Universität Basel

Research Project

One size does not fit all: the strategic use of inclusion in mediation processes

Project funded by own resources

Project title One size does not fit all: the strategic use of inclusion in mediation processes
Principal Investigator(s) Hellmüller, Sara Anna ;
Organisation / Research unit
Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Politikwissenschaft (Goetschel)
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In 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted inclusivity, understood as "the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort," as one of eight fundamental principles for effective mediation (United Nations 2012). There is however little agreement and even less evidence-based data regarding the two key elements of this definition: the *extent* and the *manner in which* views are represented and integrated in mediation processes. If these are indeed essential factors for effective mediation processes, it is both theoretically and practically important to produce evidence-based research on inclusivity.

Current academic debates pit proponents of inclusivity against skeptics. Proponents of inclusivity argue that inclusion increases public support for the peace process, provides local expertise and knowledge, broadens the discussion beyond the narrow interests of the negotiating parties, and increases the sustainability of peace agreements. Skeptics counter that inclusivity lowers the chances of reaching an agreement. They contend that agreement is easier reached amongst a limited number of actors; that exclusionary talks are sometimes necessary to achieve breakthroughs, and that selection problems prevent the real inclusion of societal views at the table.

We argue that the current debate creates a false dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion. To overcome this, we focus on *context* and *process*, two dimensions that the current literature eludes. First, whereas proponents of inclusivity argue in favor of inclusion irrespective of the actors, the issues at stake and the geographical levels at which the conflicts play out, we ask: *What is the relation between inclusion and conflict type*? Do all contexts require the inclusion of the same set of actors? Second, while academics on both sides of the debate have paid little attention to the strategic use of inclusion at different points in a mediation process, we ask: *Can mediators strategically use inclusion in a process to advance their objectives*? If so, how and what are the conditions under which this strategy makes mediation more effective?

By studying the relationship between inclusion, context and process, the project seeks to refocus attention on inclusivity's initial purpose as spelled out in the UN Guidance: increasing the effectiveness of mediation processes. To this end, we will conduct comparative case study analysis of mediators' inclusion strategies in six cases that vary on 1) conflict type and 2) mediator identity distinguishing between international/regional organizations, state actors, and non-state third parties. The selected cases – Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Colombia, Nepal, Myanmar and Kenya – include a mix of recent (sometimes still ongoing) and historical mediation processes.

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Published results

4509371, Hellmüller, Sara; Zahar, Marie-Joëlle, Against the Odds: Civil Society in the Intra-Syrian Talks, Issue brief, International Peace Institute, Publication: Other Publications (Forschungsberichte o. ä.)

4509362, Hellmüller, Sara; Zahar, Marie-Joëlle, UN-led mediation in Syria and civil society. Inclusion in a multi-layered conflict, 1365-0742 ; 978-1-905805-28-0, Accord : an international review of peace initiatives, Publication: JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

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