible in practice.

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[18] See: http://www.c-r.org/accord/nepal
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**Co-design of research activities**
*Locally led approaches*
Co-design of the research between local partners and CR staff took place mostly through Skype and email. It included developing and adapting guiding research questions to respond to context specific priority areas; identifying the appropriate range of participants and issues for discussion; and ensuring that research findings were relevant to and could feed back into peacebuilding activities in-country, including Conciliation Resources' own peacebuilding work.

In practice this was strengthened where in-country partners were longstanding, and there was a logical and pragmatic fit with existing programme work. In Colombia, CR has been working with CIASE (*Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica:* Social and Economic Action and Research Corporation) since 2012 and their peacebuilding work has always had a strong gender focus. Since 2015, CIASE has supported the development of CONAMIC (*Coordinación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Colombia*: National Coordination of Indigenous Women of Colombia), a platform of indigenous women from across the country, to promote their priorities and concerns emerging from Colombia's three decades of conflict. The proposed research activity took place at a time when CONAMIC was consolidating its initial phase of work and developing next steps. The research provided an opportunity to reflect back on their achievements, the strategies developed, as well as the broader history of the inclusion and exclusion of indigenous and women's groups and agendas in Colombia. Early discussions identified that the activity could be used to develop indicators to measure indigenous women's inclusion in the peace process, and an action plan for developing future strategy. It was envisaged that the workshop report would be used as a key advocacy document for the platform to share with international and national actors.

The Nepal and Bougainville research activities did not align as closely with in-country peacebuilding work. CR does not have an explicit peacebuilding programme in Nepal, and instead had been partnering with a research institute since 2015 to explore how the transition process has created opportunities for inclusion and change. This partner had experience in research on gender issues and the partnership was extended to develop the gender workshop. In Bougainville, given programme and partner capacity limitations, a consultant researcher with gender and context expertise was engaged to support facilitation – in consultation with CR's partner, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in Bougainville. In both these contexts the design and framing of the workshops were not as intimately linked to peacebuilding action (although the Bougainville discussion may provide a basis for programme development at a later stage). Yet, in Bougainville it was important that the workshop sustained CR's relationships and reputation with Bougainville civil society and political actors, as well as cohering with CR's peacebuilding work there.

The extent to which design was locally led was also determined by the type of relationship CR had with in-country partners for the purposes of the research. In Nepal, the research was designed by established Nepalese researchers with an acute and in-depth knowledge of the context and gender issues but was one step removed from the lived experiences of marginalised groups we were trying to reflect. In Bougainville the research consultant held prior consultations with civil society to identify relevant issues to discuss in the workshop and these helped frame the agenda, but the workshop design was in effect one step removed from CR staff and programming. In all contexts, particularly where CR's partners were not leading the design process, there was less space and possibility to interrogate potential research bias, for example, how gender was defined and issues framed.

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*Competing audiences and stakeholders*
A core challenge was to ensure that project design, research questions, and findings responded both to the needs and priorities within each context and particularly of peacebuilding practitioners in-country, but also to key policy interests and donor requirements. As already discussed, research design was constrained by prior commitments, including budgetary, set out in the original grant proposal. Box 1 below details the expected outcomes of the three workshops that were developed prior to the start of the research design phase, and which primarily responded to donor interests. This paper considers the tensions between meeting these indicators and undertaking practice-based research that actively incorporated the needs and interests of local partners and workshop participants.

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**Box 1: Stated expected outcomes of the workshops (developed in PSRP concept design phase, October 2015)**
- Capacity of local civil society and researchers to apply a range of gender and conflict analysis tools is enhanced, including an opportunity to incorporate aspects of CR's 2016 Gender & Conflict Analysis Toolkit and help CR test the first edition of the Toolkit.[19]
- Relationships between local and international actors including in-country Department for International Development (DFID) staff are strengthened through participation in joint analysis.
- Typologies and conceptualisation of political settlements are deepened through added analysis of gender power dimensions.
- External actors are better informed as to the outcomes of specific trade-offs in peace agreements between elite engagement and efforts to promote inclusion.
- External interventions to promote inclusion and implementation of relevant measures are more effective.

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In the original proposal, CR was to play a convening role to bring together a range of political and civil society stakeholders, policymakers and practitioners from diverse sectors and experience, including urban and rural. The workshops would bring these actors together to interrogate assumptions on the gendered nature of political settlements in the context and feedback into the overall research. Through their networks, partner organisations were well placed to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders. However, discussions with programme teams and partner organisations revealed the need to focus on specific groups, mainly civil society actors, sub-partners and representatives of marginalised groups, with the presence of international actors limited to one session if at all. It was felt that this would facilitate a safer space for specific groups and individuals to share opinions and allow for more concrete and focused discussions – rather than try to accommodate the perspectives of a wide range of actors with different agendas, priorities, and power relations with others in the room. Given the focus on issues of gender, which in some contexts was challenging to discuss openly or was associated with international interventions, it was important to be responsive to these concerns.

Furthermore, the type of knowledge prioritised by different actors also had to be balanced. Research partners were grassroots and change-oriented organisations, and prioritised understanding issues relevant to specific peacebuilding objectives and outcomes for their context as well as their immediate environment and condition. These were often focused at local or community level, and were time specific. They were also very practical. On the other hand, donor interest was in understanding the effectiveness of international interventions and how at a macro and formal level they could best influence inclusion. The

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[19] CR's 2016 Gender and Conflict Analysis Toolkit provides practical guidance to peacebuilding practitioners on gender and conflict analysis and can be accessed at: http://www.c-r.org/downloads/CR%20Gender%20Toolkit%20WEB.pdf.
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overall research interest was in findings that could provide analytical evidence of trends over considerable timeframes with consideration of dynamics at multiple levels and an assessment of achievements. Yet even an explicit focus on capturing local observations and perceptions of 'gendered political settlements' was problematic as it was not seen to have practical peacebuilding value for participants or partner organisations, and would be of little benefit to internal audiences. Furthermore, donor interest in understanding how external interventions shape political settlements did not necessarily match partner considerations of what was relevant and useful research.

For CR, a major aim of the research was to provide input into programming but also to provide evidence on how gender issues and channels of inclusion are perceived in different conflict-affected contexts, and the effectiveness of strategies that have been employed to push for inclusion. And of course, CR hoped to produce reports from this. We required a level of contextual analysis of gendered power relationships that some participants and partners thought was self-evident or covered old ground. They consequently wanted to focus on other issues. For example, CONAMIC wanted a more practice-orientated agenda. In Bougainville, participants saw it as an opportunity to critique international interventions. The agendas reflected these issues, and CR found other avenues to gather additional, sometimes more detailed information for the reports, for example through follow up interviews and desk research.

*'Translating' political settlements analysis*
A particularly interesting aspect of the design phase was thinking through how political settlement concepts, rooted in academic political economy literature, could be applied to peacebuilding practice. Firstly, it was about translating terminology – what is a 'political settlement', and is there a correct translation in the local languages: Spanish, Nepali or Tok Pisin? For example, in Colombia direct translation would be '*acuerdos políticos*' [political agreements]. In the end it was decided to go for '*actores políticos de facto'* [de-facto political actors] – as it was determined that the emphasis on the actor would elicit more discussion.

> *It made us think that political settlements are everywhere – nationally, locally, in our own houses, making political choices within our household.* (Director of CIASE, Colombia)

Second, what is the relevance of political settlements analysis in each context? Box 2 (below) describes the differences between the questions developed in the planning phase and the actual questions focused on during the workshops, as co-designed with Colombian partners, to detail these differences. In all contexts a political settlement was initially seen as synonymous with a peace agreement. In Colombia and Bougainville, there was initially reluctance to look beyond the peace process and talk about power arrangements. One colleague from the Colombia partner organisation asked, *'How do you change the political settlement when people accept this is the normal system? This is the system we have, the way that things are done. If we end clientelism how will we find our way?'* People initially felt much more comfortable to talk about participation in peace processes or equality issues in formal legal political institutions, or issues normally associated with gender discussions, such as women's security concerns. Yet, political settlements analysis was a useful way to bring questions of power into discussions on peace processes and for those working on peacebuilding processes.

With their Colombia partners, CR staff had an explicit conversation about the value of asking these types of questions: how it might help think about change happening outside of peace talks, not just legal and political institutions, as well as the different actors

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involved in making this happen. In Colombia, the emphasis on how elite bargains and underlying power relations shape formal political frameworks and the allocation of socio-economic resources, helped partners think about how the progress of peacebuilding and peace processes can become stuck and unstuck in specific contexts. In particular, it also helped situate more informal barriers such as customary institutions within a broader framework.

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**Box 2: Planned vs. actual research questions**

Planned research questions:
- What are key features of gender relations, and how do relationships of masculinity between [male] elites structure current political dynamics?
    - How exclusive is the political elite (in terms of its socio-economic or institutional base, accessibility/social mobility, gender inclusivity)?
    - What are the formal and informal issues (e.g. legal provisions) that determine, for example, political participation and access to land for men and women?
    - How do power relations shape policy outcomes?

- How have [peace] transition processes supported changes in gender relations?
    - What is the significance in the decrease in violence and for different groups?
    - Are there different conversations regarding power relations that are possible now that were not before?
    - What issues are groups organising around – e.g. gender equality? Do interest groups make demands based on ethnicity or other exclusive criteria?

- In what way have transition processes themselves been gender-sensitive?
    - How have peace negotiations incorporated the range of perspectives of those affected by conflict?
    - Do outcomes of peace negotiations reflect the priorities and concerns of these same groups?

- What is working / has worked, and what not, in terms of international support for challenging negative gender power dynamics, including women's participation (and broader inclusion) in transition processes?

Examples of research questions used in the workshops:
- What are the implications of peace talks for women, and indigenous communities more specifically?
- Do participants feel they or their priorities have been represented in peace negotiations and peace agreements? What issues do they think have been missing?
- Have there been other ways to influence the process or outcomes of peace negotiations, including through informal structures and channels?
- What is their expectation of change on indigenous, women's rights?
- What needs to change and who? Including formal and informal institutions?
- What role is there in promoting equality between men and women for each of the identified groups: religious groups; political groups; customary leaders; women's groups; international organisations?
- What are the advantages to having international partners working in the gender equality space in X context? What are the disadvantages?

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**Workshops - action and participation in practice**
As discussed above, the action research centred around two-day workshops in each context. These were complemented by individual discussions with specific participants and other relevant actors. This dual approach allowed for discussions that could uncover differences in opinion between participants, whilst also giving participants the option to express opinions they may not feel comfortable saying in a group setting. In order to ensure an environment conducive to opinion sharing, state actors' (national and international) participation was limited. In Colombia our partners decided that participants needed the time to discuss issues with their civil society peers, so state actors did not attend at all; in Bougainville and Nepal they attended the second half of the second day, to hear and discuss the proceedings from the previous one and a half days.

The workshops were conducted in local languages – Spanish, Nepali, and Tok Pisin – and were primarily facilitated by partners. CR staff's facilitation role was limited due to translation logistics – in Colombia and Nepal it focused on sharing experiences from other contexts and providing framing on concepts such as political settlements and global policy on gender such as UNSCR 1325. Partners would then 'translate' this into vernacular – both explaining the terms but also the relevance to the context and participants' experience. In Bougainville, externals (CR staff and the consultant) played a more explicit facilitation role. Facilitated knowledge sharing sessions led by the partners and CR staff were then complemented by small group facilitated discussions on specific issues, shared back to the entire group in plenary. So, for example in the Colombia workshop, one session focused on identifying actors who have influence over the identified issue. Small group discussions then fed back into a plenary, with the larger group identifying 4-5 key stakeholders. This was then used for the next session which looked at how those actors could be targeted, including steps towards it and a final action plan.

CR's partners in Nepal and Colombia were researchers and activists with relations with international and government level actors, as well as community-based and social activist groups. They were able to converse in local languages and English, and move between different social and political spheres with ease. The workshops were the first time that CR staff met with all participants, and therefore open communication and relations were built primarily through the partners that had pre-existing relations with participants. CR staff were dependent on partners for understanding dynamics in the room and nuances in discussions, and as previously mentioned, the space to reflect on positionality of partners was limited. There was some prior discussion about the implications of CR staff attending and facilitating parts of the workshop, but some issues were unresolved or not sufficiently dealt with. For example, the fact that staff did not speak local languages fluently meant that translators were required, which affected the natural rhythm and dynamic of discussions. This was mitigated by the trust and close working relations between CR's partner organisations and participants which meant people felt safe to discuss issues despite the presence of 'externals'. There was also little reflection on power relations between partners and participants who occupied different political and social standing. This affected how outcomes of discussions were decided and what issues were taken forward for subsequent sessions. Table 1 (below) provides more details on each workshop, including the participants and the workshop outline.

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*Table 1: Overview of workshops*

| Location | Participants | Workshop Outline |
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| **Colombia** Led by Bogota based women's rights NGO – CIASE. Long term partner of CR; CIASE's Director is fluent in English, CR's Colombia Programme Director is a native Spanish speaker, and CR's two other staff members spoke intermediate Spanish. Facilitation mostly by CIASE Director in Spanish with half the sessions small group discussions. | Two-day discussions held in Cachipay, Colombia in April 2016, with 25 women, including customary leaders, from 10 different indigenous communities across Colombia. This was supplemented by information from over 40 interviews previously conducted by CIASE with indigenous community members. | ● Peace talks: expected changes as a result of the peace negotiations *(What are the implications of the talks for women, and indigenous/Afro-Colombian communities more broadly? How do they view it as promoting change for them?).*<br><br>● Expected change as a result of the work of indigenous communities *(Developing a baseline – what change have they observed already? For example: are different types of conversation, including those directly related to community/family relations, now possible that were not before? What have these achieved so far?).*<br><br>● Actor and power mapping (*What needs to change and who? Including formal and informal institutions? What issues need to be addressed where, by whom, and what are the lines of influence?).*<br><br>● Mechanisms to implement the plan (*Developing a strategy for CONAMIC in relation to the peace process).* |
| **Bougainville** Led by a non-context consultant hired by CR in consultation with Bougainville NGO – Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation. Facilitation by consultant and CR staff with translation into Tok Pisin, and with half the sessions small group discussion. | Discussions in Bougainville with 15 stakeholders (10 women and 5 men) in December 2016, and a three-day joint analysis workshop in February 2017 with 30 participants (25 women and 5 men). Participants attended from all three regions of Bougainville (North, Central and South) and included community leaders, local government politicians, former ABG politicians, representatives from local peacebuilding groups, women's groups, churches and young women. A smaller focus group was also conducted with four men from civil society and church institutions. | ● Objective-setting.<br><br>● Gender and security (*personal security, economic security, environmental security, food security,* and *political security*).<br><br>● Political access/influence (*religious institutions, community institutions, formal political institutions,* and *peace and referendum*).<br><br>● International influence (*impact of outside influence on gender relations, advantages and disadvantages to having international partners*). |

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| **Nepal**<br>Led by Nepalese research institute – Social Science Baha. Facilitation by Nepalese experts in Nepali, with all sessions in a presentation then Q & A format. | Workshop participants included 24 women and men, ensuring a broad cross-section of Nepal's caste or ethnic, gender and regional diversity, and including local-level and national politicians, civil society groups, academics, journalists and independent researchers. | ● Gender and peace agreements.<br><br>● Gender and new constitutions (Interim 2007 and 2015) of Nepal.<br><br>● Perspectives on the impact of earthquake-relief and rehabilitation including reconstruction.<br><br>● Gender and movements/mobilisations of minority and marginalised groups.<br><br>● Roles of international support in transition.<br><br>Focus areas included: affirmative gender action in the transition, for example in politics, employment or development; gender perspectives on specific aspects of the transition, such as security sector reform, access to justice and political participation; gendered experiences, expectations and priorities of marginalised groups, including women, sexual minorities, Dalits ('low caste'), Janajatis (indigenous communities) and Madhesis (from the southern Tarai plains); and how different identities intersect. |
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The workshop format shaped the degree to which the activity was 'participatory' and 'action orientated'. In the end, only the workshop in Colombia which mostly included members of CONAMIC took an explicitly action-orientated approach: the objective of the meeting was to: *develop an action plan for CONAMIC, including indicators to monitor the achievements of the action plan, to identify opportunities to change the condition and position of indigenous women, in the framework of the peace process in Colombia – in the talks and beyond* [translation from Spanish]. In Nepal and Bougainville, participants were from a range of different civil society backgrounds, and included analysts, journalists and interest groups, such that discussions were adept at bringing out different perspectives and providing their analysis of a broad range of issues but less able to dig deeper into specific gender issues.

The two-day workshop format also limited how much discussions could be adapted to issues being raised in the room. For example in Nepal, the sessions had been designed (as suggested by the partners) to be much more structured, following a format of presentation and Q&A rather than inquiry and adaptation. In Bougainville, the workshop began with an objective-setting session where participants could set their own objectives for the workshop. They fell into three broad areas to explore: *coordination*: linking local knowledge with resources and capacity; *inclusion*: of grassroots women, younger women, and men; and *ownership*: promoting community-led initiatives. While this gave participants a sense of engagement in the workshop, there was no immediate channel for those topics to be included alongside the original agenda.

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*Political settlements in action*
Another important reflection is how political settlements analysis was brought into the workshops. Discussions with partners during the design phase had identified parallels in political settlement analysis' focus on power relations and gender analysis. Partners were interested in how questions on the way in which different informal and formal institutions and structures shape specific groups' political and socio-economic access and modes of violence, could dig deeper into gender issues. Yet in practice it was much more difficult to unpick these deeper relational dynamics, and the workshops focused primarily on women's participation – the language of women's participation and gender was often interchangeably used. It was also quite difficult to raise issues of masculinities. At times this was because some issues, for example gender equality, were seen as an imposition of an international agenda which was resisted (see below case study on 'complementarity' in Bougainville). In that way, international frameworks and expectations were implicitly present in the room when discussing women's participation in decision-making but not explicitly discussed.

The focus on women's participation was perhaps also a reflection of participants' expectations and previous experiences of internationally supported workshops on gender. The foray into the territory of power relations between women and men, discussion of patriarchal structures implicit in customary, religious, and familial structures was challenging to navigate, and might have benefitted from a different research approach, such as partner-led focus group discussions over a longer period of time. In Nepal and Colombia, where partner organisations led the majority of the facilitation, this was mitigated to some extent, and could be perhaps attributed more to the limitations of a two-day workshop. In Nepal, societal-wide gender discussions are already quite progressive, and this was reflected in advanced discussions on intersectional forms of discrimination. Discussions of intersectionality were perhaps strongest in Colombia as the workshop focus was primarily on indigenous women, and participants were mostly of that background.

**Co-analysis process**
A shared or co-analysis process for each workshop was chosen to weave the multiple experiences of CR's partners into high-quality analysis and policy recommendations. Each of the reports generated drew on the participatory action research methods used during the design and implementation of the workshops. As discussed above, these processes occurred differently in each context, but each workshop sought to balance the skills, experience and knowledge of our in-context partners and of the participants who attended the workshops, with the deep knowledge of peacebuilding, gender and political settlements of both our programming teams and specialist analysts within CR. Across three workshops, this complex process produced mixed results.

Shared or co-analysis is an intensive, challenging process that demands trust and frank engagement between all parties involved. Robust discussions are necessary, and in this case, up to 12 people, representing multiple organisations, were actively involved in commenting on written drafts. Careful coordination between and within each organisation is needed to ensure the process remains inclusive. It is also highly time-intensive, requiring translators for the text and continual review of sensitive terminology and to contextualise language. This process also requires specialist analysts to link the findings to international research, policy-making and practice, and continued engagement with partners and CR colleagues working in the context to continually check the relevance of the findings. This next section details how we undertook this process and the challenges and opportunities of this approach.

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*Drafting process*

Depending on the context, either our partners (in Colombia and Nepal) or the independent consultant (in Bougainville) took the lead on recording the discussions and analysis that took place during the workshop in local language. This lead was also responsible for undertaking the first draft of the report to share with all other colleagues. This early analysis grouped findings under the themes of the workshops, such as the level and quality of women's and other excluded groups' participation in political settlement, or the effectiveness of international engagement in supporting inclusive transition processes. Emerging themes from the workshops themselves, and events or issues that surfaced after the workshop was held, were also included and summarised for discussion with partners to determine their inclusion (i.e. whether and how to include these new pieces of information within the analysis).

In a number of the contexts we requested additional one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders to illuminate significant issues related to the workshop that required further information. For example, in Bougainville, the 2017 community government elections were held shortly after the workshop took place. While this had been raised as a key opportunity for greater inclusion by workshop participants, we wanted to further explore the implications of this new formal governance mechanism to women's inclusion in Bougainville. These additional interviews were conducted either by CR staff or our partners in context. We recorded the results of additional clarifying conversations and discussed and shared the findings within the group of analysts.

*Language*

Accessibility of the analysis is critical to both us and our partners. Each workshop was conducted in the most relevant local language or dialect, which meant that the first draft of the written analysis was in this language. This process then required translation to English, which was very time-consuming and technically challenging. For example, the report on Colombia required additional translation from various Indigenous languages and Spanish to English. Working with translated documents was difficult as the translators were not always familiar with the technical language of peacebuilding or political settlement. Deciding on appropriate, clear and context-relevant terminology required extensive discussions between the original drafters and CR to nuance these translated messages. This process of determining the precise language used was mediated by CR analysts directly with our partners.

*Interests and audiences*

An additional challenge is that CR and our partners have different audiences for our work. CR's publications are accessed by policymakers, academics and experienced peacebuilding practitioners. Our partners are seeking to influence domestic and regional-level policymakers and local practitioners; they require practical and contextualised information. We ultimately share common interests in informing, shifting attitudes and provoking action, but the language and terminology in which this needs to be communicated varies for these different audiences.

To continue our constructive and open relationships with our partners, the text used in the paper was carefully balanced to respond to these multiple interests and varying audiences in the different contexts. To help create clarity, we added a section at the start of each report termed 'main findings'. This section summarised the analysis and highlighted upfront the important messages we wanted decision-makers to consider. We used clear, less academic language and explained and applied key terms. The reports included a reflection or recommendations section at the conclusion to highlight practical steps that could be implemented to achieve greater inclusion in political transition processes. In each

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report these sections sought to meet the needs of both CR and our partners in terms of prompt and clear communication of important messages.

Direct quotes and practical examples were used throughout the analysis to contextualise the findings and help ground the analysis in practice. These tools were seen as essential to our shared analysis, helping to connect the voices of practitioners working in a variety of contexts to the international policy-makers, practitioners and academics who read this work. By directly connecting the voices and views of local peacebuilders this analysis helped bridge the divide between practice and policy.

*Timing and coordination*
The entire analysis process took much longer than expected. While translation added to the length of time to develop a first draft, so too did the process of undertaking in-depth analysis between and within organisations. The detailed task of nuancing key messages and recommendations between multiple decision-makers and for different audiences was the most time-consuming part of the process. It is clear that longer planning time frames are needed for any medium to large-scale shared research process. In addition, more time could be built into the planning for the design of the workshops so that the actual analysis process is clearer.

Coordination between partners, and with participants and additional informants was critical to managing relationships and continuing to ground the research in the dynamic contexts we were analysing. Adjusting key findings and incorporating emerging challenges and opportunities required ongoing communication and engagement. To facilitate this, all partners were copied into discussions via email and Skype to assist with shared decision-making.

CR and the partners chose one lead within each organisation who negotiated the timeframes for delivery and coordinated the analysis process between the other stakeholders. On reflection, partners identified that it is preferable that this lead should have attended the relevant workshop so that they could more easily and accurately reflect the discussions that had taken place. However, with staff changes this was not possible for CR, which made the coordination process and the subsequent analysis more difficult. Despite these challenges, goodwill between partners enabled the coordination process to work well.

*Tensions*
Since 1994 CR has created a range of high-quality research, grounded in our learning from practice, that documents and analyses the practical lessons and innovations of peacebuilding. The Accord series is published by CR and we have particular analytical language and editorial standards that we apply to all our reports.

Incorporating partners into this shared research design and analysis process occasionally led to tensions. This was caused by a number of challenges including timing, donor commitments, language and terminology, and coordination – but primarily by the question of how to target the analysis for different audiences. Linking design and practical analysis to international policy and practitioner audiences requires specific framing and terminology, which is not always similar to those used by workshop participants or by our partners in the contexts in which they work. While it is difficult, we acknowledge that these tensions often saw CR's interests trumping those of our local partners (see boxed case study example on 'complementarity' below).

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We worked closely with partners to overcome these tensions and to balance the needs and interests of all parties. Our continued working relationships in each of the contexts highlights the success of this approach, but we do not take this for granted, and continue to look for ways in which this shared analysis process can be more effective.

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**Box 3: Case study on 'complementarity'**

During the workshop in Bougainville, participants had an extensive discussion on what they termed 'complementarity' of relationships, behaviours and decision-making roles between women and men. This discussion was grounded in the understanding that in Bougainville and the Pacific region more broadly, gender roles and relationships among women and men are heavily influenced by customary systems – and these have been influenced more recently by colonialism and the Church. The roles that women and men currently play in society are shaped by values and principles emerging from multiple and overlapping institutions and structures.

Some workshop participants described the 'complementarity' of gender relations between men and women in Bougainville, where men typically have direct leadership roles, and women have relational power associated with customary systems of land tenure and familial status. This reflects the importance placed on the familial unit in Bougainville, drawn from Christian models of kinship, which situates the male adult as head of the household, but allows for a degree of partnership and consultation in the husband-wife relationship. As one workshop participant explained:

*'I think at the cultural level, [gender roles and relations are] probably based on the traditional roles that women and men have played. And I think in a lot of senses, you could also call that not so much gender equality but gender complementarity… where both sexes complement each other… because traditionally that's what they have done.'*

While this local understanding of how gender norms are developed fits neatly with the international and academic explanations, there is disquiet with the use of the term 'complementarity' by many gender equality activists and researchers. The term originated in US Christian debates on the role of women and men in church hierarchies. Complementarity has been used to argue against the equality of women and men generally. It has been used to emphasise the ways in which women and men are different, rather than the fact that both share similar human qualities, and can successfully hold similar positions in life. The concept has been widely used to support male domination of decision-making and conservative gender roles and behaviours, such as the promotion of traditional forms of marriage, and to argue against women's leadership in public spaces. This Bougainvillean framing of gender analysis in terms of 'complementarity' is therefore challenging to engage with when CR is seeking to understand and support transformative peacebuilding and inclusive political settlements.

In Bougainville, the matrilineal aspects of society were perceived by participants as affording women relatively better status than in many other parts of PNG and the Pacific region. Yet some participants also recognised that gender discrimination is still widely prevalent (and, for many, undesirable) within both informal customary and church structures, and the post-agreement formal institutions. Additionally, women and other marginalised groups (including young men and women) are often excluded from decision-making.

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> A more transformative gender approach that reassesses current relations between men and women and the systems that sustain unequal influence, requires understanding Bougainvillean perspectives on gender. Workshop participants explained that in Bougainville, the term 'gender' is almost universally understood to mean 'women'. It is strongly associated with international human rights norms focused on the promotion of gender equality, which is equated with 'women's empowerment'. Both concepts of gender and gender equality are generally perceived to be Western or external notions that do not fit easily with Bougainvillean cultural understandings of gender roles, and are not broadly accepted by men or women. The framing of the workshop reflected these concerns about terminology, exploring the different experiences of women and men, and how they can access and influence power. Instead of using the term 'gender' CR and partners suggested using the phrase 'relationships between women and men' to discuss gender dynamics of power, violence and peace.

**Dissemination of the research**

The research was funded by the UK Government and one of the key aims was to provide policymakers with better information about the outcomes of specific trade-offs in peace agreements between elite engagement and efforts to promote inclusion. The aim was to provide new evidence to support effective external interventions to promote inclusion.

To build a deeper understanding of the needs and interests of policymakers, we shared and tested the relevance of our early analysis, findings and policy recommendations. Robust discussions, which included partners from Colombia and Nepal, with a range of multilateral (UN and EU) and bilateral (UK, Australian and Swedish) policymakers enabled us to better target our findings and our recommendations. Evidence, particularly in Colombia, demonstrates that this research is being used by partners to inform their peacebuilding work, and for advocacy with specific national and international policymakers to highlight overlooked gender issues as well as the value of existing peacebuilding work to challenge gendered transitions. A synthesis report of the three reports was also developed, with more focused recommendations, to respond to policymakers' interests to understand comparative lessons and broad trends of inclusion, particularly the trade-offs between elite and non-elite inclusion and sequencing of their support for peace processes.

**Conclusion**

As an international practice-based peacebuilding organisation that values participation, CR is committed to undertaking work that responds to issues prioritised by in context partners and includes them in each stage of design and implementation – but we acknowledge we are still learning how to do this optimally in practice. Our experience from the PSRP highlights that shared research and analysis requires longer time frames and constructive and frank engagement between partners to do well. Centring this work on a one-off workshop is not the best way to undertake participatory action research, as it can be too structured and potentially extractive. Language, which is often overlooked in external engagements in contexts, should also be considered more thoroughly – both in the conduct of research and writing of analysis. Working closely with long-term in-context partners through engaged and open dialogue-based learning is the best way to enable this process and integrate changes into peacebuilding practice.

The objectives of the research detailed in Box 1 (above) were met to varying extents. In addition, a number of partner objectives, including their need to have high-quality documents useful for their own advocacy, were met. While there are clear tensions apparent in research that has both an external policy focus and also actively seeks to

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meet the needs and interests of conflict-affected partners and workshop participants, we believe we navigated these challenges effectively, whilst maintaining strong relationships with our various local and international partners. Co-design with our in-context partners from the outset would enhance this process further, as well as early consideration as to how participants themselves could be brought into research design. CR's ability to carry out this type of research was very much linked to its history of partnership in the contexts and its peacebuilding reputation – long term trusted relations with in-country civil society activists with a wide range of networks was integral to doing research with practical value, but also to bringing in groups and people that are often marginalised from such research and hard to access or build relations with from scratch.

A key challenge is how policymakers and funders of practice-led research in conflict-affected contexts value participatory action approaches. Small sample sizes and data rooted in personal experience do not necessarily align with conventional research methods, criteria for 'evidence', and increasing interest in longitudinal quantitative data. Upfront and early conversations with donors about the value of practice orientated research, how it can be used, and how they can support uptake of findings is key – and may have helped mitigate some of the tensions encountered here.

Overall, the process successfully generated evidence on the diverse ways people are seeking and achieving forms of inclusion, and the need for an intersectional approach to political settlements research to include diverse groups effectively in this process. The research evidenced the importance of localising and integrating international frameworks at a local level. It has also generated useful findings on how practitioners, academic researchers and policy-makers can more effectively approach inclusive peacebuilding and political settlements.