

DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE REGIONAL PROJECT

Democracy and dialogues:
challenges for democracy
in the XXI century

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Democracy and dialogues: challenges for democracy in the XXI century
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Contents

Introduction	5
Conceptual framework	6
Progress of democracy and its conceptualization.	6
What does democratic governance consist of?	9
Problems of democracy in Latin America.....	9
The logic of the dialogues	11
Dialogues as a complement to representative democracy.....	14
Objectives of the dialogues.....	15
Types of dialogue	17
Nature of the dialogues	18
Dialogue experiences.....	20
Bibliography.....	28
 Annex I	
Case studies: methodologies applied in the dialogues of Panama 2000 and WSP Guatemala	31
Panama 2000.	32
Development of the process: Procedures	34
First Assembly of the national group.....	37
Second Assembly of the national group.....	38
Third meeting of the national group.....	38
Seminar of Experts.....	40
Second Phase of the WSP.	40
Structure of the program.	42
 Annex II	
Some experiences of Social Pacts in Latin America since 1945.....	45

Introduction

The relation between State and society has been one of the main themes of political science throughout time: fundamentally the debate on how much power the State confers on citizens for governing, what its limits are and therefore how much of this power is conserved in the hands of the citizens represented to revoke their mandate. So the debate extends to the sovereignty of citizens for recovering power when the authorities fail to comply with the mission delegated to them.

Power is exercised through political institutions in which the rules of the game of the political system are implemented. It is here where we can see evidence of the main weaknesses of the democratic system, arising out of the deterioration and weakening of its institutions, which is a condition that has made them into the Achilles' heel of Latin American democracy. This is especially true in the political party system which has deteriorated significantly in recent decades -even in those countries where it appeared to have been already consolidated- due to its loss of representativeness and leadership, as well as the demonstrated incapacity of the powers of the State to incorporate the diversity of society's interests.

Consequently, there is at present a discussion about the convenience of complementing representative democracy with other procedures and rules of the game, in order to extend and open decision making power centers to other social actors who do not feel that they are represented or reflected in the decisions of their representatives. Among these procedures are a large variety of national dialogues which have taken place in several countries in the region: intrasocietal dialogues and dialogues between State and society, some of which have been successful and have contributed important lessons to future initiatives.

Some consider that there is an overlap between the dialogues and representation; others see it as a complement for strengthening associations which consolidate the political system. But, are the dialogues really competing against representative democracy? Are they protected by the law and by the spirit of democracy as understood in its theoretical principles?

Conceptual framework

Athenian democracy has without doubt been a philosophical reference point for those who argue for a more direct democracy today, a democracy in which decisions are taken directly by the people. However, ancient democracy also had to rely on representation. In public assemblies affairs of concern to the community were discussed, but they also had representative power structures¹. It would seem then that "...direct democracy controlled by all the people is more a political myth than a form of government" (Sabine, 1972: 17). However it is an important reference point for current efforts to increase power centers and build democracies on the basis of pluralistic societies.

Notions of direct democracy and the open participation of citizens in public affairs, at their height in ancient democracy, were taken up again during the eighteenth century by Rousseau, who analyzed them extensively in his book, *The Social Contract*. Rousseau considered that citizens always conserve the legitimate right to sovereignty, so in his opinion, "...the very last citizen is a person as sacred and inviolable as the first magistrate, because where the person represented is present, there is no longer a need for the representative" (Rousseau: 92). His proposals were condemned as being "reckless, scandalous, impious and destructive of Christianity and of all governments". (Villaverde, 1993: X). The importance of the citizen, as described by Rousseau, continues to be a reference point for current efforts to consolidate a more participatory democracy in many countries of Latin America.

Progress of democracy and its conceptualization

Democracy in its modern sense is based on representation, which is justified by the extension of participation through universal vote; its main consequence was the need to develop a representative system with responsible political institutions, capable of selecting candidates who would subsequently be presented to citizens in a transparent process, and who would finally have the last word in selecting their authorities. In this case the responsibility for selection procedures lay with the political parties.

So collective deliberations are engaged in by those who are elected for that purpose (Bobbio: 52). Implicit in this representation is the responsibility to transfer

¹ Council of the Five Hundred which was the executive and directive body of the assembly where the effective work of the government was done in Sabine (1972).

the interests of those represented to decision-making spaces, a responsibility which is not based on the explicit mandate of the representatives². A deeper discussion on this aspect would be worthwhile since it is a key element in the current problems of representative democracy.

This is how the crucial role of the political parties became the most important link between society and State, this being the way for election procedures to be linked to representativeness; the strengthening of democracy depends on their strength, and conversely their weakness deteriorates it and prevents it from growing. Thus the importance given to the institutionalization of the political party system in the democratic system for achieving democratic governance. "An institutionalized party system implies stability in competition between parties, the existence of parties with stable roots in society, accepting that parties and elections are legitimate institutions for determining who will govern, and parties with reasonably stable and structured rules".³

The traditional concept of democracy was first linked to the vision of a proactive State, which promoted and was responsible for development, a State that intervened and executed. However, during recent years political and economic world events have significantly transformed this vision.

The process of globalization has accelerated and this has had repercussions in several areas: first, the democratic system has spread throughout the world and become the hegemonic political system, and second, a change in the role of the State, which is being promoted as a facilitator of development in the context of the needs of the market economy, a vision which has expanded together with the expansion of democracy⁴. This is an approach that is far from the role of the "Welfare State", a role, which worked of course in more, developed democracies and has to do with a State that responds to the needs of its citizens.⁵

However there are difficulties inside the last wave of countries which joined the democratization process. Many of these are democracies imposed from above, not ones resulting from conviction or the democratic thinking or values of citizens; authoritarianism is still embedded in the population and in their daily actions.

² In a text on "The future of democracy" Bobbio referred to article 67 of the Italian Constitution, which explicitly describes the functions of parliaments "without the obligation of mandate". He also mentions Leninist principles which are contrary to this position, and which, he points out, were incorporated into Soviet constitutions, explicitly describing the compulsory nature of the greater responsibility of members of parliament to the citizens they are representing, citing as an example that "...article 15 of the current Constitution reads: 'A member of parliament has the obligation to inform readers about his activity and the activity of the soviets.'" (Bobbio, 1996: 57)

³ Scout and Scully, in: Feldman, Eduardo. (2001:4).

⁴ Since 1974, with the third wave of democratization, an accelerated expansion of democracies occurred throughout the world. According to data from the annual Freedom House census on political rights and civil liberties, the percentage of countries which adopted democracy as a political system increased from 27.5% to 61.3% in 1995, in Diamond. 1996

⁵ In the case of developing –or underdeveloped?– countries, the Welfare State was one of the answers to the needs of the poor and the poorest, who are also citizens and represent the majority of the population.

Consequently there are serious difficulties in building a democratic State with consolidated political institutions.

New forms of coexistence which are emerging between the State and the society have made these relations more complex than the tradition of thinking which dates back to Alexis de Toqueville (Martínez, 2001); public administration is no longer an exclusive space for the State, so limits in spheres of action between the latter and citizens are still blurred. Consequently, tensions are produced because of the conflict between the State and civil society in relation to decision-making, which was formally the sole responsibility of the State. So now one cannot speak about a total separation between the civil society and State institutions as one could in the past, but in many cases both share concrete responsibilities for implementing policies.

With regard to these changes, the traditional notion of government restricted solely to State spaces is undergoing radical transformation. It is on that basis that democratic theory has embarked in new directions, incorporating new related concepts such as governance and *governabilidad*, which are related to current contexts that make it difficult for democracies to consolidate as in the past. This concept emphasizes “the capacity to guide, develop and promote social behaviors not subject to hierarchical relations characteristic of the State administrative apparatus.” (Martínez, 2001: 3). This definition is complemented by Renate Mayntz, who defines it as a “...non-hierarchical modality of coordination which points to a new style of government with interaction between the State and non State actors inside mixed public and private decision making networks”.

The concept, described by Martínez, “refers to the pluralism of actors, to the many institutional spheres, to the formal and informal means of interaction between public and private sectors, to the complex relations of interdependence between levels of government, and to the mobilization of organizational networks which occurs around public policies”.

Furthermore, a difference is established between governance and democratic governance, making a clear reference to the capacities of governments to comply with objectives and goals using totally different procedures. Citizens accept the way things are done and take decisions. They respect the established authority, the rules of the game, whether they are democratic or not, because conditions exist which make it possible to exercise power, without the authority having to resort to violent methods for executing political decisions. So governance can occur both in authoritarian governments as well as democratic ones; this also means that a crisis in governance can occur in both types of government.

What does democratic governance consist of?

In government, the rules of the game (procedures) are observed in accordance to democratic principles. Consequently, according to Günter Malhold, the challenge of governance consists of having efficient mechanisms to “...achieve real consensus among many actors trying to have an impact on the political system in decision making, and in a parliamentary structure which in its style of “decision making” is remote from these necessities”. According to the same author, this implies “extending spaces for debate, for developing agreements and consensus and managing dissent, procedures and mechanisms in discussions which are predominantly thematic” (Malhold). So dialogue is presented as “...a methodology for the exercise of power based on broader agreements...”; the legitimacy of the electoral system, which suggests representativeness by means of electoral agreements through votes, is not enough.

Problems of democracy in Latin America

In Latin America representative democracy has tended to consolidate, and in the majority of Latin American countries this can be seen in the succession of governments as a result of the free and secret ballot and respect for election results by the State. However there is still some doubt about how sustainable these democracies are, taking into account the growing crisis in governance in some countries in the region.

There is no doubt that democracy in Latin America is being eroded by a political crisis caused by the loss of legitimacy of the authorities and of the political institutions. This crisis has largely arisen from the difficulties of the economies of the countries to adapt to the new world context, a situation which has had a significant impact on people’s standard of living, and is attributed to poor government administration, but the crises in governance also have their origin in situations related to the way politics is implemented. As a consequence of the authoritarian styles of governments, politicians who undertook representation through participation in political parties – which are the main institutions for representing or being represented – became accustomed to governing without consulting. Consequently the parties have not managed to consolidate as authentic pillars of representative democracy. As Bobbio indicated, “democracy has not managed to completely defeat the oligarchic power, let alone has it managed to occupy all the spaces with power for making decisions which are obligatory for a complete social group” (Bobbio: 34).

Political parties are simply electoral machines that disappear after the elections and come to life during each electoral campaign, so they do not involve their

members or their party cadres in a more active and committed way. The electoral offer consists of products that are rapidly distributed without any responsibility to the consumer. Consequently a crisis in political representation occurs after the elections when the representatives elected by the citizens become independent and stop responding to the interests of the electorate, representing only themselves and taking decisions without consulting.⁶ This situation is a reflection of the fact that institutions still respond to former economic interests and to former political projects which exclude certain sectors. In the majority of Latin American countries, especially in the youngest democracies, one cannot envisage a consolidated democratic project with institutions which apply the principles and values of democracy.

A loss of trust and interest of citizens in the electoral processes has been observed. The frustration of citizens when their expectations about democracy are not complied with has led to an increase in absenteeism. Absenteeism is however, for some theoreticians such as Bobbio, a way for politicians to evade pressure from the citizens, and the less they vote, the less pressure politicians are under when in power.

Under these circumstances, it is necessary to make a greater effort, and this cannot be achieved only with the traditional institutions of democracy. It is necessary to broaden the spectrum of actors who interact and intervene in decision-making. In this context, we refer to a quote on the thinking of Joseph Schumpeter, who sustained that "...the characteristic of a democratic government is not the absence of elites, but the presence of many elites who compete among themselves to conquer the popular vote" (*Ibid*). This is possible in pluralistic societies that open different spaces to citizens.

The importance of electoral success led to the need to institutionalize political parties in order to consolidate democracy, this leading to a discussion on the formal and informal rules of the game which give shape to institutions in a given context.

In this context Feldman refers to an essential aspect worth analyzing, which he calls "political systems with low institutionality"⁷ present in Latin America (Feldman, 2001: 5). When he refers to the institutions, he relates them to "...the rules of the game which structure interactions between actors", and in turn govern the behavior of these actors. To this he adds another important aspect to the discussion: the

⁶ This was a concern expressed by Tocqueville in his book *Democracy in America*. Basically it is the discussion about what to do when behind the majority there is a minority which manipulates and exercises political power, defines and prepares bad laws which will be adopted and applied for all. Tocqueville saw this as a serious risk to public order (Tocqueville: 191).

⁷ Feldman defines the concept of institution as "specialized mechanisms which embody different principles of social regulation (hierarchy, exchange and solidarity), which individually or collectively act in each and every social (political, economic and societal) sphere of action and in the State, and are adopted for coordinating actions aimed at solving problems and/or conflicts, as well as for achieving objectives".

actors' acceptance of these rules of the game, which depends on their perceptions of "how much they can benefit if they coordinate their expectations and decide upon courses of action. ...the capacity of the institutions to act according to the rules of the game will make it possible to be clear about what can be expected from them and the benefits that could be obtained from a given institutional framework."

In accordance with Feldman's proposals, "when there is little development of formal institutions, in practice others might substitute them informally, without the former ceasing to exist". However, as Norberto Martínez says, it is important to make it clear that "...representative mechanisms of citizen participation cannot be substituted by the direct relation between spheres of the public sector and community organizations. If the new forms of public administration were to make use of these social resources, these should be subject to the control of representative bodies and to the evaluation of their contributions and impacts" (Martínez, 2001: 9).

This is where the extension of citizen participation starts to play an important role through *dialogues* as a means to contribute to generating proposals for change which will strengthen public administration and improve political institutions, "...with capacity building actions, with strong components aimed at building social capital and activating the civil society" (*Ibid*).

This also implies the more active participation of citizens in different types of associations, -considered to be a powerful instrument for action in a democratic system- so that, in turn, these associations will relate to each other in accordance with the overlapping of interests and objectives. The consolidation of democracy, as Putnam indicates (1995), requires a strong and active society. It cannot be limited to a passive role exercised every four years and exercised by us as individuals, because we would fall into a "minimalist" vision of a democracy, reduced to being content with a minimal level of freedom to participate.

What then is the most adequate and effective procedure for introducing the interests of the diverse sectors of the society into decision-making? Who should transfer these interests? The technicians, the ones who have the best academic training? Is it possible for large societies with a diversity of very often opposing interests to directly intervene in decisions?

The logic of the dialogues

The dialogues are nothing more than the building of new spaces of societal representation for extending the decision making circle. They suggest the need to build a model of public space, complementary to the representative system,

through which civic activity can be strengthened and a contribution can be made to the creation of associations. A space where democratic practices are generated and the free expression of ideas and positions among citizens is strengthened.

Dialogues have now become a tool for some democratic governments concerned about extending and consolidating participation; they are a way of extending the representation of diverse interests and facilitating the incorporation of the opposition's interests, of those who are not represented in parliament or of individuals who for one reason or another do not belong to political parties but also need to have channels of communication with decision making spaces at the different levels of government, without this idea implying a displacement of the parties and the State as those responsible for political activity.

Dialogues are also being envisaged as instruments that will allow networks of organizations and individuals to be established, very often with interests that are contrary to the interests of those who are formally represented.

Concern about the real representativeness of the political parties, of Congress and the Executive branch, and the also valid concern to incorporate the strategic actors and the diversity of social actors is part of the justification for holding dialogues and building new political alliances with citizens who are more committed to the democratic system.

During the inaugural speech at the Coronado meeting, Panama, Fernando Zumbado of the UNDP (Solórzano, 1997) referred to the importance of dialogues, indicating that "politics is too important to leave it in the hands of the political parties", especially when one observes that the channels of participation are not effective and that the institutions are not able to implement the goals. For Zumbado, "building consensus is making governance in the strictest sense of the term", because democratic governance, unlike authoritarianism, is governing with the people, taking into account the opinion of the people who will be impacted by the decisions taken.

In this way dialogue and negotiation are becoming a way to contribute to democratic development, contributing to the creation of a democratic culture and the legitimation of the political system. Therefore, they are tools necessary at the national as well as the international level, where dialogue spaces for the civil society should also be contemplated for discussing aspects of citizenship in new contexts in which nation states are becoming less belligerent.

Furthermore, joint agreement about the rules of the democratic game and adoption of these rules, which occurs during this democratic exercise, become input for the political system itself, which absorbs these new values acquired by citizens during the dialogue process.

The challenge of democracy as a political system is to recognize and integrate the diversity of expressions and cultural forms inside the countries, which in practice is

also urgent throughout the world, taking into consideration the existing diversity in the many countries belonging to the family of democracy.

Another important aspect worth emphasizing is the concern which arises when promoting these processes about how to reconcile the interests of strategic actors with those of actors who have been historically excluded so as not to continue to reproduce the same flaws in the representative systems. Is it possible to do this through dialogue?

The use of this tool arises from the need to build a different State with new institutions which contemplate new relations with civil society organizations under equality of opportunities, and with which the State should share responsibilities in the design and execution of public policies.

With regard to the latter, it is worth emphasizing the fact that the numerous dialogues that have taken place in Latin America show us that bringing the different national actors together for a dialogue in order to build agreements, leads to commitments being made and creates a sense of responsibility among the ruling class in the way they deal with society's problems.

Marcela Arce, a representative of the Panamanian civil society during the Panama 2000 dialogue, indicated that "the society does not want to be a spectator of national events but to actively participate on a daily basis in solving the challenges which arise..." (*Ibid.*).

Opening the public space to the understanding of citizens becomes a priority, because closed agendas formulated behind the scenes represent the interests of a minority. Democracy requires power to be visible in order to overcome the stage of authoritarianism in which concealed agendas prevailed, developed by hegemonic powers. The visibility of power was emphasized by Kant and it represents the possibility that citizens may publicly express their ideas and criticisms of the political system and the management of public affairs (Bobbio, 1996: 101).

As was indicated in the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program in 1993, participation "can become a source of enormous vitality and innovation for the creation of new and fairer societies". If participation is conceived as a process, it implies that dialogues should also be seen as processes in time, or the sum of different initiatives which will be linked together and complement each other, strengthening intrasocietal relations and those between the State and the society.

For example, the Bambito I, II and III dialogues in Panama formed part of a series of related dialogues, even though they were held on different dates, which contributed in time to the building and strengthening of democratic values, and were the basis of the success of the Panama 2000 dialogue initiative. Likewise, in Guatemala, the creation of a National Consensus Forum, during Serrano's auto-coup, was not an isolated event, but the continuation of a process started during

Vinicio Cerezo's Government (1986-1991), and it demonstrated the trust developed between representatives of the workers' and employers' sectors during the 1991 Social Contract.

Dialogues as a complement to representative democracy

Agreements reached through open discussion between strategic actors, the government and other social actors are fundamental for democratic consolidation; they make it possible for these actors to draw closer together, and although at first some of them may not be totally committed to democratic values, in practice they start to assimilate them. For instance, for O'Donnell and Schmitter (in Feldman, 2001: 2) "the most promising route to a successful transition and subsequent consolidation process is a tacit or explicit alliance between the 'weak members of the system and the moderate opposition"; it is worthwhile, in other words, not to leave out of these processes actors who may at some time provoke the collapse of the political system.

In the context of the crisis of political institutions the whole society has expressed a serious lack of trust in and rejection of politics, as a result of which some of the more interested actors seek alternative channels of participation where their interests can be better represented or where they can transfer them more directly. "The crisis in representation which is occurring in Argentina is a consequence of a crisis in the forms of traditional participation" (new groups dealing with crises in participation). Another cause of the crisis is the absence of control mechanisms for the actions of the governments and their institutions.

The adoption of a democratic system does not in itself guarantee the development of institutions that will make it sustainable and consolidated. At first the countries will usually come up against numerous demands and at the same time a high level of institutional weakness in responding to these demands. This can be seen in the area of security, justice and access to basic services such as education and health, among others. It is an issue aptly reflected by Bernardo Arévalo when he points to the institutional channels for public policy formulation as having an "...imperfect and sometimes very imperfect" operation (2002).

It is important to emphasize that transformation of these institutions requires a joint effort. When the political system is not transformed, the same political forces remain which in the past were linked to traditional, authoritarian ways of deciding and doing things. That is why efforts to generate consensus aimed at contributing to the development of institutions and the processes that occur within them should be appreciated.

Objectives of the dialogues

For greater probabilities of success in a dialogue process it is necessary to have clear aims. Generally, the dialogues have been directed at solving immediate problems in situations which require profound solutions of a structural nature and which in the long term might weaken the democratization process.

In accordance with Emilio Morgado's definition, "...consensus building is a way of achieving agreements and commitments through transactions based on reciprocal concessions, estimated as being equal by the parties involved". We have turned to this for improving levels of governance, furthering certain public policies, and fundamentally for applying economic measures (for example, the Social Contract in 1991 in Guatemala). "There can be no contract or agreement if there is no prior consensus; whereas, consensus building occurs even when this does not produce a contract or agreement (Morgado, 1995).

The use of dialogue and consensus building models in situations of crisis or stability "aims in the first place to reduce tensions; or in the second to influence a change in cultural patterns in order to strengthen democratic expectations." (Solórzano: 41)

They can also be useful tools for developing analysis capacities aimed at building consensus and at becoming transformed into concrete actions in the proposals for solution. Methodologies such as the War-torn Societies Project –WSP- could be applied to similar processes for formulating proposals for solving national and local problems.

Another aspect it is important to stress with regard to the positive aspects of dialogues is the space created for free expression of the interests of the diverse actors participating. This creates an atmosphere appropriate for raising the awareness of citizens' rights, but also of the responsibilities and commitments each should adopt with regard to the topics dealt with. Consequently, as Carmelo Angulo stated during the Learning Workshop on Democratic Dialogue (UNDP, 2000), "through dialogue the actors can achieve a commitment in a neutral space, opening a space for discussion to include the expressions of those people who are generally excluded", thus representing a real opportunity to reform and rebuild democratic institutions, incorporating the diverse opinions and visions about topics on the national agenda.

Different authors have pointed to some concrete merits of the dialogues, summarized as follows:

- Governments can manage tensions and prevent violent conflicts.

- It is possible to overcome social fragmentation in the context of a common national objective.
- They build democratic values and people understand the rules of the democratic game; they make it possible to agree to the rules of the game in accordance with democratic thinking, applying them and complying with what was agreed on by the majority or by consensus, depending on what the group has determined.
- They facilitate alliances between actors because they create networks of trust and identity among participants. Furthermore, they facilitate alliances between strategic actors and all the different actors who are usually excluded from decision-making.
- They help towards understanding and respecting the diversity of opinions, which is crucial for freedom of expression. Acceptance of the fact that there are alternatives and that others also have their “truths”.
- They develop dialogue skills as a democratic practice; use of the rules of the democratic game.
- They concentrate discussion and efforts on the search for concrete solutions.
- They facilitate opportunities for access to information.
- They shift interests which generally fail to find channels of communication in the State (expressing that which has not been expressed).
- They are a space for analyzing strategic issues for the country.
- They allow the opposition to have a voice and the government to incorporate it into its administration.
- They make it possible to use the experience of different actors for designing and implementing public policies.
- They can contribute to creating group identities with common objectives.
- People learn to listen and be heard.
- They make it possible to exchange ideas and intentions, experiences and visions, solutions which have been discussed, results which can be applied and adopted by all.

The dialogues favor interests which respond to the common good since they make it possible to incorporate new actors, including the churches, indigenous people's organizations, women's organizations. They usually open up to the participation of different key actors: government, political parties, trade union and entrepreneurial organizations, NGOs, popular organizations and citizens in general, as in the two dialogues held in Guatemala, WSP and UNDP Guatemala. In some cases governmental representatives have not been included –intrasocietal dialogues- seeking to strengthen civil society positions.

Types of dialogue

Responding to the approach of the workshop and using some proposals that emerged from this activity, the dialogues can be grouped together according to the circumstances that gave rise to them or the objectives sought.

During the learning workshop on democratic dialogue, the main facilitator of the activity, Katrin Käufer, proposed that the dialogues be arranged according to four types of interaction or “conversation qualities” (*Ibid.*) among participants: generative dialogues, reflective dialogues, talking tough, talking nice. Even though these types are not intended to be a categorization, they are a first step towards that purpose, but with the condition that it is necessary to identify more concrete and complementary criteria with other proposals resulting from the interventions of other participants.

Taking into consideration some aspects of Käufer’s proposal, I would propose a system based not on types of interactions between participants, but on the final purpose of the dialogue exercise. Some participants in the Antigua Workshop said they would leave out the talking tough and talking nice categories, and in a new classification include **situational, reflective and generative dialogues**. This could be an initial approach that could be discussed to the extent that progress is being made in analyzing dialogue processes as a tool for democratic governance.

Situational dialogues

These occur at times of crisis, so they are organized urgently and generally lead to the application of “fire fighting” measures. The fact that they are situational does not prevent them from catalyzing more long term processes. They manage to be successful when citizens find common objectives that lead them to choose one direction or another, as was the case with the National Consensus Forum in 1993.

Other examples have been the dialogue of Agenda Peru and the experience of Dialogue Argentina. In the latter, the situational nature was confirmed by Enrique Olivera in the document “Dialogue Argentina” (*Ibid.*), which describes the first meeting of rapprochement organized in December 2001 as an emergency meeting, in the midst of a crisis of governance and an extremely unstable political context which obliged the President of the Republic, Fernando De la Rúa, to resign.

Some situational dialogues are also convened by governments which have lost legitimacy, which fail to inspire confidence among the citizens, leading to mistrust and fear of being manipulated by the government, which then appeals to dialogue

when it has gone beyond the limits of governance. Generally there is no response from citizens and no interest in the process.

Generative Dialogues

These are processes aimed at profound change, in which visions are shared and commitments to change are established by the actors involved. Normally these are associated with the urge for reform in public as well as social policies, through methodological processes which are political-technical in nature. For instance, processes such as those developed by the War-torn Societies Project and by the Encounters for Updating, which are also propositional in nature, are a source of knowledge –technical and political- for generating public policies which have been extensively discussed and agreed upon by the different actors. One could also include dialogues which seek to incorporate concrete decision-making, decisions which are binding, such as Panama 2000.

The above does not imply that the dialogues should not be described as a space for strategic discussion aimed at promoting long term changes: the WSP, the Encounters for Updating, and Panama 2000 are examples of this, with concrete proposals which are very clear on priorities for citizens and for the country.

Reflective Dialogues

There is no doubt, as Carmelo Angulo pointed out, that all dialogue has a reflective component. Otherwise it would simply be a conversation between actors. Since reflection is the final goal of such an initiative, one can place it in the category of “reflective dialogue”. Some dialogues which fit in with this group are the dialogues on future scenarios, such as Visión Guatemala (1997-2000) (Díez Pinto, 2000), Destination Colombia (1997-1998) (De León and Díez Pinto), Vision Paraguay (2001) (UNDP/Alliance Foundation, 2002), and Vision Panama 2020. These exercises are tools for long term strategic thinking which promote profound reflection about the future and its alternatives.

Nature of the dialogues

In accordance with the context, the topics on the agenda, the actors involved and the historical scope of commitments acquired by the variety of actors involved in

the dialogues can be established if the dialogue corresponds to State or government policies.

Dialogues with a government agenda are those which incorporate topics which respond to the temporary nature of the government promoting them; topics which also form part of the government program and what it aims to promote during its mandate. Generally these tend to be used to reinforce the government, even though this does not mean that they are not generative. The Social Contract and the Encounters for Updating in Guatemala, as well as the Argentine Dialogue and Agenda Peru, are examples of dialogues with a government agenda, since their scope is limited to that presidential period. That, of course, does not mean that participants were aligned with government policies, but simply that they were acting so that these policies could be of benefit to their sectors, or of general benefit, depending on their objectives.

Dialogues with a government agenda promote partial interests. The government agenda "is that which, based on electoral legitimacy, is promoted by the party or the coalition of winning forces when the new government takes office and, at the same time, it permits the opposition of losing parties by creating an environment of government and opposition parties which opens the window to democratic change" (Solórzano, 1997: 22).

Through these dialogues measures are also taken, with the consent of the political elites, to recover legitimacy and build the conditions necessary for governance, when this is at a disadvantage in spaces such as the Legislative Assembly.

Dialogues with a State agenda, however, aim to achieve national objectives based on the historical dimension of the content of the agenda. An example of a dialogue with a State agenda was Panama 2000, and the Peace Accords between the government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in 1996, which was accompanied by civil society organizations and involved extensive discussion of the topics covered by the accords. Likewise, the Fiscal Pact in this country, which was not successful and failed to be implemented because of the government agenda of the incoming president, Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004).

Generally it is the dialogues with a State agenda that are binding in nature, although the majority of dialogues have experienced difficulties in becoming binding processes. This situation very often affects the interests of some actors, who see these processes as a waste of time and valuable human and material resources, which could be used for another type of actions with greater political impact. However, it is worth looking back to the report of the May 2002 workshop in relation to this point: "Even the most representative and productive dialogue between multiple stakeholders cannot impose its will on those who hold power extra officially...nor can it usurp the authority of properly elected leaders" (UNDP, 2002).

Dialogue experiences

Contrary to general ideas, consensus building in Latin America has been carried out through numerous dialogue processes and social contracts over several decades. Some of these dialogues are related to the brief spaces of democracy that opened up during more participatory governments.

A study by Emilio Morgado identifies the first social contract in the department of Escuintla, Republic of Guatemala, during the revolutionary Government of Arévalo in 1945. This was known as the Triangle of Escuintla.

As can be observed in the annex to this document, the first initiatives –including the Triangle of Escuintla- sought to reach worker-employer agreements; in many cases government mediation was available. The Social Contract during the Government of Serrano Elías was a similar experience which sought to reach an agreement between the labor and entrepreneurial sectors with the participation of two workers' unions, two Federations of cooperatives, the CACIF (the entrepreneurial umbrella organization) and the government.

Intersectoral dialogues have been held recently which have incorporated a broader range of actors than in the past. Some incorporate representatives of civil society organizations, including churches and religious movements, organizations of new social actors such as women and indigenous peoples (seldom do they include young people). There has also been a proliferation of intrasocietal dialogues such as Forum Guatemala and civil society initiatives through the departmental Consensus Building Tables or Committees. So it is possible to hold reflective dialogues without the pressure of continuously negotiating with the government in power.

Methodological aspects

For dialogues to be successful a series of requirements is recommended. Some of these were specified in the document Destination Colombia, although they are valid for any type of dialogue.

- Participants need to be representative: diversity of interests and political and social weight.
- Definition of and compliance with the rules of the game.
- Methodology and facilitator.
- Formal and informal rapprochement between actors.
- A Technical Secretariat should be set up.

In addition to the above, there is a series of methodological aspects related to the dialogue processes which is vital for analyzing this instrument of participation.

Convening dialogues

The entity or individuals responsible for convening the dialogues is a central aspect, an element which could contribute to trust or to a lack of legitimacy for an initiative. It may be necessary to incorporate instruments, concrete procedures, which will make the agreements binding, as well as establish limits to the impact of participants.

In some dialogues the government has been responsible for convening, generally in order to incorporate new ideas and to achieve greater levels of governance, thus preventing possible subsequent tensions. In some dialogue processes an attempt has been made to avoid the authorities being responsible for convening, in order to avoid the process being seen as a government action.

In the case of the WSP the meeting was convened by a think tank, and in Panama 2000 by the political parties. The Vision Guatemala initiative was the result of a joint initiative with the Planning Secretariat of the Presidency (SEGEPLAN), the UNDP and Guatemalan entrepreneurs. But public invitation to this dialogue was the responsibility of seven eminent citizens with different ideological positions, each with considerable drawing power. They made up the group of promoters, who in turn invited 39 influential leaders in the country.

Other dialogue initiatives were convened by the presidents, such as the Social Pact in Guatemala by the President of Guatemala through a presidential decree, the dialogue of the Governance Committee in Peru, which was convened by the President as an initiative of the Prime Minister, and the Argentine dialogue, which, according to Enrique Olivera, "...was launched by the current President of the Republic".

It is also important to identify who is the driving force behind the dialogue process. In the case of Vision Guatemala it was the seven eminent individuals, but in the case of the National Consensus Forum in Guatemala, it was mainly entrepreneurs and politicians. In others it has been the Government which has convened and controlled the process as in the Social Contract, and there are some which have been promoted by international agencies for the purpose of contributing to the strengthening of democracy. In the latter, government backing has been available with the support of technical teams and facilitation for conducting the meetings.

Definition and identification of actors

The definition and identification of actors who participate in the dialogues will depend on the nature of the dialogue, on the agenda, and on the objectives. But furthermore, after the sectorial actors have been defined, the organizations represented should have a good level of representation in their sector, since compliance with commitments acquired for the sector depends on this.

In this context, the actors who have participated in the different dialogues were identified in accordance with the objectives specified right from the beginning. This was aptly presented in the document of Dialogue Peru, which indicated that a dialogue “should reproduce among its members the conflict that needs to be solved”, so that central aspects of the tensions existing in the society be incorporated into the dialogue; in other words the external conflict should be reproduced internally in the dialogue, so the actors involved in the conflict which is the subject of the debate should be represented.

Consequently we can see that the majority of labor related social dialogue initiatives have been set up with three key actors: government, the workers and the private sector. Even though on some occasions the government has not been present, it has encouraged them, such as in the case of the Escuintla Triangle in 1945. In this way social interlocutors have been incorporated into “spheres in which decisions are normally the government’s area of responsibility” (Morgado, 1995: 320).

One of the concerns in the dialogues has been to include the actors, although this concept is focused on by those who promote or facilitate dialogues from two angles: the inclusion of relevant actors in accordance with the issues to be dealt with, as in the case of the WSP, and the inclusion of actors who have been historically marginalized and excluded from political and social participation.

Dialogues aimed at analyzing issues related to subsequent public policy formulation require a higher technical level in the actors.

In the second phase of the WSP, for example, actors connected to the topic under discussion were included from the government and the civil society; it was inclusive to the extent that the stakeholder groups, relevant actors and top authorities who were invited had been involved with the problem under discussion. In the case of generative dialogues for public policies -such as those indicated in the classification proposed by Katrin Käufer- the tendency is to incorporate actors with technical capacity and knowledge of the topics on the agenda, as well as government representatives, especially high ranking ones from the institutions involved in the policy making process.

In the dialogues the participation of actors representing the whole diversity of interests is essential, especially strategic actors, ones who have sufficient resources to destroy a political process.

In the case of Agenda Peru a broad range of actors was invited, including representatives of parties in the congress, the most representative civil society organizations (including the churches and representatives of other dialogue initiatives).

Furthermore, as has been indicated before, dialogues aiming at social contracts in general have incorporated representatives of the workers, entrepreneurs and government. Those which are political in nature are aimed at taking decisions on national affairs and to this extent they have included both strategic actors as well as a wide variety of representatives of civil society organizations, political parties and others. This was the case of Panama 2000 and the National Consensus Forum in Guatemala.

Agenda

The importance of starting off with an already defined agenda, as compared to the participants defining an agenda, has been discussed with the facilitators of dialogue processes, as well as with participating actors. There are arguments in favor of both positions. However the experience of the Social Contract during the government of Serrano Elias in Guatemala, where very broad issues were raised and the identification of a work agenda in accordance with the dialogue being proposed was delayed, leads us consider more carefully whether to launch a process without having defined the topics beforehand, although they should possibly be approved by the participants. It is more logical to develop a process on the basis of an objective and not the other way round.

The way topics on the agenda related to the stakeholders are identified is important. This implies understanding their interests to be able to link them to the thematic needs of the country, a task which can be done during the phase of investigating the possible participating organizations.

Usually the themes developed during dialogue processes are linked to problems in the social and economic fields. In labor agreements topics have been linked to work, economic policy, wages, employment, social demands, and others. Other dialogues have been held with broader thematic areas, dealing with aspects of national problems in different spheres, including aspects of State reform and topics related to democratic governance.

In recent years topics related to the role of the State and new forms of implementing public policies under these new ideological approaches have been broached.

In the case of Agenda Peru, for instance, priorities for Peruvian citizens were related to corruption especially on human rights issues.

Other issues incorporated into dialogue processes have been: privatization, decentralization, fiscal policy and social policy, citizen security, freedom of the press, corruption, macroeconomic policies, land issues, prices, wages, employment and investment.

Methodological procedures

Methodology is also a key aspect, since it will define the rules of the democratic game, and these will be the procedures for establishing participation with equality of opportunities, clear rules and the observance of agreements reached by the majority or by consensus. This means that once the positions have been agreed upon, they should be respected by all, but this is feasible only when the actors have accepted the rules of the game, because this leads to equality of opportunities in the presentation and analysis of proposals, these being reflected in the final agreements.

During the process respect should be maintained for the opinions of others, developing the capacity of participants to open up to other ideas and to broaden their horizons. Thus the importance attributed to having a good facilitator who is impartial, technically capable, and has the ability to direct the participation of individuals and manage situations of tension which may emerge at any time.

Furthermore the facilitators and promoters of the dialogue should not create false expectations about the results expected. Another important challenge will be to achieve a high level of commitment from the actors and to maintain a friendly atmosphere among the participants, trying to strengthen interpersonal relations.

There are several ways of preparing the conditions for facilitating consensuses. In the different dialogue exercises it has been detected that in the first phase it is convenient to carry out initial surveys, to establish the objectives, which can be aimed among other things at: finding a “way out of the crisis in the case of situational dialogues”, identifying and analyzing ways of solving the main problems of the country, justifying economic measures with the backing of strategic actors, and others.

Furthermore for leading and developing the process well it is convenient to have a technical secretariat to provide support throughout the process. In the Social

Contract during the Serrano Elías Government in Guatemala, the absence of technical support was identified in the dialogue process as an aspect to be overcome in other initiatives (interview with Mario Solórzano, 1992). This was implemented by the WSP which had a coordination team and facilitators with technical capacity.

According to the objectives established, key actors are identified who should participate in a dialogue of the kind that one aims to promote. It is a good idea to compare with other actors the relevance of the actors identified.

Awareness rising is also important for convincing the actors selected that they will gain something from the dialogue, and also about the seriousness of the process.

Dialogues generally develop through commissions and working groups, with the representation of a variety of actors related to or knowledgeable about the issues under discussion. In some cases, when the dialogue experiences are political in nature, different types of actors are present. Irrespective of the aim of the dialogues, all have some kind of structure for organizing the work and facilitating agreements or reflections that take place during the process.

There has been some discussion about the need to have a baseline document for deliberations in the dialogues, to use as the basis for incorporating observations which emerge during the discussions, in order to avoid dispersion and the lack of agreements. Dialogues such as the Fiscal Pact, Encounters for Updating, and the WSP in Guatemala, as part of the methodology, have included the presentation of baseline discussion documents for avoiding dispersion in the development of themes and for achieving concrete results.

In the case of the Social Contract of 1991, in Guatemala, there was some inequality observed in the understanding of different actors about the economic social problems of Guatemala, which demonstrated the need for participants to have access to new information. Consequently different presentations were made of different points of view about social and economic issues.

Another important methodological aspect is the significance of revealing or not the deliberations and results of the dialogue process. In this context, different positions have been adopted in the different dialogue processes. For instance, one of the aspects questioned by the Agenda Peru document was the tension between “the necessary privacy of the agreement and the need for transparency”.

For the coordinator of the Social Contract of 1991, a negative factor for demonstrating the transparency of the process was not having a communication strategy and human and material resources for implementing it. The opposite occurred in Panama 2000 where it was considered that the “...participation of journalists responsible for forming public opinion in prior discussions, in the workshops, seminars and meetings, made it possible to create a beneficial public debate” (Solórzano, 1997b).

The diverse experiences of national dialogues in the different countries confirm what Morgado expressed (1995) "...that consensus building is not an easy or spontaneous process and it is not something that is repeated mechanically". The same author suggests that it is probable that "...the consensus building culture –in the short term- fails to be expressed in the signing of formal agreements", but its main expression is in terms of the levels of dialogue and peace that are generated.

Aspects to be improved

The majority of social agreements emerging from dialogue processes have had short lasting effects, corresponding in many cases to transitory short term interests (*Ibid.* 326); they have led to declarations of intent and not to the adoption of concrete commitments by those involved. Neither have verification mechanisms been created to permit follow-up to agreements and the design of a strategy for applying them, whether they are binding or not.

However, intrasocietal initiatives such as the National Consensus Forum have led to the need for subsequent reforms to the Constitution of the Republic and to the Internal Law of the Congress in 1994.

Sometimes opportunities are not taken advantage of because of the lack of vision of the governments with regard to the merits and benefits of the dialogue processes for democratic consolidation. For example, the Dialogue Argentina document indicated that "after the most important national political and sectorial representatives had sat down together to engage in dialogue, having never done this before ..." the occasion was not taken advantage of.

Neither have they usually become transformed into long term plans of action (Dialogue Argentina) with possibilities of execution, because to date there is no formal mechanism for making them binding. However, this has not prevented these civil exercises from having an impact on political processes. This is demonstrated when we observe citizens who participated in different types of dialogues, occupying positions to which they have been elected and even in the Cabinet of the Executive Branch.

In addition to the above, the dialogues have contributed to changes in attitudes and the development of democratic values. Panama 2000 demonstrated the possibility of "...historically opposing political forces, representative sectors of the civil society and the government being able to overcome their differences, prejudices and distrust" (Solórzano). This was a dialogue involving more than just the academic debate and theoretical reflection which has been characteristic of some of the most recent dialogues, and was aimed at building governance out of daily political practice and making concrete decisions which were binding in nature.

According to the experience of the participants in the different dialogues, the main problem identified with regard to these initiatives is in the follow-up. Some people interviewed asked what had happened to the results and recommendations of the dialogues which had produced important results on national issues.

Furthermore, the relevance of keeping the deliberations and agreements resulting from the dialogues secret is being discussed. In some, secrecy was preferred (WSP). However, this has had consequences throughout the process and for the final enforcement of agreements. The lack of knowledge about the process can lead to confusion among citizens; the information which should be transmitted as was mentioned in Dialogue Argentina, is what the process is about, what it aims to achieve and how it is being implemented.

The fact that the process has not been disseminated might lead to the topics developed and the agreements reached not being transferred to the national agendas. So communication is a key element, as it definitely was in the Panama 2000 dialogue, in which the media were included as part of the dialogue process, although not in the Social Contract in Guatemala, in which the coordinator expressed that to a great extent the weakness of this experience was the lack of a communication strategy with the media.

Finally it is important to stress the need to build a culture of dialogue as part of the democratic culture. As Carmelo Angulo pointed out "let the dialogue effort continue for ever and let there be spaces for reflection in the different bodies", that are sustainable and become a routine tool.

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Case studies: methodologies applied to the Panama 2000 and WSP Guatemala dialogues

Panama 2000

Dialogue and negotiation process

Basic elements

- Precise definition of the facilitator's role.
- Formation of the dialogue groups (political parties, civil society, government).
- Transparency in preparation, development and compliance with the agreements.
- Permanent formal and informal consultation on the proposals.

Elements related to the form

- Dissemination with and among actors.
- Work environment and facilities.
- Establishment of the rules of the game accepted by all.

Systemic negotiation model

The methodological model of the process was based on the systemic negotiation model, applying minimum concepts of Easton's systemic analysis.

The cultural forms in which individuals and organized social groups relate to each other and to the established political power.

The central objective of the dialogue and consensus building models in situations of crisis or stability "aim at reducing tensions in the first case; or, in the second case, at influencing a change of cultural patterns in order to strengthen democratic expectations."

Minimum concepts of systemic analysis (Easton):

- Understanding political life as a behavioral system.
- Distinguishing the system from the environment in which it exists and from which it is open to influences.
- The responses, understood as being variations occurring in the structures and processes in the system, which can be used as alternative, constructive or positive efforts by the members of the system to regulate or tackle tension from environmental sources as well as internal from the actors.
- Feedback or the capacity of a system to subsist in the presence of tension is a function of the presence and nature of the information and other influences which envelop its actors and those who take decisions.

Objectives of the model

- To create an atmosphere of trust among the actors, and gradually achieve levels of trust.
- To gradually lessen existing tensions and those which emerge in the future.
- To convert differences into constructive elements.
- To establish a frank dialogue which will make it possible to connect the points on the agenda.

Efficiency of the model

1. Constant measurement of the environment.
2. Dynamic interrelation between demands and results, to be implemented by the UNDP and the support group (facilitators) and constant and permanent feedback.
3. The model operated on the basis of demands presented by the political parties, the civil society and the government. The demands were processed by the support group and the UNDP and later returned to the actors, who modified, approved or rejected them, providing feedback for the process in this way.

Results

- A capacity for rapid reaction to difficulties (tensions) which appear is acquired, suggesting actions to solve them.
- It relaxes the existing levels of tension.

Development of the model

The model is based on the political will of the actors to hold the dialogue and negotiate among themselves in accordance with the objectives they establish, and this is expressed formally and informally throughout the process.

The model should clearly explain the principles which regulate its implementation: the role of the facilitators, the transparency of the process and the shared responsibility in complying with agreements in a context of trust.

An atmosphere of trust where differences are not concealed, but managed and converted into constructive elements for achieving the objectives proposed.

Development of the process: Procedures

First stage: organization

Action-research was implemented (recognition of the intrasocietal atmosphere); the facilitators (support group), the actors and formal and informal mechanisms for interrelation were selected.

Second stage

Two working groups were set up: one with the political parties and another with the civil society. This made it possible to have available a mechanism for formal and informal consultations with the leaders of each social sector or political party and with independent eminent persons recognized as leaders in the country. In formal consultations the different steps to be followed were discussed and approved.

In the case of the Government, more than one working group, the communication channels were defined through Dr. Eduardo Ritter (member of the Support Group), Irene Perurena and the President himself, Ernesto Pérez Balladares.

- The agenda for the meeting was prepared reflecting the demand for the central topic of the dialogue (the Panama Canal).
- The agenda was worked out by the support group and enriched by the opinions of the parties and the civil society.
- The specific methodology for the meeting was discussed for the purpose of envisaging the number of participants there in their own right and the special guests. For this purpose internal rules were developed for the meeting, and these were presented and discussed with the groups of actors (rules of the game).

Third stage:

- Definition of who would convene the Panama 2000 Encounter (it was decided that the political parties would do it).
- Parallel actions for contributing to the success of the Encounter (a briefing workshop).
- Work atmosphere (the Encounter would be in Coronado).

Fourth stage: definition of the communication strategy

- Organization of a special team to design a communication and information campaign for the media specifically and for public opinion.
- Workshops for journalists, meetings with the owners of the media, directors of editorial staff and reporters.
- Design of a publicity campaign for informing the public.
- The support of a special envoy for managing information with the international news agencies.

Fifth stage: organization of the Coronado Encounter

- Methodology of the meeting.
- Selection of a moderator.
- Support documentation.
- Attention to journalists.
- Logistics for achieving an appropriate work environment.

Sixth stage

Subject to the results of the meeting.

Key elements for success

- The creation of a support group for facilitating the whole process. It was a national group of eminent, highly respected persons, with ideological-political pluralism, autonomy and national vision. Their function was to provide legitimacy and confidence to the actors in the process, making it possible to establish a flexible and dynamic relation with the political parties, the civil society and the Government, as well as complying with the function of processing demands, and mediation and organization of the whole process together with the UNDP.
- The presence of the support group gave complete autonomy to the dialogue process in the context of the government and the political and social forces participating.
- The broadening of the civil society and the integration of the journalists' union, association and forum.

WSP: First phase

The central element of the PAR-WSP methodology is the adaptation of the methodology to participatory action-research originally developed in the 1960s and 1970s to adapt to the new social, political and time contexts.

In accordance with the methodology, it is up to the researchers assigned to each working group to adopt a role as co-participants. From there, it is expected that the researchers will play a leading role.

It is the society, the object of the research, which will make the inquiry and reach conclusions, whereas the professional researcher plays the role of “an auxiliary providing encouragement”, unlike the traditional researcher’s role. To achieve the latter, it is necessary to train people in the methodology, so in the case of WSP-G three intensive seminars were held for the team with the central personnel of the project.

Preparatory phase:

The WSP began with a series of activities for understanding the socio-political and economic context of the country, as well as the universe of organizations with which serious work with positive results could be carried out in order to progress with peace and democracy in the country.

1. Revision and analysis of diagnoses of the national reality:

A briefing process and systematic analysis of the documentary information on the national reality, using as a base documents by experts and official documents (government program, etc).

Objective of the diagnosis: to present the social and political context of the country, establishing the characteristics of the current Guatemalan society and the type of experiences suffered during the armed conflict.

2. Identification of important organizations

About 14 organizations were identified and these were visited and informed about the program and its objectives. In the case of sectors which had joint representation, such as the CACIF, the meeting was with the directors, but when they were not united under a representative body, interviews were made with the different groups in the sector, which made the search for consensus more complex, both for defining the sectorial representation in the national group, as well as in relation to the document.

In the majority of sectors it was possible to establish a unified representation, with the exception of the churches and women's organizations.

3. Consultation with organizations and eminent persons in the country on substantive issues

The visits to organizations made it possible to understand members' points of view about critical issues which needed to be dealt with in the WSP dialogue process.

4. Analysis of information and identification of critical points

The opinions given by representatives of the organizations made it possible to have a clearer vision about national problems and to establish critical points on which joint work could be done.

Operational phase of the project

The first step in this phase was the organization of the national project group, defining the number of members, sectors represented, forms of participation, and others.

Level of representation: to consider mechanisms which would allow the national group to reflect and incorporate the resulting social polyphony of the different sectors and the many organizations which exist inside each of these.

The subsequent work of the WSP was done in three assemblies for joint decision making and group work (initially five critical issues or points were identified, but finally four were worked on), in which the critical issues or points identified were discussed during the consultation.

First assembly of the national group

It was decided that during the first meeting of the national group (first assembly) representation would be by sector and not by organization. For this purpose several organizations were grouped together under a single representative. This representative was to speak on behalf of all the organizations in the sector and present consensuses on the central issues of the meeting at the assembly's plenary.

In this first meeting of the national group on January 10 1997:

- The project was formally inaugurated
- The report presented by project coordination was debated and approved: "Guatemala at a Crossroads: 1997".

This document contained an analysis of the postwar challenges and the key points identified.

1. Presentation of the critical issues identified in an assembly with sectorial representatives of the organizations.
2. Approval of the critical issues identified during the consultation.
3. Organizations of four working groups for the four critical issues identified. Each group was responsible for researching the topic in order to agree on operational recommendations.
4. Registration of representatives of organizations in the working groups.

Second assembly of the national group

The second assembly was held half way through the process (June 13 1997). On this occasion the system of sectorial representation was no longer used, instead the direct participation of organizations and institutions was sought in order to "...reflect the wealth in the diversity of ideas, perspectives and positions..." (WSP: 94) existing in the national group.

In this meeting the working groups presented a partial report of the research done by their group with suggestions and recommendations for the following phases of the group work.

Third assembly of the national group

The third and final meeting was held on November 21 1997, for presenting and discussing the results of each working group.

Recommendations of the meeting

- To make efforts to disseminate the conclusions of the groups and have them reach the different actors related to the topic investigated.
- To evaluate the scope of the interactive methodology.
- To set up a follow-up committee for the continuation of the WSP.

In this third meeting dissemination of the results of the Project was recommended, and the establishment of two final working teams: one for making an evaluation of performance and methodology and another for proposing follow-up.

Working groups

As was indicated, the working groups organized themselves around key issues identified during the consultation with organizations and approved during the first assembly of the national group. These working groups were involved in investigating and debating the problem related to the topic.

Participation in the working groups was voluntary and the organizations and institutions were able to send representatives or delegates to the working groups they were interested in.

The level of participation in the groups varied during the investigation process, as well as the organizations involved in the work. So some organizations joined in at different stages in the process and others withdrew, but there was a permanent nucleus of persons and they were the driving force of the group.

A sectorial balance of actors was also maintained, so that discussions could be pluralistic in nature. About 17 sessions were held in 9 months, every two weeks and sometimes once a week. In some groups sub commissions were established for dealing with specific topics.

The direction of group tasks was the responsibility of the facilitator-researcher who supported the groups "...in methodological and substantive aspects of the investigation, identifying inputs, preparing materials, coordinating the sessions... (*Ibid.*: 99).

Each group made joint recommendations on policies related to the group topic, although these were written by the facilitators, who subsequently presented them to the group for approval.

Field work

The activities of the working group took place in the interior of the country, thus reproducing at the local level the interactive experience from the national level. So it was possible to incorporate other opinions and proposals from local actors in relation to the topics of the working groups.

Selection criteria for the localities

- Localities which had been affected by the armed confrontation.
- Relative importance of the issue in the locality.

- Existence of local initiatives for dealing with it.
- Existence of organized groups.
- Existence of some well established local leaders.
- Active community life.
- The will of the most significant actors –municipal authorities, etc- to support and participate in the workshops.
- Presence of international cooperation agencies or projects (*Ibid.*:104).

At the local level a similar activity was used as at the national level when the WSP project started. Exploratory visits were made to understand the context and significance that WSP issues had for local actors. A general diagnosis was made of the problems to be tackled.

The project was presented to the local authorities and the participation of different actors was promoted. Just as with the national experience, problems were identified, prioritized and debated with the methodological support of a facilitator. The work was in groups and plenaries.

Seminar of experts

As a complement to the group work a workshop was held for the purpose of making recommendations for enriching the development of key points. The discussion was held in the working groups on the same topics dealt with in the WSP groups. Each group was directed by a facilitator.

Problems were analyzed in relation to the topics and work agendas were prepared. These were used as recommendations for guiding the group work.

The Accord on the Strengthening of the Civil Power and the Function of the Army in a Democratic Society.

Second phase of the WSP

Issues related to military policy and security in Guatemala were targeted in an effort to make it possible to reorganize the army and its role in a democratic society.

Preparatory phase

Before making the activity public, six working meetings were held with the Ministry of Defense, and the Army finally made a commitment to institutional participation, since this was part of the peace agenda.

There was an academic reflection and a broad and profound dialogue on the complexity of civic-military relations and their impact on the building of democratic institutions, which was privileged terrain.

The coordination between scientific research and politico-social dialogue continued. The dialogue continued for almost two years.

Objectives of the project

- To end the paralysis in the reorganization of the Armed Forces.
- To provide a conceptual framework for democratic security policy.
- To design a security policy for democracy.

Procedure

- Creation of a space for sectorial research extending the debate beyond the traditional limitations of the army context.
- To solve the problem of the absence of civilian human resources in state security, especially in relation to issues within the functional framework of the Army; to have civilian specialists.
- Absence of the political parties, combined with the institutional absence of Congress. Not to invite the parties was a decision taken by the project. However this weakened “the terminal efficacy of the project, in relation to public policy formulation...”
- “Prior experiences –such as WSP Guatemala- without the participation of the governing party but in a more or less active way with the main opposition party, revealed the high risk of a space for debate of neutral intent being perceived as a sphere for rejecting governmental policy”. However the decision was that if not all significant parties were to be there, it was better not to have any present, and this is what happened.

Methodology

Adaptation of the participatory action-research methodology to new social, political and time contexts.

The social actors contributed with their knowledge of the significant topics, and the researchers assisted with the systematization of knowledge, developing specific research aimed at complementing social knowledge and directing the exercise of collective analysis. This is how the traditional barrier between the subject and object of the research was eliminated, converting social actors into subjects of the scientific process and involving academicians in the political processes of social change.

Structure of the program

- a. A coordination team made up of national actors and run by a “figure of consensus”, of public renown, complying with the dual function of facilitating the political dialogue and coordinating the participatory research.
- b. A research team made up of national academicians, responsible for providing methodological support for the work of the PAR, providing the relevant materials and obtaining the necessary information.
- c. A project group made up of high level representatives from the different political and social sectors involved in the problems being analyzed, responsible for approving the general research agenda of the project, supervising the progress of the investigation process, and approving policy recommendations by consensus.
- d. Multisectorial working groups in which the PAR can develop, responsible for making operational recommendations by consensus for the consideration of the project group.

This structure was developed in the following phases:

a. Preparatory Phase:

- Initial evaluation of the viability of the project in terms of political conditions and the existing will.
- Multisectorial consultations aimed at identifying the different sectors involved in the problems being analyzed.
- Identification of the ideal coordination team in terms of credibility and balance.
- Building of confidence in the possibility of a joint effort.

b. Preliminary research phase

- Preparation of an initial report (country document) through an analysis of the sources available, including a consultation process with all the sectors involved, for the purpose of establishing a conceptual framework for the research, and a preliminary diagnosis of the problems.
- Formation of the project group with high level representatives from all the sectors involved, so that after the preliminary report the general conceptual framework and the general agenda can be approved by consensus on the specific topics (intervention points) which would be the object of the PAR in the working groups.
- Identification of the research team in accordance with the topics of the general agenda.
- Formation of the multicultural working groups for each topic identified in the general agenda.

c. Research phase: participatory action

- Identification of the research agenda for each topic incorporating an action plan and a schedule.
- Preparation of a working document containing the specific conceptual framework, and a reading on the different social and political positions in relation to the problems (policy mix/actor mix).
- Analysis, debate, generation of basic consensuses and the formulation of operational recommendations by consensus.

e. Analysis and evaluation phase

- Approval of the policy recommendations.
- Evaluation of the research.
- Formulation of recommendations for follow-up.
- Dissemination of results.

The central actions in this process, in accordance with the stages established by the WSP approach, have been:

Preparatory phase (June-August 1999)

1. Establishment by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), IGEDEP and WSP International of a neutral and independent academic-political platform organized by them, run by a coordination team experienced both in the problems of security sector reform as well as in the application of the WSP approach.
2. Consultations with the different political and social actors for the purpose of guaranteeing the space necessary for developing the project and building the trust necessary.

3. Identification of the different political and social actors directly involved in the topic, and an initial round of consultations on the different perspectives of the problem.

*Preliminary research phase
(September-April 1999)*

1. Preparation of the draft “Bases for considering the military question in Guatemala”, as the conceptual framework for the project and a preliminary diagnosis of the problems of civil-military relations in the country and a discussion inside the project group.
2. Setting up of the project group with 35 social actors, invited on behalf of their institutions and on their own behalf, and multicultural in nature (civilians and military, government and civil society, academicians and politicians), including representatives of the armed forces and retired military, human rights organizations, academic research centers, institutions linked to the former insurgents, and members of the business sector.
3. Identification of the project’s general research agenda, with 5 specific intervention points: a. conceptual framework; b. security concept and agenda; c. military doctrine; d. democratic controls (broken down into reform of the intelligence apparatus, security institutions, and citizen participation); e. military function.
4. Setting up of the multicultural working groups around each of these topics.

*Participatory Action-Research Phase
(May 2000-January 2002 :*

1. Formation of the research team, assigning a researcher or a research team to each working group.
2. Selection of a member from each working group as a moderator for group discussions, and to liaise between the members of the group and the researcher assigned.
3. Preparation by the researcher and approval by the working group of the research agendas and schedules corresponding to each topic.
4. Preparation by the researcher assigned to the group of the corresponding working documents.
5. Development of the research and production of basic consensuses.

Annex 2

Chart: Some experiences of Social Contracts in Latin America since 1945.

Some experiences of social contracts in Latin America since 1945			
Country	Date	Type of dialogue	Results
Guatemala	1945	Triangle of Escuintla Tripartite dialogue	Labor: new labor laws
Mexico	1945	Worker-industrial social contract Trilateral agreement	Measures to promote industrial production and an increase in jobs
Venezuela	1958	Worker-employer agreement	A mechanism for settling collective labor conflicts was established to limit the need for strikes Rules for terminating labor relations were agreed on
Venezuela		Specific social contract Worker-employer agreement	Political agreement Contributed to strengthening the democratic regime after the dictatorship of General Pérez Jimenez
Argentina	1973	National commitment	Establishment of an income and wages policy as part of an anti inflationary policy
Mexico	1977	Alliance for production	Established a wage restraint policy, credit incentives, and a prices and subsidies policy for raising agricultural production of food for popular consumption
Colombia	1981	In the framework of the Intersectorial Tripartite Commission	Adoption of a new Law of Family Subsidies
Mexico	1982	Tripartite agreement on national solidarity	Support for the immediate economic restructuring plan (PIRE) for fighting against inflation
Mexico	1988	Agreement for stability and economic growth (PECE)	Government commitments for balancing public finances, prices, fees for public services, exchange policy and devaluations, new tariffs for imported products, elimination of unnecessary regulations, and others

			Commitments by the entrepreneurial sector: recommend that members not raise prices, recognition of the trade union sector and collective bargaining
Honduras	1985	Commitment signed by the top representatives of the Liberal, Christian Democrat, Innovation and National Unity parties with the confederations and central organizations of workers	Guarantee active participation of workers and peasants organizations in building a democratic, pluralistic and participatory society Facilitate their participation in defining national development objectives and strategies; establish standards of participation co-managed with the workers, peasants and other social sectors in State bodies within their jurisdiction Development by enterprises of workers and of social interest
Uruguay	1985	National consensus on programs between: political parties, trade unions, entrepreneurial organizations and representatives of other social organizations	Halt in the deterioration of wages and pensions Approval by José María Sanguinetti's government of a wage adjustment law; formation of tripartite sectorial commissions to fix minimum wage in over 30 branches of economic activity; strengthening of the system of labor relations
Dominican Republic	1988	Agreement from tripartite dialogue: government, six trade union organizations and business organizations in the National Council of Businessmen Accompaniment from the Catholic Church	Increase in minimum wage, the Christmas bonus, pensions and retirement plans, and others
Brazil	1988	Social commitment for tackling inflation and new economic growth Trilateral agreement	Tripartite participation was agreed on for formulating an emergency anti inflationary program aimed at protecting the purchasing power of income, and others Practically ineffective because of an agreement between the government and entrepreneurial organizations
Venezuela	1989	National agreement	Adopted agreements on fiscal

		Workers, private sector	deficit and budgetary spending, tax reform, foreign debt, exchange policy, trade and industrial policy, prices and social programs State commitment: to direct budgetary resources to contingencies resulting from the adjustment program
Mexico	1990	Pact for stability and economic growth	
Mexico	1992	The previous pact was called the stability, competitiveness and employment pact	
Mexico	1995	Agreement to work together to overcome the economic emergency, between the government, employers' organizations, workers and other social organizations	Agreements on prices and wages: their relation to the creation of permanent jobs, the extension of productive capacity and the attraction of new investments On savings and public spending, credit restrictions, monetary policy and an increase in economic efficiency through the introduction of several measures such as the establishment of the National Council of Small and Medium Enterprises; accelerate the revision of the regulatory framework for eliminating obstacles to business activity and creation of more jobs
Dominican Republic	1990	Tripartite agreement on economic solidarity, but without the participation of the large trade union organizations	Government commitments: to increase pay in the public sector and encourage an increase in the private sector; budgetary balance, monetary, fiscal, exchange, trade and credit policies; fixing prices of goods and services; programs of social and environmental assistance Entrepreneurial commitments: to not raising prices of articles of primary necessity; reintegrating foreign currency from exports, improving labor relations, and others
Argentina	1994	Framework agreement on employment, productivity and	17 clauses of tripartite agreements

	social equity	
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Source: Morgado (1995)