Supporting Syrian approaches to political accommodation
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Overview

Conflict Dynamics International is conducting an initiative to support Syrian actors in developing options that can reconcile competing political interests and thereby help to chart a way forward for Syria.

The types of options at the center of this initiative include ideas for shaping political dialogue processes as well as future governance arrangements. These options focus on accommodating, where possible, the competing political interests that are fueling the ongoing conflict.

Context

Whatever the initial causes of the Syrian crisis, conflict dynamics have evolved due to new factors that must be considered in any attempt to stop the war, which include: the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria as a significant military force; the re-orientation of internal conflict toward fighting between non-State armed groups and Islamist groups as well as between these groups and the Government of Syria; and the deepening cleavages between different communities and ethnic groups as a result of the prolonged and intensely brutal nature of the conflict.

Further, there is a lack of common ground on political solutions between parties to the conflict and influential Syrian groups. In addition, there is a lack of dialogue on future governance arrangements, which has left a significant substantive vacuum in the political domain.

Objectives

The purpose of this initiative is to support Syrians, as well as agreed international mediators, in exploring options for a viable political process and governance arrangements that can contribute to ending the violent conflict and foster national dialogue.

The specific project objectives are:

1. To facilitate a greater understanding of the political interests and socio-cultural needs, as well as an actor map, inside Syria by working with Syrian partner organizations;
2. To support Syrian influencers and interest groups in developing options for political dialogue process and governance arrangements consistent with the Syrian context;
3. To facilitate dialogue within and between Syrian constituencies on options for political accommodation.

The target audience for this initiative include: the Government of Syria and its supporting constituencies; political opposition groups; armed opposition groups; international facilitators/mediators; international/regional organizations; civil society constituencies; and supporting States.

This work is being fed into the mission of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria and other high-level dialogue channels, as well as other international actors.
Methodology
Conflict Dynamics has developed a structured approach for exploring options for political accommodation, which includes:

Four Strands, or focal areas, that relate to political dialogue processes:

- Process design
- Participation
- Implementation modalities
- Confidence building measures

Six Strands, or focal areas, for organizing governance arrangements:

- Political structure
- Electoral system(s)
- Executive
- Legislative branch
- Public participation
- Traditional and customary arrangements

These Strands provide a structure for generating options and for assessing whether those options are capable of accommodating diverse interests.

Working with the political accommodation approach, this initiative guides Syrian constituencies through a 6-step methodology to develop options, which includes systematic analysis of political interests and contextual factors, as well as several rounds of consultation to assess and refine the options.

Project activities and outputs
Activities to support this initiative include:

(A) Individual and small group consultations to discuss political interests, contextual realities, and opportunities for dialogue;

(B) Policy-oriented research, including comparative case study analysis, to provide technical ideas for building and refining options;

(C) Facilitation of workshops or seminars on how to apply the frameworks and tools for political accommodation;

(D) Support of dialogue on options for process and governance within and between Syrian groups, where possible.

This initiative involves working in a neutral and impartial manner with all key constituencies and parties to the conflict in Syria.

To carry out these activities, Conflict Dynamics maintains a regional presence and has partnered with Syrian and international organizations, which includes expert advisory support from Dr. David Lesch and Trinity University (USA).

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