



National Dialogues Conference

The Third Conference on National Dialogues

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Conference Report

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**National Dialogues
Conference**

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Introduction

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, together with a consortium of NGOs consisting of Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), Felm, Finn Church Aid (FCA), and Common Space Initiative (CSI) held the Third Conference on National Dialogues in April 2017 in Helsinki, Finland. This series of conferences provides stakeholders from multiple contexts and practitioners internationally to come together to share their thoughts and experiences on national dialogues. Providing a space for joint reflection and in-depth discussion between the many actors around a shared theme has proven fruitful, and has established the National Dialogue Conference as an international flagship of MFA Finland's peace mediation efforts.

Over the past three decades, national dialogues have become increasingly common worldwide as a mechanism for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The series of National Dialogue Conferences have focused on this thematic widely, with topics ranging from the conceptual to the agencies included. In 2017, the third conference focused on the wider ecosystem of national dialogues: *what happens around dialogue processes, regionally and locally, and how does this affect them?* National dialogues do not take place in isolation, but are intimately affected by the surrounding regional and international environment. Accordingly, national dialogues often assume central roles in transition processes, but they affect and are affected by other national or local processes. The conference aimed to deepen the common understanding in how these dynamics can be disruptive to or supportive of dialogue. National dialogues present a multi-track and multi-sector process with its own ecosystem. This is often both fragile and cumbersome, but nonetheless shows the way towards reconciliation and shared future.

The objective of the National Dialogue Conferences is to contribute to and participate in the wider debate relating to national dialogues, and to create a space for actors working with national dialogues to learn from each other, share experiences and create contacts. In addition, the conferences aim to identify common challenges and develop recommendations for national dialogue processes. The conference series has been favourably received, and the feedback has been encouraging. Information on future offerings will be published on the National Dialogue Conference [website](#).

This report aims to capture the main findings, challenges, applied lessons, and tools from the discussions at the conference. Starting with a summary on the main thematic of the conference as well as a brief reflection on the implementation, sections on the discussions in the individual sessions will follow. Furthermore, the report includes contributions by selected conference speakers to allow for related points of view on the theme, reflection on the two previous conferences, and background research papers that were written for the 2017 conference.¹

¹ The views and opinions represented are a recollection of various rapporteurs from the conference, and do not directly represent the views of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland or the Consortium of NGOs organising the event.



Conclusions from the National Dialogue Conference 2017: Contents and Implementation

The Wider Ecosystem of National Dialogues

The focus area of the National Dialogue Conference 2017 is the wider ecosystem around national dialogues. This section summarises and analyses the main findings of the conference discussions. It starts with scrutinising the local and regional dimensions of the national dialogues and moves on to questions regarding inclusion and women. Finally, the section concludes with the main connections and intersections between the themes.

Local dialogues: from community level consultations towards sustainable results

Including local level actors in national dialogue processes creates hope and empowerment as well as maintains social cohesion. The inclusion of grassroots actors increases the sustainability of results - the solutions are owned by the relevant actors. Local dialogues can also prove useful in situations where the formal process is deadlocked, which has been the case e.g. in Syria. The recommended concrete way to go about local dialogues is to start with communities and gradually expand the dialogues to larger parts of society. However, local consultations cannot happen in isolation, and ways of linking them to the formal national process remains difficult. For example, in Myanmar, due to the lack of political will, the results



of the local level (state-based) dialogues are not fully taken account in the union level dialogues. Systems thinking has been brought up as a potential way to find a solution to this.

Many local dialogues work in secrecy to avoid disturbances from external actors, especially in highly regionalised conflicts such as Syria. One key risk in open/public dialogues, especially at the local level, is attacks by armed actors. If the dialogue process is conducted in secrecy, there might however be risk of elitism as well as a decreased amount of inclusion or contradiction with broader ownership questions. On the other hand, in some instances, less publicity might be key for confidence-building, which is the case in e.g. Ukraine and Syria.

Local dialogues are often closely linked to land-related issues and legislation. For example, both Syria and Myanmar struggle with how to combine governmental legislation with customary rights. In Myanmar, the ethnic minority groups advocate for local governance to ensure their customary land practices. Further, in Syria the division of the power to administrate land between the different level authorities has been suggested as one possible solution to the conflict.

Support from external actors can be useful for local consultations but there are potential risks. It is crucial for external actors to critically assess how they are being informed about the knowledge on the ground and from which quarter their knowledge originates from. Context-specific dynamics between centres and peripheries are essential: people in big cities often know how to deal with external actors and NGOs and what language to use to get their views across, which might not be the case with rural communities or marginalised ethnic minorities. As an example, even though the Central African Republic national dialogue process can be considered a success in many ways, it can also serve as a cautionary example since many support actors in the process based their work on inadequate analysis of the conflict, which resulted in enforcement of a myth about a religious conflict.

Without unity of purpose well-meaning support by several actors may result in harmful outcomes. It is important for a support actor to acknowledge that sometimes it is better to withdraw and practise self-critique. Support actors should continuously ask the local stakeholders about their trust, and if it is lost, those actors should be humble enough to walk away. Additionally, even support for efforts that are not directly linked to peace and mediation, such as education and capacity-building for women, youth and minorities, can fortify local participation in national processes.

Regional actors in national dialogues: from non-interference towards non-indifference

Modern conflicts inevitably include a regional impact, thus consequently, also the solutions must be region-wide. Regional actors can assist in bringing the opposing sides of the conflict around the same table and push them to an agreement paving the way for a national dialogue.

The Middle-Eastern crisis has been contributed to the application of regionalism on a broader scale than before, and it is beyond doubt that a sustainable solution to the crisis must have a strong regional dimension. The concept of the Peace of Westphalia has been suggested to serve as a source of adaptable solutions for the Middle East. Syria in particular has become an arena of international and regional actors, and the decision for peace is not in the hands of



Syrians anymore. The inevitably required regional solution must also consider global norms, but it is important not to fall into the trap of Eurocentrism in defining them.

Regional actors should always strive to understand and appreciate local context and knowledge, which comes down to time, resources, and as political will. Experience of several national dialogues or peace processes can be a significant asset of regional actors, but it is crucial to note that not everything is transferrable. Additionally, regional actors should coordinate their engagements in line with the principle of subsidiarity. Examples of this are the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities.

A significant challenge in linking regional actors to national dialogue processes is the regional actors' own political and economic interest also being at stake. To avoid this, dependency on regional actors should be diminished to ensure national ownership. However, regional organizations hold a critical responsibility to respond to emerging crises, be it by facilitating national dialogue or other means. There is a need for a policy shift from non-interference towards "non-indifference".

Women, youth and ethnic minorities: from "whom to include" towards "how to include"

There is a great need for genuine inclusion in peace efforts, and not only in rhetoric, numbers, official goals, or principles. Meaningful inclusion of diverse interests and groups, i.e. women or national minorities, that have been traditionally excluded from the decision-making, broadens the agenda of discussion, widens the scope for solutions and addresses potential spoilers. Inclusion imposed by external actors in a peace process can be a start, but the results are unlikely to be sustainable without national buy-in. The thinking should be shifted from "whom to include" towards "how to include". To avoid losing the achievements for political plurality after the formal process has ended, follow-up on inclusion aspects should be included from the early stages of process design.

The need to continually having to justify their participation in dialogue processes is a key challenge for commonly excluded groups such as women, youth, and ethnic minorities. These challenges are deeply rooted in cultural norms, existing power structures and related underlying conceptions of certain groups: politics, war, and peace are often regarded as domains for older men.

Intergenerational differences need attention, as clearly demonstrated by the youth-driven uprisings in the Arab world. A "whole of society" approach may offer a broader analytical frame than a conceptually narrower emphasis on, for instance, youth inclusion. Instead of waiting to be invited, youth groups have frequently created their own space for dialogue and with creative methods, which could be leveraged in creating and evolving instruments of national dialogue.

A key advantage of national dialogues is the prospect of including actors who are central in the conflict but with whom formal actors are unable to deal with for political reasons. The exclusion of Taliban from the negotiation table in Afghanistan serves as an example of what can happen when one of the main conflict parties is not included in the peace process. Legitimacy suffers irrespective of whether the excluded actor is concerned radical.



To carry out an inclusive national dialogue process, all relevant stakeholders should be involved throughout the process. In Afghanistan, the response was to convene the *loya jirga*, the traditional method to deal with national crises, in which a key area of concern was to include the diversity of views regarding the conflict. Traditional practices, if correctly used, can indeed be advantageous for inclusion. Also, customary land practices can serve as toolboxes for inclusive solutions to land issues. For instance, in Myanmar and Syria land issues are so deeply embedded in the conflict that they need to be closely integrated in the peace processes. However, many traditional systems are extremely patriarchal, and therefore a recommendation is hybrid systems combining modern government-based and inclusive laws with traditional ones.

Different societal groups based on e.g. gender, ethnicity or religion should not be treated as homogenous. The differences within and the intersections of different groups are essential for the dynamics of the dialogues. An illustrative example is the ways in which women from ethnic minorities often suffer from conflict differently than women of the majority groups, as is the case of sexual violence in Myanmar. Experiences of the conflict vary, and it is essential for leaders to acknowledge this and have the different perceptions of history as a basis for dialogue and subsequently for compromise. For peace to be inclusive and sustainable, common elements from the past should be found. Most importantly, the various parties of a conflict as well as the various groups that experience the conflict in different ways need to learn how to listen to the other's narrative. Also, in the light of different narratives and the weight of history, important questions to ask are who has the right or the power to include, and who is in turn included.

Participation of women: from corridors towards the front row

Persistence, activism, and struggle have been prerequisites for change in promoting women's participation in national dialogues. For instance, in Yemen women's participation in the National Dialogue Conference in Sana'a was result of courageous activism. But even after changes for the better have been made, there is always a risk of losing the gains made. E.g. in the Central African Republic, the leadership positions gained by women were given back to male power holders after the presidency of H.E. Mme Catherine Samba-Panza. Therefore, follow-up of the inclusion and gender elements on the peace processes should be incorporated from the start so as not to lose the valuable achievements, nor to establish only a cosmetic inclusion.

Ways hitherto used to enhance women's participation include e.g. women's networks and coalitions such as the Women's Advisory Board in Syria, and mutual support among women. The use of quotas can serve as a valuable basis, but the objective should be raised from the typical (and somewhat arbitrary) 30% to 50%. Additionally, the role of individuals serving as significant actors in peace processes can create hope and give inspiring examples for women elsewhere. This has been especially relevant in the case of H.E. Mme President Samba-Panza.

It is highly problematic that the principal way for women to get their concerns across in national or regional processes is through informal channels. The role of women in conflicts and subsequent peace processes is still often the background actor or the victim, especially in the case of younger women. In response to this, for example in Myanmar, the key to



enhancing participation possibilities for women could be to shift the scope of the dialogue away from the military towards the political.

In the conference, women and regional dynamics were not prominently discussed in the same session, whereas local dynamics were highly linked to themes of gender and inclusion. This further reflects how the perceived societal position of women remains at the level of the family and local community and grassroots level instead of the formal, international, regional, or even national processes. Women should be recognised as political actors rather than being treated as a homogenous group. Additionally, the deep-rooted custom of women discussing only “soft” or so called “women’s issues”, i.e. community-level themes, should be done away with. This would be in line with the broader requirement to take note of the quality of aspects of inclusion, not only their quantity.



Conclusions

The key to a successful approach on the implementation of national dialogues is to combine in-depth understanding of local context, and, if suitable, adopt best practices from elsewhere. Coordination, interaction, interconnectedness, and complementarity of dialogues is essential – locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally.

The dialogues at different levels can take diverse roles but all benefit from each other. National-level processes and the support of regional actors provide the overall peace process with the legitimacy and formality it needs for the impact to be substantial and durable. On the other hand, local dialogues are particularly important in terms of inclusion and ownership, which in turn are deeply interconnected: talking about national ownership in cases where the extent of inclusion has been low is false. Ownership solely by the middle-aged male population is not genuinely national ownership. Inclusion and ownership are at the core of the advantages of using national dialogues as a method for peace. They were also among the most used words when conference participants were asked to describe national dialogues as can be seen in the



Finally, there is a visible need for simultaneous dialogues at various levels. However, separate platforms for different level actors are recommended, since despite their interconnections and demand for complementarity, the conflict dynamics are not the same at different levels. It is therefore crucial that there is coordination, “dialogue between dialogues” – that is, that these different-level dialogues or formal/informal dialogues interact and recognise their respective justifications for existence.



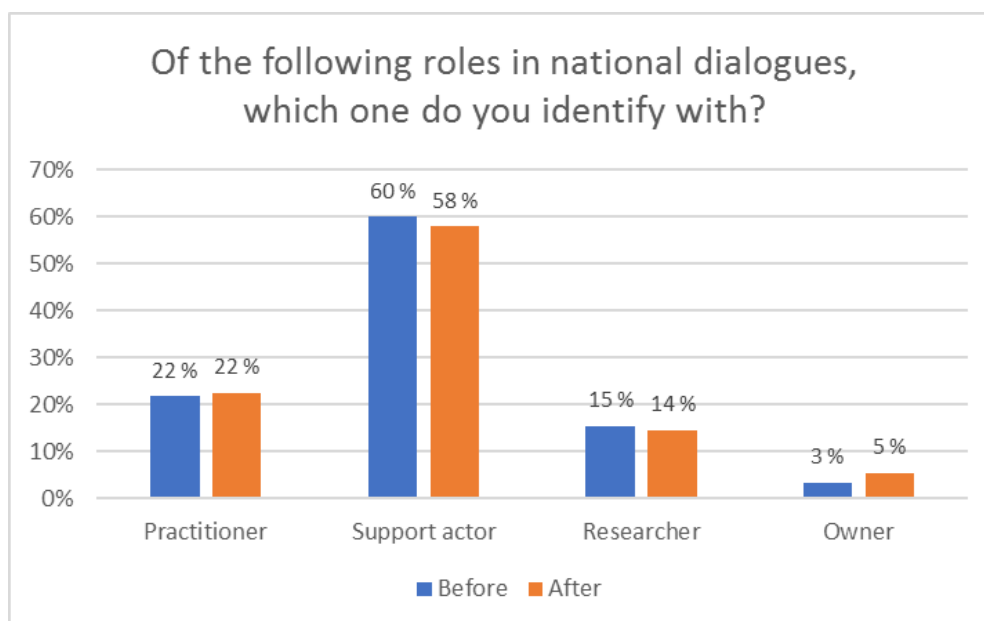
1. Word cloud based on conference participants' responses on "What three words would you use to describe national dialogues?"

National Dialogue Conferences: a series to support theory and practice

The series of National Dialogue Conferences aim for the creation of a vibrant space for open discussion, as well as enabling a space for stakeholders, experts, and analysts together to share both successes and challenges. A range of thinking has been put behind achieving this both methodologically as well as in practical features throughout the event. The equilibrium of theory and practice are the core aim of the conference. Additionally, after three successful gatherings, the event has authorised its role as a forum for networking and inspiration for participants. In this section, we will highlight some elements that were considered in the modus of the conference in 2017.

Participation

The mentioned objective of bringing together a broad range of stakeholders and practitioners is a relatively easy task. Enabling and supporting invigorating and inspiring discussion throughout is far harder, and has a lot to do with the right mix of attendance. In 2017, variety in participation was specifically aimed for by balancing the invited groups. Emphasis on support actors is apparent in the figure below (figure 2), and raises the question of whom the event is aimed at. Here the question of identification should to an extent also be raised, as varied division between identifying, i.e. as Owner/Practitioner, can in some cases exist.



2. Conference participants' responses to "Of the following roles in national dialogues, which one do you identify with?"



Overall, what can be said about participation in NDC 2017 is, that although the aim of the event is to broadly serve multiple audiences, support actors as a group are highlighted in participation. Nevertheless, emphases on specific attendant groups shouldn't prevent a variety of perspectives from being voiced and heard. This variety of views is clearly visible in the word cloud representing participants' views on what national dialogues evokes as a concept (figure 1). All in all, a mix of definitions could be raised from the variation, and this would certainly benefit future thinking.

An integrated approach on gender

In 2017, specific attention was paid to integrating gender into the conference both thematically and in practical measures. Rather than discussing questions relating to gender and inclusion in a separate session, the inquiry is systematically integrated in all aspects of the conference: starting from the conference objectives, results, agenda, to participant identification, set-up, and reporting.

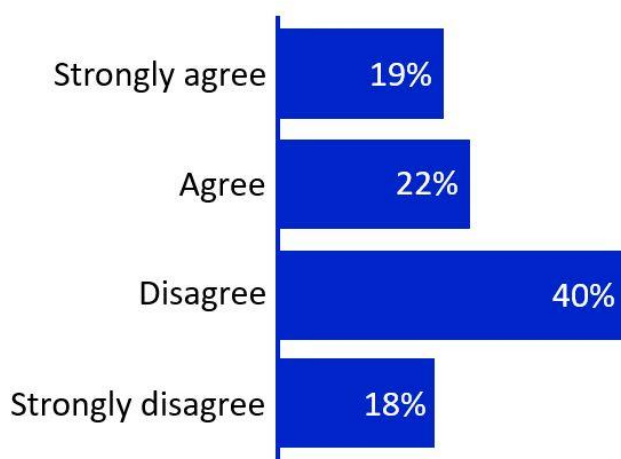
Thematically gender appeared in all sessions and regarding participation, the gender balance was 50% female and 50% male. Future development on this matter could include more balanced panels regarding the participants' gender, thematic focus notwithstanding. Challenges in achieving a balanced approach to gender still pertain, as data collected from the conference revealed. A thought-provoking, but unfortunately not completely surprising, finding was the decrease in the amount of men in the audience the more women and gender were highlighted thematically.



Breaking the traditional event structure

The National Dialogues Conference 2017 was organised with specific attention to participant experience. This was perceived as key to an interactive and thought-inducing event. Organisation of the conference was supported by *Inforglobe* software and consulting house through data collection and analysis, and *Miltton* marketing group through visual design. Live polling conducted on both days, and through pre-conference and exit questionnaires, as well as technical solutions were used to create a dynamic experience, where the composition of the attendance and the feedback received were considered in highlighting various themes. An example below (figure 3) is the live polling done on the emphasis of ownership versus effectiveness, with the amount of variation stirring lively discussions among the participants.

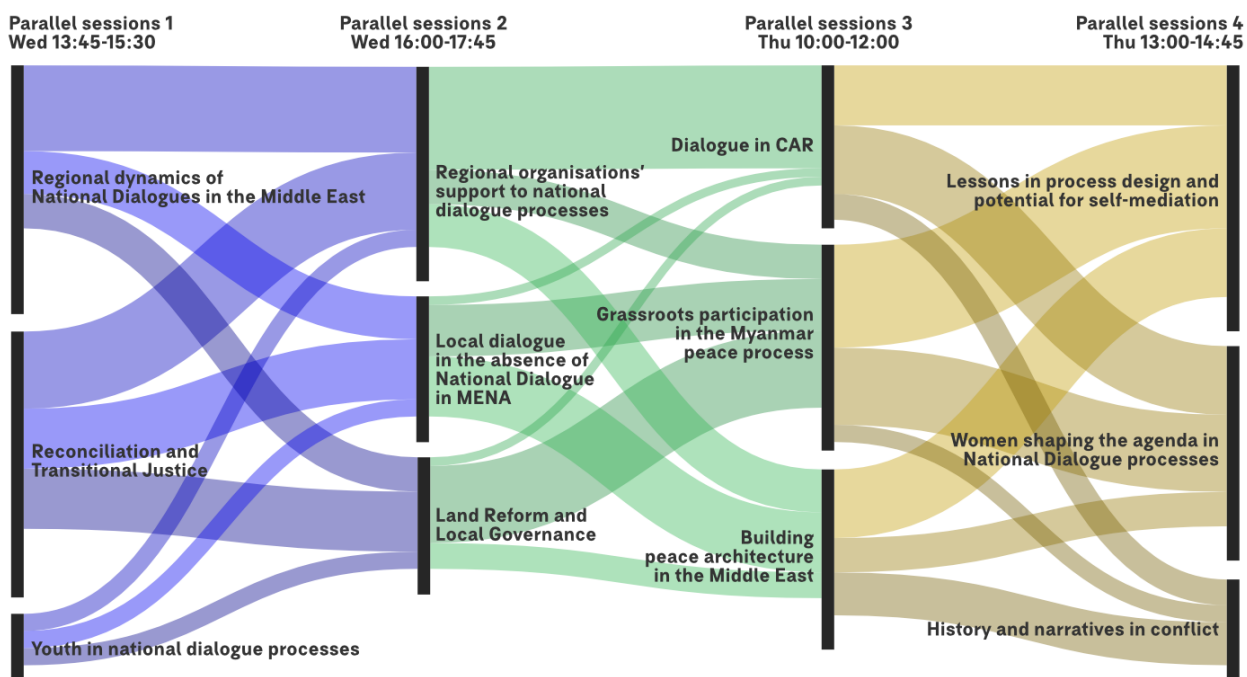
Ownership is too often emphasised over effectiveness in national dialogues?



3. Live-polling on the emphasis of ownership versus effectiveness

Moreover, data collected from the event reveals a certain tribal approach to the theme. As seen in the diagram (figure 4) below, different thematic paths chosen by participants throughout the two days signal the resurgence of tribes gravitating towards certain paths under the umbrella of national dialogues. The conference is engineered to serve various interests and angles, a goal certainly achieved, however one must be mindful of the forming of different 'tribes' inside a shared field. The risk here is the lack of interaction between these groups, focusing only on a specific reality with the narratives on national dialogues diverging. As so often in practice, parallel structures and narratives can at times turn harmful. Embracing diversity inside the thematic is a positive foundation for a broad and active field. Nevertheless, the need for drawing narratives somehow nearer cannot be overlooked or dismissed.





4. Participation in parallel sessions illustrating the different thematic paths taken by conference participants

All in all, the consideration of interactivity in the context of the event is not only seen as an initiator of discussion, but also supporting the observation of various dynamics and ensembles appearing inside the field.



Communication – Serving the wider audience while protecting a discreet space

Often the creation of open and frank spaces doesn't combine well with openness and outward communication. Nevertheless, the positive attention created by the series of National Dialogue Conferences has shined a light on the thematic and increasingly highlighted the event, particularly in Finland. Media coverage, both among traditional and social media outlets, has increased at each event with an agreement on the benefits of informing wider audiences of positives and challenges among the thematic. This also helps in situating national dialogues within the wider peacebuilding community and range of themes. Communication of successes and challenges relating to national dialogues is certainly healthy for the continuing discussion among the field, but also for introducing the topic and communicating this important work to wider audiences.²



² That is, during the *Women Shaping the Agenda* session 33 messages were posted live on the social media forum Twitter, and two of the session panelists were interviewed by YLE public radio and by the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper. On the first day of the conference, the official #nationaldialogues trended as one of the top mentions from Finland on Twitter.



National Dialogue Conference 2017: Sessions

Leadership for Change: Experiences from Namibia

Namibia's independence and peace process has been widely regarded as a success story and this experience was reflected on by two former Presidents and friends of Namibia, Martti Ahtisaari and Lucas Hifikepunye Pohamba. The outcome, is, according to President Lucas Hifikepunye Pohamba, a working democratic political system, freedom of speech for all, and a society that values the expression of different opinions. Several elements from the Namibian experience can also be valuable examples for national dialogues.



There was relative consensus among the international community about Namibia's right and need for independence, which the country finally gained in 1990. The support was visible in the form of broad international support, which proved to be valuable for the overall process. The humanitarian assistance received from the Nordic countries was also appreciated. Even in national dialogues, both support from outside actors and humanitarian assistance can importantly facilitate the process.

In transition processes receiving external support, there are always people who oppose the support actors, as was the case with Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) in Namibia. Therefore, the support actors, trusting that they have a mandate and support from the key parties, must in some situations be, as President Ahtisaari said, "stubborn as mules" in working for peace.

In his work with Namibia in New York, President Ahtisaari, for some time, held two positions. He was commissioner for Namibia, and the Secretary of the United Nations Council for Namibia. The staff was divided into two groups as well. This reflects the rather curious ways in which diplomacy sometimes works; however, maintaining a dialogical connection with all sides was essential in those circumstances.

Even though South African representatives aimed to delay the independence process, President Ahtisaari had no choice but to deal with them. However, he saw that if he got the South Africans to cooperate when the Cubans leave Angola, there would not only positive prospects for Namibia, but also for a gradual change in South Africa. Indeed, when the Cubans left, the situation started to improve, and Namibia was "the key to get the car that is South Africa moving". The way Namibia was governed after gaining independence made South Africa run out of excuses and worked as a catalyst for their democratization process.



Presidents Pohamba and Ahtisaari described the moment they met in Tanzania as friendship at first sight. The Namibian experience is an image of what can be achieved through strong and sensible leadership, and especially through respect and friendship between key individuals. This can be one of the leading forces in broader societal change, also in national dialogues. Even though sustainable results from national dialogues require joint effort, also personal chemistry and mutual respect between different parties might lead to eyes opening to the alternative perspectives and reaching common understanding. It is however important to note that nothing is agreed before everything is agreed. The aim of this is to avoid parties withdrawing from the process once their own goals have been achieved.

As in all transition processes, aspiring to understand other perceptions, forgiving and being able to cooperate is challenging, but being serious with the will to find a solution is key. In the broader sense, as emphasised by President Pohamba, the people of Namibia and of South Africa have a lot in common. For instance, Afrikaans is spoken on both sides of the border, and the Bantustan system was applied on both sides. Within Namibia, having the different groups of people present discussing together the future of the country was difficult at the beginning. But there was strong commitment to reconciliation and inclusion. The key way in which Namibia could see above the differences and past resentments was concentrating on and communicating what they have in common: that they are all Namibians.

High-level Panel: Regional Dynamics, Political Leadership, and Complexity

The panel discussion revolved around the environment in which conflict resolution and national dialogue processes take place, with recognition of all the levels – local, national, regional, and global – that have an influence on the efforts. It was noted that two-thirds of all two-sided civil wars are resolved, while the fragmented ones are more complicated – in the latter, the distribution of power is often asymmetric. The Cold War setting is being renewed, with a number of stalemates such as Syria and Crimea.

The question of leadership under positive and negative regional pressures and dynamics was at the centre of attention. It was noted that leaders had failed in prediction, despite the analysis available. The fall of Mosul and ISIS control were not foreseen, nor was the sudden increase in migration to Europe, and there were no efforts to prevent them in spite of predictions. Reactions that came after were in the most part not constructive, and when they were, the leaders in question paid a heavy price. Prediction, prevention, management, and resolution are all necessary.





In the case of Ukraine, if one looks at the actions by Russia then, there were clear signs of what was to come already in 2010. As a first step, there must be political leadership at the national level, and a national consensus on strategic issues for the country. Chief Security Officers and citizens must be involved and back this process. A well-developed communication strategy can enable their involvement. The people in areas not controlled by the state should be made to feel that they still belong to Ukraine, and dialogue and listening are important in this field. Leadership is key to capacity building and structures, institutions as well as conflict prevention and resolution. However, people-to-people diplomacy should also play a role. The international sphere is crucial for the complete solution for Ukraine, but national level efforts are key as the ties between citizens are weakening. International organisations support important dialogue efforts.

The need for a long-term vision is clear. The position of High Commissioner of the OSCE was in fact a conflict prevention instrument, and quiet diplomacy was at its core. However, external actors meet the constraint of national sovereignty and it becomes a challenge to convince actors that something is in their own interest. At the OSCE, staff have worked on building states and nations in many countries, and it seems necessary to accept the existence of different narratives of history within one nation. Leaders should allow for this, and for compromise. It was pointed out that forecasting is difficult – still, more effort should be put into prevention.

During the session, several points were made concerning Africa and the African Union (AU). Firstly, in terms of leadership over the past 20 years, the continent has developed robust norms and instruments. The norms mean holding leaders accountable for governance, peace, and security questions. Secondly, in the case of the Gambia, the electoral crisis led to repercussions beyond the country. From the AU viewpoint, the will of the people had to be



respected, and military force was used to back mediation efforts, which led to results. Thirdly, the AU has high-level mediation efforts, but also military peacemaking as in the cases of Boko Haram, the coalition against the LRA and against al-Shabaab in Somalia. These entail robust regional solutions to national problems. The military can be used to soften the situation towards mediation. Fourthly, NATO's role in Libya was perceived as a failure of leadership: compliance was not reached through the positions of the AU, the UN, and the League of Arab States (LAS). Libya used to have the highest GDP in Africa, but is now a failed state with strong Al-Qaeda and ISIS presence, and the whole Sahel is under pressure by these groups. Fifth, leadership requires unity, which is often absent. This is the case for example in Syria, since the United Nations Security Council resolution will be vetoed. Humility is needed for these problems to be addressed.

The relationship between political will and leadership, and the development of a long-term vision were further discussed. The Gambia and P5+1 with Iran were singled out as successes, while cases such as Syria, Yemen and South Sudan were raised as cases where it is too early to talk about a long-term vision in the absence of the political will for a settlement. In the latter cases, the bloodshed should first be stopped, whereas vision-building can wait until after that. On the other hand, it had to be acknowledged that temporary arrangements can create permanent divisions, which become frozen. When this happens, decisions need to be made regarding the possible re-unification. In many cases, if a crisis or situation is not in the headlines, it is not taken seriously or considered urgent. In these cases summits can be held, but they do not lead to implementation.

It was pointed out that the international community was slow to react in the case of Ukraine, despite many predictions. In a region with various fragile situations, early warning and response systems are important to foresee problems. This in turn requires field staff, and a peace index at national level. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has a key lesson to learn from Ukraine: at the beginning of the crisis the Chairman of the OSCE was from Ukraine, and we can now see that joint leadership is needed, since this position is so central. In Ukraine, some issues must be solved locally, since from there the view is always different than from the capital, and the grievances are different. Solutions must highlight commonalities between the groups and show the benefits of ongoing mediation.

Early response is not always the problem in the AU, since sometimes it is known that something is going to happen, for example in Rwanda in 1994 and in Libya in 2011. We were aware of Gaddafi's failings: the LAS agreed to a no-fly zone but not to regime change, whereas NATO removed Gaddafi from power and walked away. The migration crisis is one consequence of this. We need to learn to listen to each other.

Ways to improve the highest-level leadership of the UN were also discussed. As the Security Council was (and is) deadlocked on several conflicts, it was said that their failure reflects a return of some form of Cold War. Others highlighted the need for a rapid international conflict management mechanism, which would complement a similar one at national level. Currently these systems are not effective. Yet another comment suggested that the high-level leadership is in fact proactive, and prevention is high on the agenda. However, the success stories should be better promoted to emphasise the dividends. UN effectiveness does require rebuilding, and this should focus not only on the military but should also include people who understand politics and state-building.



The abuse of the veto power was perceived as a structural challenge, but some suggested that it will not be resolved in the following several decades – this is because those who have it will hold on to it, leading to tragedies such as Syria. Despite all the recent events, nothing concrete will come out. The question is how to confront this problem: Kofi Annan aimed for reform in 2005, but without results. UN vetoes have been impediments in the past, e.g. in the cases of Namibian and South African independence. In some mediation cases, even at this level, humility is required and we need to be able to say that we don't know – otherwise the process goes wrong. Also in the Ukrainian case, the main obstacle was UN vetoes. This is a structural problem, and leads to deadlocked situations. The same applies to the OSCE, where at present solutions cannot be implemented. Discussion is required on how to break this impasse.

On the Libya case, efforts by the AU, the UN and the LAS were ongoing to pull the country from the current cycle. A roadmap has been agreed on to foster reconciliation – including reconciliation between regions, in order to avoid rifts. Reconciliation is a valuable tool in preventing the break-up of countries into regions. The question is how to generate interest required for a robust reconciliation process, that covers the different centres of power and many militias. Importantly, one must convince externals that their strategies must be in the interest of Libyans and of the region. In the case of Ukraine, the crucial thing was to convince all citizens that they are part of Ukraine. It was suggested that many so-called root causes such as language and regions were artificial inventions by Russia, with the aim to exploit and destabilise. It was also noted that a country cannot be run from the East or from the West, but it needs to be united – and this requires dealing with diversity. In places such as Syria and Ukraine, there is a real need for a national dialogue out of the limelight, as confidence building is a pre-requisite for success, and it takes time.

Regarding local ownership and its relation to effectiveness, one view was that national dialogues are very complicated, and while local ownership is important there might be a need for outside help to reach results. The case of Yemen was inclusive, transparent, and reached an agreement – and still led to intervention and failure. National dialogues should be considered as only one part of the conflict resolution process. It is not the solution in itself, as other elements are also needed. Importantly however, external help for the people in-country must be genuine as they strive for solutions. Another comment highlighted the need for interaction between the national, regional, and international levels. Also, it was noted that the lack of sufficient ownership will lead to problems with implementation.

In the AU, national dialogues are often perceived primarily via national ownership. The important question is how to reach a social contract that binds the people and the state. This was key in South Sudan, for example. Effectiveness can also be a question of longevity. In some cases, we need to frankly question ourselves on how we got it so wrong.

In Ukraine, ready-made models from outside the context had been presented, but the situation is changing. The key is to combine in-depth understanding of local context, and, if suitable, adopt best practices from elsewhere. Others agreed that while every conflict is unique, there are still lessons to be learned. In some cases, high-level persons present a recipe that doesn't work, for example the failed case of trying to apply lessons from Northern Ireland to the Middle East conflict. In other cases, you need to benefit from the best practices, such as the case of implementing a national reconciliation process in Iraq (initially rejected by Iraqis). We should



also learn from how the Colombian civil society was prepared for the peace process. Finally, an important issue was raised from the African context regarding the space available for local decisions on the course of reconciliation processes. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela had all the space he wanted. In South Sudan, where one key question is between retributive justice and a reconciliation process, such leeway is not currently available. The question of amnesty is a major one, and we need to recognise that we operate in a limited environment.

High-level Panel: Activating the Local Level Potential for National Processes

The panel expressed a risk-oriented approach concerning the potential for local level actors to participate in and influence national dialogues. It identified several common traps in local level participation, gave valuable examples to learn from and offered solutions for how to avoid these risks. Ensuring local level participation was addressed through the inclusion prism as well as specifically from the point of view of external or support actors.

Various support actor roles were touched upon, but the government point of view was emphasised. A key area of concern for governments who wish to support enabling local participation is concrete work in capacity building, especially in the case of women, youth, and minorities. It was emphasised that the donor should aim for being on the side of the weakest party. The support does not directly need to have to do with peace and mediation efforts. Other actions, such as supporting education, can be strongly linked to fortifying local level participation in national processes.

The panel addressed the question of how local processes in need of external support deal with situations in which support comes from too many actors. Even if the intentions were good the support can result in harmful outcomes, and in these cases the support actor must be held accountable for its actions. It is important for a support actor to acknowledge that sometimes it is better to withdraw and practice self-critique in the light of the overall picture of the situation on the ground. Methods for knowing when the support or assistance is not wanted include continuous asking whether the stakeholders trust the support actors and being humble enough to walk away in the case of lack of trust. Situations like this can be a valuable opportunity for the external actor to reflect the process and learn what went wrong since. After all, the peace processes and national dialogues are not about the supporting actors.



To avoid the culmination of a clash of interests between the external actors, it was noted that more important than the mere number of supporters is their unity of purpose, since competing visions and objectives among the supporters carry significant risks. The competition between different support actors was openly admitted, but the situation could be enhanced by international coordination. A suggested solution involves identifying the strengths of the different actors and discovering ways in which the whole can become greater than the sum of its parts through applying the principles of complementarity, coordination, and cooperation.

Several common pitfalls were identified in local level activation and inclusion processes. Once such clear-cut danger that is always present in questions dealing with themes of political processes is corruption. This is especially important to bear in mind in the participant selection process for local consultations. Another common pitfall is the connection between the local level and the formal processes on higher levels. Local consultations can be a waste of time if they take place in isolation and are not taken seriously. Additionally, feedback from the local level actors to the higher levels is very important.

Following this theme, the will to incorporate grassroots participation elements to the national dialogue process needs to be genuine for the cooperation to be fruitful, which implies focus on proper process design. Furthermore, the actual formulation process of the agreements and results of the dialogue processes were seen as possibly risky. There have been challenges in balancing between the constitutional advisers and keeping the agreement close to its audience. Therefore, uncomplicated text is preferred. The constitutional advisers should serve as expressly advisers, and not be given an excessively large role.

Questions concerning dialogue with armed or radical groups polarise opinions and thus form significant traps. According to the panel, dialogue – even with groups that have been labelled extremists – makes sense, and contributes to the greater good. However, one must be mindful of the constraints. The question of formal and informal dialogues is at the heart of this conversation, since NGOs may have the capacity to deal with groups that formal actors such as the UN cannot be in contact with for political reasons. The panel raised the experiences with the Taliban in Afghanistan as an example of what can happen when one of the main parties in the conflict is not brought to the table. The legitimacy of the process suffers irrespective of whether it is concerned a radical actor. The panel advocated the research approach instead of making assumptions about radical actors, especially their willingness to conduct dialogues.

Finally, inclusion issues were established as a trap in problems with dialogue at the local level. This was addressed in the context of the dilemma between tribal and modern civil societies as well as gender dynamics. The ever-evolving tribal identities are challenging to get a grasp of unless you have spent a very long time in the area. It is not uncommon for external support actors to fall into the trap of conforming to the people in the capitals who claim that all problems stem from the tribes. People in capitals and big cities know how to deal with external actors and NGOs, and what language to use to get their views across. This might not be the case with tribal groups. Therefore, it is crucial for external actors to critically assess how they are being informed about the knowledge on the ground and from which quarter their knowledge originates from.



Apart from armed actors and tribes, the approach of asking questions instead of making assumptions is extremely relevant in gender issues. Taking this one step further, an even more inclusive way to go about these questions is creating spaces for the actors to get their voices across, since even the formulation of questions is use of power. The panel stressed that this is especially relevant for women's participation, as the ones probably asking the questions might have no idea of the extent of expertise women carry with them after having been fighting the same barriers their whole lives. Therefore, it is expedient to instead of just asking women's views, create spaces for the women themselves to get to construct the agendas. This evolves further to the fundamental questions of inclusion: who has the power to determine whom to include, and who is included merely for appearances?

What is needed to reach inclusion in national dialogue processes is all relevant stakeholders from a broad range on the spectrum, and from the different stages of conflict. In Afghanistan, the response to this call was the *loya jirga*, the traditional method to deal with national crises, in which a key area of concern was to include the diversity of views regarding the conflict. It was also noted that one single person representing a certain view or group is not necessarily enough, and that the innovative use of for example social media could be an answer to this issue.

Incorporating local dynamics into discussions about national processes sheds light on the inadequacy of peace processes in reflecting the actual degree of complexity of conflict and society. To avoid this in the future, the panel recommended thorough research and asking earnest questions as well as creating new spaces for dialogue through an open-minded outlook on groups often ignored or underrated by formal processes such as tribes, women, and even radical groups. In terms of support actors, unity of purpose and cooperation were strongly advocated, but this can only be reached via lowering the barriers of competition and working hard together. There is immense potential in local participation in national processes. Moreover, many examples from history show that genuine and broad public support for a peace process can only be achieved through local participation.

Session A: Regional Dynamics of National Dialogues in the Middle East

Main themes of the session include the sustainability and women's inclusion perspectives on national dialogues as well as the changes in the political order of the Middle East. Another key focus was the different regional actors, their incentives, and their influence on national dialogues and political processes.

The shifts in the regional balance of power since the 1980s underlie the current dynamics in the Middle East. Egypt's diminished influence left space for the rise of Iran and Turkey as central regional powers. The more recent changes include Qatar taking on a more active role in shaping political developments in the region during and after the Arab Spring.

The extent to which regional actors seek to influence the outcome of civil wars and the subsequent political processes depends on whether their vital political, economic, and



ideological interests are at stake. In Syria, Yemen, Libya and Lebanon, the domestic political developments have been shaped by a direct involvement of regional powers, whereas in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, the influence of regional powers appears much more limited.

Regional actors' ability to affect national political processes is integrally linked to international and domestic developments. As an example, Syria was allowed to play a central role in post-war Lebanon by the international guarantors of the Taif agreement in exchange for Syria joining the coalition against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. With Syria's attention currently focused on the civil war, there are signs of Lebanon starting to develop internal mechanisms for maintaining stability. In Yemen, the national elite's acceptance has enabled the involvement of regional powers, most notably Saudi Arabia, in national affairs over the past decades.

There was clear agreement on the necessity of involving regional actors in national dialogue processes. This was seen as particularly critical in contexts where regional interference is shaping the political and social dynamics at all levels of society, such as in Syria and Yemen. It was noted that in such cases, processes engaging only national actors are inevitably insufficient for achieving durable solutions.

In the past, regional powers have played a positive role in the pre-national dialogue phase by pressuring opposing political groups to come together and agree on a national dialogue. This was the case in Yemen where the Gulf Cooperation Council played a key role in brokering the 2011 transition roadmap between President Saleh's party and the formal opposition. The question of how to ensure a positive engagement of regional actors also in the following stages of the dialogue process was raised by many and identified as an issue requiring greater attention.

External actors' narratives and definitions (e.g. of inclusiveness) affect the design and implementation of national dialogues. To avoid creating further instability, it is essential that external actors supporting national dialogues in the Middle East base their interventions on a proper understanding of both the national and the regional dynamics.

A refusal of external actors to deal with certain political or armed groups is counterproductive to the goals of national dialogue processes. Rather than fostering confidence and consensus between all key parties, it entrenches national divides. The politicisation of civil society actors, a development sometimes fuelled by outside actors, also increases the fragmentation of the society along conflict lines.

Gender is often overlooked in the MENA region. To prevent inclusion from becoming an artificial tool, it is important to ensure women and youth representatives selected to participate in national dialogues have sufficient legitimacy and relevance among local constituencies.

Having simultaneous dialogue processes at different levels (local, national, and regional) was considered key for ensuring broad-based support for and in facilitating the implementation of the dialogue outcomes.

The local and regional dialogues may have different purposes. While a regional compromise was seen as a key enabler of and a precondition for a national dialogue process, engagement



of local communities was considered particularly pertinent for the sustainability of the outcomes.

As regards concrete mechanisms for engaging regional actors in national dialogue processes, two alternatives - a platform engaging both national and regional actors as well as a separate, parallel regional dialogue process - were discussed. Establishing separate regional and national processes was recommended: although national and regional actors are often closely connected, regional conflict dynamics are generally partly distinct from those defining the national sphere and require different tools.

Session B: Youth in National Dialogue Processes: Resolution 2250 an Entry Point

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security was adopted in 2015, urging greater representation by young men and women in the prevention and resolution of violent conflict. It has been a much overdue recognition of the positive roles youth play for security and conflict transformation – also because young women and men living in conflict, post-conflict and forced displacement settings have been too commonly perceived as either perpetrators or victims of violence.



The Progress Study on Youth, Peace, and Security – currently under way – provides a unique opportunity to present evidence of young women and young men's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution. Especially the youth space of dialogue and mediation has not been studied sufficiently and this conference session on youth in dialogues provides an important opportunity to elaborate on this topic further. The central statements that the panellists explored during the session include:

1. Young people's dialogue and mediation efforts are less recognised and reported because we usually fail to understand them as such.
2. Young people have their distinct approaches and methods for dialogue and mediation.
3. Young people have an extended 'sphere of influence' on and access to conflict actors that are different from that of traditional political and societal elites or other peace actors.
4. Young people's dialogue and mediation efforts can have stronger traction if they receive due recognition and sustainable support.

Recent years have seen a growing demand of youth inclusion and participation in national dialogues, especially in the light of the youth-driven uprisings in the Arab world. The experience so far has been mixed, ranging from not included or partially included but not given any decision-making power or any substantial role in the implementation phase. Track 1 mediation and dialogue is limited to a very small number of people, and reduces also the inclusion of young women and men. Young people do get more traction in community dialogue, and they can be influential, albeit informally. The panellists pointed out that one reason for this discrepancy between formal and informal dialogue can be attributed to how the 'inclusion paradigm' is shaped, for example its emphasis on quantity and not quality, or even a 'good' quantity does not necessarily end up guaranteeing quality.

There are serious doubts that adding youth to a platform in which, generally speaking, more men than women are represented, is bringing about necessary change. The presenters though highlighted that youth indeed do have a different sphere of influence and youth can navigate hierarchies in a different way. They take different approaches to dialogue, and make use of inventive forms of dialogue such as theatre. Also, they tend to be very creative in constructing their own level, form and format of dialogue. Rather than waiting to be included, young people make their own space of dialogue now. The youth space of dialogue and mediation is very active in interactions between young people themselves. But youth are also active in cross-level, and cross-generational dialogues, and for example in inter-ethnic dialogues, for example through the ethnic youth conference. Youth can be less threatening than other actors. For example, in religious dialogues, they may be able to move more freely, because religious leaders have a status they have to maintain.

The realities of youth are not broadly nor fully understood; too often, young men are seen as perpetrators and young women as victims. Additionally, some youth see it as their duty to be active, along the lines of 'when injustice becomes law, rebellion becomes a duty.'

The panellists agreed that there is a necessity to include youth issues and needs into the national dialogue process, but the question is how: is representation the only mechanism for effectively bringing youth to the national dialogue process? Inclusion may further the already



existing fragmentation of many dialogue platforms. Support tracks, on the other hand, may be an ineffective way to increase youth dialogue with other tracks – lots of noise in parallel tracks does not necessarily lead to holistic dialogue. In addition, reducing the inter-generational gap is one of many divides that needs to be considered in national dialogue.

A “whole of society” approach may offer a broader analytical frame than a conceptually too narrow youth inclusion, as some national dialogues altogether suffer from exclusion and elitism. This approach may also work for the youth who already have a considerable and often ignored role in dialogues.

The conference presentations showed that there is a considerable body of knowledge regarding national dialogues and associated best practices. The design of national dialogues may lead to better results if inclusion is conceptualised as “how to include” rather than “whom to include”.

Session C: Reconciliation and Transitional Justice

The session explored the dynamics between reconciliation and transitional justice in fragile and contested polities. The focus was on the interconnections of transitional justice and reconciliation against Nepali and Colombian contexts. After the end of a civil war, or after mass atrocities have been committed, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have been implemented in a nation’s attempt to mend social relations within a new, post-conflict political framework. In the past two decades, there has been an almost unquestioned faith in the potential for transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions and trials to heal and transform wounded societies. Reconciliation has emerged as a specific goal of many transitional justice processes. In national dialogue processes stakeholders are challenged on how to foster reconciliation and about how different mechanisms such as truth commissions, trials, amnesties, and local justice initiatives can be expected to contribute toward this end goal. But there is still much debate about the meaning of the term, and little empirical evidence of how different transitional justice mechanisms may affect achievement of this desired outcome.

Transitional justice and reconciliation in the Colombian peace process

For more than five decades, Colombia faced one of the longest and most complex armed conflicts in the world, in which repeated human rights violations were perpetrated.

In the Colombian peace process, victims were placed at the core of the peace process. More than eight million Colombians are officially registered as victims. This represents more than sixteen percent of the population. 50% of the victims were women. Women’s organizations have been involved in collecting and organising storytelling and collecting of expectations.

Despite their initial reluctance, the government, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC) have increasingly acknowledged their responsibility for human rights violations and have publicly asked the victims for forgiveness.



Colombia's Final Agreement to End Conflict and Build Peace is composed by the following topics and most of them point to eliminating the causes that have fuelled armed conflict in Colombia. The main such causes are comprehensive rural reform, political participation, ending the conflict, solving the problem of illicit drugs, agreement regarding the victims of armed conflict, and implementation and verification mechanisms. The actual model of transitional justice, approved by the Congress in March 2017, contemplates a Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and non-Repetition. It is a system made up of different judicial and extra-judicial mechanisms: the Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition Commission, the Special Unit for the Search of Missing in the Context of Armed Conflict, and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The common objectives of all these are bringing about reparations, peace building, non-repetition, and a commitment to the promotion, respect and guarantee of human rights.

Today, more than 300 subjects of collective reparation are working to strengthen their political projects, to reconstruct their identities, to recover their cultural practices, and to continue their psychosocial recovery. These reparation measures have been the strongest approach to dealing with the past and the process of healing the pain. Colombians now seek to change their way of thinking about their conflict and the way conflict has been justified. "We need to learn to think of ourselves as a different country." Collective reimagining, education and culture are ways to stop violence on the long-term.

Transitional justice and reconciliation in Nepal

Nepal's peace process was extremely political. Priority was given to the political process, but not so much to truth and reconciliation. The truth and reconciliation process has focused on legal mechanisms based on concepts of international transitional justice, with much contentious debate about all of this.

The transitional justice bodies, which were envisaged in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between the government and the then rebel Maoists, came into being after nine long years in February 2015. The task of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) is to "establish truth, investigate into rights violations and make recommendations for action". In February 2017, the Government of Nepal formally extended the mandate of the TRC and CIEDP for another year.

A key source of contradiction has been the TRC Act and its predecessor TRC Ordinance that are seen to be in violation of Nepal's international legal obligations, as they allowed for amnesties for some gross human rights abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law, amounting to crimes under international law.

The commission has to investigate almost 60 000 complaints of rights violations that allegedly took place during the decade-long Maoist insurgency. Not a single a case has been heard so far. There is no shared understanding on reconciliation. On the large scale, political actors claim "we have reconciled." Power-sharing deals have been made, new constitutions have been drafted, and there have been agreements to devolutions of power. But what does this mean for the people? For a mother whose child has been detained? What about the victims of sexual violence – have they been heard and helped to recover and heal? The failure to address transitional justice has had an effect on people's healing and dealing with the past.



Transitional Justice and Reconciliation need to go hand in hand. Reconciliation was not included in the process design. Concepts of forgiveness and healing have not really been part of the discussion. Had there been a good politically led truth and reconciliation process, the society would have accepted the situation. Now there is a lack of broader acceptance. Now it is difficult to identify where to start, and how to address the lingering questions. It would be important to identify experiences of local reconciliation that might have happened without political support.

Key themes in the discussion

Forgiveness

It was noted that the debate on transitional justice and reconciliation must be much broader, and must include the space for asking for forgiveness. In this discussion there is no definitive right answer. Minds are easily triggered by violence. We react to atrocities as opposed to investing in prevention. Where do we find the personal and individual space to heal? Forgiveness cannot be imposed by state or policy.

Recognition of the victims' suffering is key. Work is needed on psychological processes – individual and collective processes, and individual healing connecting to the collective healing. Healing and forgiveness can be supported through exchange of experiences, where victims have an opportunity to express their expectations.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are culturally bound

In Colombia, forgiveness is not the only route to reconciliation, but when it does happen it is an important part of broader reconciliation.

In Nepal, the concept of forgiveness is rather vague in the culture. “Even if we forgive, we don’t talk about it, we don’t necessarily say ‘sorry’”. Forgiveness is demonstrated in subtle ways, such as having a cup of tea together.

What role does religion play in terms of reconciliation?

In Nepal, inter-religious faith leaders have come together locally in certain areas where conflict has been localised. In Colombia, religion has been an important part of the peace process. Different Christian denominations, and over 100 ethnic groups, all have found ways of peacebuilding and reconciliation. Respect for the thinking of the others has been a key ingredient.

Religion can be a key resource for reconciliation and its role has not been fully explored and used in TRC processes. However, reconciliation also needs to occur between people who don’t have a relationship to religion.

The role of regional neighbours/international parties in the processes

There were five regional consultations in Nepal. Later, the UN has worked with victims, which is also heavily political. However, in general the role of regional and international actors has been rather limited in Nepal. In Colombia, regional neighbour countries have been very important.



Session D: Local Dialogue in the Absence of National Dialogue in MENA

The relevance of the dialogue, whether local or national, is always context and time related. This has been evident e.g. in Libya, where the actors relevant today were not relevant two years ago.

Local dialogues are important as they maintain social cohesion. The main question is how to prevent violence – what kind of action is needed to prevent the same happening over and over again. According to the panel, the only solution to this is the local society, which can build the social contract.

Experience from Syria shows that a good practice is to start discussions with households and then reach out to larger parts of the society and create local dialogues. This kind of local dialogue can give hope for people and encourage them to stay where they are. During the bombings of the Syrian city of Idlib, local dialogues with information sharing and coordination from city to city created hope about the dialogues bringing change later.

The terminology is critical. In Syria, negotiations were met with local opposition, since it was seen as giving up. When the terminology was made clearer, it turned out that the idea was to have dialogue first, and only after that reach the partners to start negotiations.

There have been significant challenges in both Syria and Libya. In Libya, there is lack of a long-term vision in which people would be heading towards local dialogues and mediation tracks. Parallel processes that support different tracks are important. Syria in turn has become an arena of international and regional actors. The decision for peace is not in the hands of Syrians anymore. Local dialogues work in secrecy to avoid disturbance from outside actors.

The ready-made processes that would feed the knowledge from local dialogues to a higher level should be avoided whenever they are not engaging with specific parties. In order to get this knowledge input, the international community needs to be creative and open-minded and design the intervention taking into consideration the reality on the ground.

The civil society plays a significant role in local dialogues and negotiations. An organisation's main concern can be children and human aid but at the same time their work supports social cohesion. For example, in the western part of the Syrian city of Aleppo, which is controlled by the government, local groups and Internally Displaced People are working together to solve problems related to water, energy, and other public goods. Finding effective solutions to such problems is in the best interests of all the conflicting parties.

The civil society in Libya was very vibrant in 2012 but through the militarization of politics, many of these actors were silenced. The civic space is being attacked by the armed actors that are putting the national process and Libyan civic rights at risk.

The roles of women in conflicts and dialogue processes are many-sided. It is good to remember that during many conflicts, e.g. in Libya, most of the catering for fighters comes from their mothers and sisters at home.



In Syria, when men are fighting, women are having dialogues locally. The women thought that this is the only tool for them to keep themselves and the children safe. Women were empowered through dialogues, and now place their hope on bottom-up processes instead of top-down ones. The Women's Advisory Board meets beside the official negotiations about Syria in Geneva and was founded for supporting the work of the UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. Also in Libya, the role of women is key in the reconciliation and especially between the two different sides of society.



In Libya, the lack of a national counterpart has had a major influence on the situation. Due to that, international organizations such as the UN should look at municipalities and identify cooperation partners at that level. They should also be proactive and not wait for a reaction from the area, as well as give a set of options that the UNDP can provide. Also, the UNDP needs to simplify their processes and use the language of the operational area for their processes and instructions.

In Syria, the UN should focus more on development and sustainable development, not only humanitarian aid. However, before this shift, the research has to be done well as there are still many areas in need of relief. Also, local dialogues can be used for educating international organisations.

Session E: Regional Organisations' Support to National Dialogue Processes

The panel focused on reflections on the challenges and opportunities related to the work of the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). There was consensus among the panellists on the regional impact of conflicts. That is, instability in one country inevitably affects its neighbours, either directly or indirectly. It is therefore important that regional organizations support peace processes, including national dialogues.

The panel touched upon the notion of “African solutions to African problems” to discuss the role of international actors in supporting African national dialogue processes. The panellists agreed that while African countries and regional organizations must indeed take responsibility for solving the crises in their region, their efforts should not be undertaken in isolation. Instead, coordination and collaboration is needed with external partners. Nonetheless, simultaneously,



local ownership needs to be guaranteed and dependency on external resources should be diminished.

On the topic of coordination, the panel also addressed the issue of the principle of subsidiarity. The panellists noted that in addition to enhancing coordination with international partners, African regional organizations must also coordinate amongst themselves. Most notably, the AU and the RECs need to ensure coherence of intervention and unity of purpose in their responses to crises. They need to identify and take advantage of their respective comparative advantages in the spirit of seeking sustainable solutions. Although this will typically mean that those actors closest to the country in question need to have a central role, flexibility is required in defining the roles of the AU and the RECs in each particular setting.



Furthermore, there was consensus among the panellists on the imperative responsibility of regional organizations to respond to emerging crises, be it by facilitating national dialogue or other means. Reflecting on previous failures to intervene, most notably in Rwanda, the panellists called for the region to move from a policy of “non-interference” towards “non-indifference”. In other words, regional organizations cannot ignore security threats but they rather have a responsibility to respond to situations in which human security is at risk.

Finally, the panel discussion touched upon a number of cases to discuss various aspects of regional organizations’ involvement in national dialogue and peace processes. The case of the Central African Republic (CAR) was raised as a positive example of a national dialogue process receiving sub-regional, regional, and international support in a relatively coordinated and systematic fashion. The efforts of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) were supported by and undertaken in close coordination with the AU, the United Nations, and diverse non-state actors. The case of The Gambia was identified as an interesting case of a REC taking decisive action with political support from the broader region and the international community. Lastly, the case of South Sudan was discussed in light of the proposed national dialogue process in the country. The panellists agreed that while the South Sudanese national



dialogue process requires support, it should not be viewed as a replacement of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCISS). Instead, a national dialogue process in South Sudan could enhance the implementation of the ARCISS and contribute to enhancing national ownership in that context.

Session F: Land Reform and Local Governance

Because land is a key concern in many conflicts, it cannot be ignored in peace processes. Land-related issues are often very complex, technical, and difficult to solve. Furthermore, housing, land, and property (HLP) rights are often not seen as political issues, and are left to be handled only in the post-agreement phase. Nonetheless, for a lasting peace, questions related to land should be discussed already in the peace negotiations. This is especially the case when land-related disagreements are one of the underlying causes of the conflict.

Land is at the heart of Myanmar's conflict and peace process. There are parallel systems of land governance in different areas. Customary land practices are still in use in many areas, but they are not protected by official laws. Many of the ethnic groups are afraid that land laws are just another, non-armed, way for the government to expand its power. The ethnic groups think that the land laws of the government do not work and local governance is the best solution. At the same time, also illegal land confiscations by the government and armed groups continue to complicate the issue.

The land issue in Syria is very difficult. Approximately 50 % of the population has fled from their homes and are now refugees or internally displaced persons. What has happened and will happen to their lands remains unclear. Additionally, reconstruction will be a massive operation in the future and the protection of land rights is very important. Also, the rights of displaced persons should be regularised, and people should be included in the decision-making over land. The problem of how to connect governmental legislation with the customary/tribal rights is an issue also in Syria.

National and local land administration and land registries are very important institutions to set up if they have not been working properly or have become inoperative during the conflict. The peace process should not be limited to restoring the HLP rights, but should also use the opportunity to fix unequal land policies, protect vulnerable groups and set principles for better land administration. In addition, the division of land administration power between central, provincial and local authorities can be a solution in the peace process.

Customary communal rights and practices are often romanticised as very good systems that respect the local culture and history. However, they can also be problematic. For example, many traditional systems are highly patriarchal and in some cases women are excluded from the right to own land and other land rights. Still, it is important to see also the good sides of the traditional systems. In conflict areas, the traditional communities might be the only functional institutions. Also, innovative hybrid systems with traditional and modern elements (including women's rights) could be the answer in many contexts.



In addition to Syria and Myanmar, there was brief discussion about the land issues in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Cyprus, and Colombia. Also, food security and water rights in relation to land issues were discussed.

Land issues are not only legal and technical, but also administrative and political. All these dimensions should be considered when land issues are incorporated into peace processes.

Session G: Dialogue in CAR: Historical Pathways, Local Dynamics, and the Role of Regional Influence

The Central African Republic (CAR) has gone through decades of crisis. Despite the participatory process of the national dialogue that brought together a vast spectrum of forces together, the country is still in crisis.

This is partially due to several weaknesses in the follow-up of the dialogue process. The country still lacks a constructive and sustainable forum for dialogue. Historically, consultation processes have been reactive, rather than preventive. Ideally, the parliament should be the forum for dialogue but so far it hasn't fully been able to perform that role. National dialogue processes are therefore temporary and should not aim to replace constitutional bodies of the country that play a more permanent role.

The national dialogue process in CAR produced useful recommendations but their implementation depended on the political will of the country's leaders. Even though they were binding there were no sanctions for non-implementation for the leaders who did not take them forward. In CAR, the political parties do not have the mobilising power necessary to implement the recommendations, which also points to the lack of ownership by the people. There was a clear call in the session for the dialogue process to be owned by national actors.



For a national dialogue process to be successful, it needs a clear vision and process design. Every step needs to be carefully thought out, including the follow-up. Even when well prepared, dialogue processes cannot perform miracles. A pending question revolves around the relevance of national dialogue as a mechanism to solve problems in CAR, as the armed forces have recently reappeared and are asking for a new dialogue.

The international community, including the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) as well as the neighbouring countries have a vital role as internal conflicts affect the entire region. ECCAS was fast to intervene and supported the dialogue process and the follow-up of the implementation. In CAR, ECCAS was able to integrate the work of many partners, which reinforced the dialogue secretariat. The principle of subsidiarity created the space for cooperation for different actors.

In terms of inclusion, the national dialogue in CAR was a historic achievement. Many forces in the country that previously had no role in politics were able to participate in the dialogue. Among others, women, youth, and religious actors were consulted, including rural populations and communities outside the country itself. Their views were heard on how to organise the dialogue, on the recommendations and their implementation. It was important that people's views were heard before the national dialogue even started. However, this required a lot of resources and was not easy to organise.

Session H: Building Peace Architecture in the Middle East

The concept of building Peace Architecture in the Middle East is not new, and there have been failed initiatives in the past. A few of these are the 1991 Madrid Conference on multilateral discussions between Arab states and Israel; the initiative in the early 2000s by the Secretary General of the League of Arab States (LAS) regarding Arab neighbourhood policy; 2015 Egypt's call for Pan-Arab Military Forces to tackle terrorist groups; and the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, led by Saudi Arabia since 2015.

The Middle East is enduring one of its most difficult phases in decades. The current situation in the Middle East is very complex and constantly changing, and there are doubts about whether the situation can or will be solved in the near future.

Currently, there is no shared vision even among the Arab states. And, as the decisions of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), LAS and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) depend on the conflicting member states, there are currently no good prospects for Peace Architecture. Tolerance, political leadership, and confidence building are needed. Regional awareness and regional solutions are required, although they need to follow global norms. Without democracy, there can be no stable Peace Architecture, but democratic transition cannot be forced from the outside.

The states' borders based on the Sykes-Picot agreement are to a large extent artificial. ISIS has already reshaped the border between Syria and Iraq.



The concept of the Peace of Westphalia could serve as a toolbox for the Middle East. External guarantors would be needed for Peace Architecture like in the case of ending the Thirty Years War. Although the UN is widely criticised for its faults, its approval would still be required – the OIC, LAS and GCC are dependent on a UN framework. The Nordic Countries could play an active role due to their non-colonialist past and vast experience of peace mediation, both officially and among NGOs. For example, in Syria the situation is changing constantly, both in the areas where fighting is taking place and in diplomacy. The situation in Syria or more broadly in the Middle East is not yet close to exhaustion where the conditions for a new Peace of Westphalia would exist.

In the discussion, the issue of inclusion was restricted to how groups like ISIS should be dealt with. The inclusion of women and youth was seen in this context as easier compared to the question of ISIS. If the international forum refuses to interact with groups representing political Islam like Hamas and Hezbollah, what can be done with actors like ISIS or Al-Qaeda?

Session I: Grassroots Participation in the Myanmar Peace Process

The peace process in Myanmar is at a critical turning point. After negotiating a nationwide ceasefire with 16 armed groups and jointly designing a complex Political Dialogue Framework, the challenges of addressing each stakeholder group's demands and expectations are seemingly overwhelming. Currently the formal process is not only becoming increasingly fragile but also presents a risk of exclusiveness. Enabling meaningful grassroots participation by increasing the local ownership and empowering the local communities creates a more conducive setting to lasting peace. Over the past three years we have witnessed the development of several initiatives or “common spaces” that have started to serve as “safe spaces” for all-stakeholders informal dialogues and as support mechanisms and safety nets for the peace process.

Generally, the common spaces support the dialogue space by trust building, information sharing and creating a common vision to the stakeholders. The dynamics between common spaces are diverse as the issues seen as important are not the same in all states. The structures, objectives and priorities of the common spaces vary depending on the regions. In some states, due to the lack of formal processes, the common spaces offer the only platform for peace negotiations.

The grassroots exclusivity at union level is considered an obstruction for resolution at state level. Practically the formal process is feared to be too top-down, exclusive, and general to tackle the causes of regional conflicts. Thus, the grassroots participation through common spaces is not only beneficial but a necessity to support the formal process by bringing forward the regionally substantive questions.

Up till now, when it comes to the national process, only 8 out of 22 ethnic armed groups are part of the formal process. The next union-level peace conference (UPC) was held in May 2017. Prior to this, there had been two UPCs with no meaningful outcomes. The expectations for the next UPC are high, as for the first time, grassroots actors have been able to discuss the issues



concerning them in sub-national dialogues (based on region and ethnicity). However, if the upcoming UPC fails to deliver positive outcomes to the aspiration of the local community, the whole peace process is at stake. The most the UPC will likely achieve this year is to agree on the principles of federalism, rights issues related to minorities and equality, and possibly an outline of a negotiations roadmap. Due to this the informal processes are needed to work with the local communities – not only to engage with the national dialogue process, but also to support the regional government to address the questions that can be discussed and decided on locally. The Myanmar peace process will presumably last for another 3-5 years, though it should not be allowed to fall into the “dialogue as an event” trap. Setting up the grassroots and state-based dialogues and linking them to the union process are essential for a stable and functional peace process in Myanmar.

Session J: Lessons in Process Design and Potential for Self-mediation (UN Advisory and Policy)

Overview of Session and Introduction

Since the Arab uprising, there has been preference to the format of national dialogues in the Middle East to resolve long-standing national conflicts, constitutional shortcomings, and structural challenges. The emergence of national dialogues usually followed periods of some stability arising either from a ceasefire agreement, bilateral negotiations between key parties or through a framework agreement which enabled a more formal process to arise – and finally be linked to a constitutional change process. The agreements reached from these formally mandated national dialogues produced framework agreements that formed the basis for future political change and constitutional change process. Our challenge is how to manage the complexity involved in national dialogues with a multiplicity of different stakeholders – inside and outside existing constitutional and governing bodies.

Our understanding on the design of national dialogues is evolving based on reflection of practice. What is important to capture in the framework of design is (a) what the specific elements in the design of national dialogues are, (b) what we can learn from how people are using these and (c) how these elements are related to each other. They are interlinked and contextual, driven by the stakeholder relations and driven by what’s broken. Therefore, in our learning and reflections, it is important to look at how these relate to each other.

Embracing complexity of national dialogues in terms of inclusivity and substance – reflections on how this informs the design and tools for capturing and managing complexity

The multiple stakeholders involved in national dialogues inform both the design of national dialogue and the tools designed to facilitate and manage it. Once we move from inclusivity – from bringing all the relevant stakeholders to the dialogue “table” – to substance, we often find complexity and diversity also within the same stakeholder groups.



Reflecting on the case of Myanmar, the 700+ participants are divided into six representative stakeholder groups, within which the parties are clustered into one and the armed groups into another. The interests of the stakeholders from the 14 different states and regions are significantly different. The complexity is compounded by the different positions and “realities” of the 22 parties and 18 ethnic armed groups within their respective stakeholder groups. To move the process forward and reach any agreement, they need to reach “internal” consensus. The challenge is how to deal with this complexity and reach consensus amongst these multiple stakeholder groups where they recognise each other’s different realities and at the same time reach agreement where all groups feel that their interests have been met.



Therefore, the mechanisms designed need to reflect the shape of the conflict which leads to different procedures and roadmaps, chronology in terms of the process and how that shapes the self-mediation instruments. Furthermore, we need to reflect on how we design instruments that help us capture the complexity of substance inside national dialogues, move beyond overviews to the ways in which this complexity is managed.

Key elements of national dialogues and shared knowledge

There is a danger of the concept “national dialogue” becoming non-descriptive if it is used as a catch-all phrase for all forms of dialogue. In light of what was discussed at the two previous conferences, national dialogue can be defined as an extra-constitutional mechanism aimed at addressing and transforming the basic political or constitutional structure of a country. It must be inclusive. National dialogues should be distinguished from track two dialogues and other dialogues unless these other dialogue processes deliberately feed into the process of national dialogues. National dialogues may be the result of layers of dialogue happening at different levels. They are essentially self-mediated processes. This does not exclude the involvement of external actors, but the key characteristic of national dialogues is that they are self-owned and self-managed, both in terms of the decision to create the national dialogue and in its decision-making on process and substance.

National dialogues may suffer from political capture, i.e. where either the ruling party or an external actor wants to determine the outcome, for example by determining the agenda and deciding on whom they appoint as the facilitator. Another major challenge of national dialogues is lack of confidence in the process itself. Productive discussion in national dialogue will be enabled by the different parties having confidence that the process is credible, and that their voices will not be side-lined. Therefore, for every aspect of the process there has to be political consensus. Rushing the process is killing it.



Self-mediation structures, mechanisms and principles - reflecting on the case of South Africa:

The first round of talks in South Africa failed because of political reasons and because the procedure of dialogue was not productive. In terms of design, there were five committees and 19 parties around the table of four delegates per party, where every party presented a position paper. This was a recipe for positional bargaining, for making speeches, talking at the other, and was not conducive for dialogue. The talks broke down.

In the second format of the national dialogue, emphasis was placed on self-mediation structures built into the design, and on shared knowledge creation. These included:

- Within the design of the national dialogue, 7 technical committees were established, composed of experts, but appointed by all the parties. Their mandate was to compile one document (*One Text*) from all position papers, which captured consensus, key points of contradiction, provided basic facts and information about the underlying thinking that should go into resolving these, and made suggestions on the process of discussing the issues. This greatly focused the negotiation process on essential matters and removed a lot of “political clutter”.
- One of the common challenges in many dialogue processes is that stakeholders work with different information sets that inform their decisions, “singing from different hymn sheets”. This process facilitated shared knowledge creation, and by providing factual and non-politicised information to negotiators, the negotiation process was greatly simplified.
- There needs to be a deliberate design to build relationships between the negotiating parties.
- Another innovative aspect of the process at the time was the self-mediation structure called the “Planning Committee”, created to act as a deadlock breaking mechanism. It was composed of ten negotiators (i.e. politicians) nominated by the collective body based on their individual capacity and the trust all had in their consensus-building abilities. This committee was the ‘clearing house’ for all the discussions. In practice, the Planning Committee would receive the position papers and give it to the Technical Committee. The One-Text prepared returned to the Planning Committee who assessed whether it was ready for negotiation and then send this to the Negotiation Table where the parties had two negotiators per party (of whom one had to be a woman) and then the negotiations started.

Lessons learned from self-mediation structures and impact on design of national dialogues

Inclusivity and national ownership provide the potential for a transformative dialogue if they are integrated well into the process. They have a direct bearing on how national dialogue processes are designed, mandated, agenda is set and decision-making is organised.

Inclusivity is often used as a normative category. On the other hand, inclusivity as a strategic question is not always taken into consideration in terms of who the relevant stakeholders needed are for the process to achieve the objectives set. An important aspect connected to inclusivity is the notion of legitimacy. Are all the key and legitimate stakeholders on the table and are the outcomes of national dialogues truly inclusive? Excluding key stakeholders from the table (e.g. Taliban in Afghanistan, conservative elites in Guatemala) may jeopardise the outcome and the process or even the implementation of outcomes reached. Are the elements and principles of the process inclusive or do they lead to marginalisation of key stakeholder



groups? We also need to consider the internal dynamics of the stakeholder groups. Where is the centre of gravity within them and what are their internal decision-making mechanisms for consensus?

The fundamental question around national ownership is how national the questions and conflicts are. In many cases we look for national consensus where the context and conflict requires an international or regional consensus. Ownership is related to the quality of the agency and power dynamics, where elite ownership is not necessarily national ownership. When operationalising the commitment to national ownership there are different assumptions and understandings: Is it about getting the buy-in of the population for the agenda drafted by external actors (when you look at Iraq, Afghanistan) or is it about processes and agendas drafted and implemented by national stakeholders just seeking the support of international actors (considering the case of Nepal). It is only the parties themselves that can determine what is broken, what needs to be fixed, who needs to fix it, who has the power to fix it, and who has the power to prevent it from being fixed.

Complexity, Consensus and Deadlock-Breaking Mechanisms in National Dialogues

Rather than a problem, complexity is a defining trait of national dialogues. It results from the political context of the conflict, the scale in terms of the number of stakeholders involved and the diversity of positions and perspectives represented and the ambition to re-negotiate the social contract.

Consensus implies a capacity to compromise and the commitment of stakeholders to look beyond their own political and tactical interests to the shared new social contract. Absolute consensus is desirable, but often unlikely, which means that mechanisms need to be designed to generate consensus or provide alternatives to it when necessary. Therefore, the process generates its own consensus. Responsible and committed leadership is important in reaching consensus, and would include the ability to reach consensus agreements for the greater good as well as the responsibility not to focus on short-term gain, but rather the longer-term wellbeing of the nation.

Consensus in national dialogues needs to be incorporated into the design framework of the dialogue that can then allow for the generation of consensus inside the dialogue. Consensus in most cases starts in the preparatory and design phase, either in an agreement for a more inclusive process between negotiating parties or in the technical committees. The 'framework of a national dialogue' is there to prevent deadlocks and create a space conducive to consensus. To build consensus, a national dialogue in its design and management needs to be inclusive, and take into account the input of parties (both internally and externally).

Consensus can also be generated through constant input of constituencies through consultations or by inputs from non-formal dialogues spaces. In addition, linking national dialogues to other processes can address the "ivory tower" risk. Decision-making mechanisms and structures are also important to consider when looking at generating consensus. Sometimes participation may be quite fluid, with some different stakeholders coming in and out, thereby causing some inconsistency in the levels of engagement. Not only do we need to consider whether the relevant stakeholders are involved and the sustainability of inclusivity, but it is also necessary to consider whether issues already discussed would need to be



reopened when others become re-engaged. Although consensus should not be thought of as being synonymous with unanimity, it is important that a sufficient part of the stakeholders agree in order for the process to continue to be considered legitimate, fair and representative.

Deadlock breaking mechanisms in national dialogues need to be designed to reach a balance between a system which gives veto power to every participating party, and a system which systematically disregards dissenting opinions as long as they are part of a minority. The challenge in the design of decision-making and deadlock breaking instruments is that sometimes these models re-empower the existing power conflicts among the stakeholders and disempower the minorities inside the national dialogues. In many cases, deadlock breaking mechanism designed to protect the minorities in national dialogues give the stronger stakeholders the power to deadlock the dialogue. One of the constant challenges of self-mediation is that the instrument created to protect the minorities inside national dialogues also becomes the deadlock generating instrument of the process. That is why when looking at all design elements we need to consider the interconnectedness and balance between them.

The Role of Third Party Actors in 'Self-Mediation' Structures of National Dialogue

National dialogues can be a mix of both nationally led and third-party mediated processes. In some instances, national dialogues arise where power holders push for national dialogues with the intent of dominating the process. Power elites would rarely initiate a national dialogue if they believed it would lessen their influence. The concept of national ownership can be difficult to quantify, and is interpreted differently within different strata.

An increasing challenge for third party actors such as the UN and regional organisations is being asked to support seemingly questionable national dialogues. Sometimes such support is sought to lend the process legitimacy, or to act a guarantor to assuage the doubt regarding engagement of outlying national actors. In such settings, the issue of preconditions arises, whether third party actors should try to set some minimum standards, but without undermining national ownership. The questions around whether to support and how are complex. Sometimes it may be a case of making the best of limited opportunities, engaging in the hope of trying to constructively influence the process. National dialogues can develop their own dynamic and power relations can evolve, and as a result some questionable national dialogues have resulted in political transformations.

An important responsibility of third-party actors is in helping to create an enabling environment by coalescing regional and international support behind a national dialogue. Nationally, third-party support may be useful in holding power holders to account and as such help in breaking deadlocks.

The risk of overloading the processes is not only about the complexity of the actors involved but also the agenda. We need to consider how other processes can constructively contribute to lightening the burden carried by national dialogues, by complementing the dialogue, by providing alternative forums and spaces to address some issues. The transparency and inclusivity of national dialogues does not mean that all actors suddenly become equal in terms of their influence. Power politics remains a key determining factor in reaching agreements.



Session K: Women Shaping the Agenda in National Dialogue Processes

It is widely agreed that national dialogue processes can play an instrumental role in expanding political space and providing meaningful opportunities for wider citizen participation, including women.

The panel highlighted how women's meaningful participation tends to broaden the agenda for discussion and bring a richer variety of substantive perspectives to the table. However, granting women seats in the process is only the first step: only with opportunities for meaningful influence can women contribute to the sustainability and quality of the processes and their outcomes.



Over the recent years there has been much normative talk about women's inclusion but concrete actions are still few and far between. The panel focused on cases where women have been able to influence national dialogue processes, notably in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Yemen. The discussion also addressed emerging national dialogue initiatives and related women's efforts for mobilization in Myanmar, Syria and in South Sudan (floor discussants).

The **Central African Republic's** most recent national dialogue, National Reconciliation Conference 2014-2015, was a three-part international process consisting of the ECCAS-mediated Brazzaville Forum, countrywide popular consultations, and the national Bangui Forum. Whereas the past efforts to address the conflict had been largely confined to conversations between the elites only, this time government officials, civil society actors and international representatives were dispatched all over the country, including refugee camps, to hear the local population's views and grievances. Altogether, over 19,000 persons were consulted, achieving a unique degree of public participation. The process was formally led by Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). In that context, it also enhanced women's inclusion therein, and e.g. together with the African Union (AU) and UN Women conducted a Solidarity Mission to Bangui to draw national, regional, and international attention to the roles of women in the peace process in CAR. The mission highlighted the role of the President as a figure of reconciliation, and the difficult situations of women in the refugee camps and as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The mission also urged stakeholders to listen to women's organizations before the establishment of the Bangui Forum. It can be argued that women's contribution and their views were included to a reasonable degree in the design and implementation of this critical event. Among the main issues brought up by the women groups



during the consultations were security in communities and restoring the presence of the national army throughout the entire territory. Women also demanded an end to impunity for violence against women, and reinforced the role of women as political decision-makers.

Yemen's recent developments provide many interesting insights into women's participation in national dialogues. The National Dialogue Conference in Sana'a was among the core components of Yemen's transition agreement. The conference was designed to produce broadly accepted recommendations that would serve as the basis for formulating a new constitution in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. The ten-month dialogue, conducted from March 2013 to January 2014, presented a historical opportunity for Yemenis from all segments of the society to engage in dialogue and develop joint solutions to critical national issues. Women secured their seats at the conference as a result of their courageous activism in the 2011 uprising. This is particularly noteworthy in a context that holds some of the worst gender indicators in the world. The women succeeded in incorporating quotas for representation of young people (20%) and women (30%) in the government, key institutions and in the conference follow-up committees. But many of these achievements have been lost in the vicious and fractious war that has escalated since 2014. While Yemen's main political groups maintain that the recommendations of the Sana'a conference would stand in any eventual new transition, that moment seems far off, as does a real commitment to women's participation in an inclusive settlement and peaceful transition for the country.

Myanmar's long-running conflicts have been characterised by displacement and human rights abuses against ethnic minority communities. These have included widespread sexual violence against women, particular from minority groups. Women have increasingly organised themselves and formed women's groups to address the needs of their communities, particularly along the borders. For example, in 2011 the Women's League of Burma formed a peace mission team to lobby for a gender inclusive peace process in Burma and women's active participation in peace negotiation tables. The latest dialogue efforts advanced since February 2017, have brought together six dialogues. Three of these were based on ethnicity, two were regionally focused and one was a thematic dialogue, known as the Civil Society Forum. Notwithstanding some positive steps, women remain marginalised and largely excluded at every level of the current peace process.

Syrian conflict resolution efforts as outlined by 2012 Geneva Communiqué have equally emphasised inclusive and meaningful participation of all groups through a national dialogue process. The subsequent Security Council resolution 2254 also insisted on "meaningful participation of women" in the on-going peace efforts. One of the most prominent initiatives to this end was the creation of a Women's Advisory Board. This board, comprised of 12 very diverse women representing a wide spectrum of opinions and backgrounds in Syria, has provided the UN Special Envoy with important ideas and inputs to addressing women's concerns in the negotiations. There are over 200 Syrian organizations working with women and addressing gender issues in Syria, but leveraging their work to influence the political process remains a major challenge. Many fear that the political negotiations will only satisfy the regional powers and their Syrian clients and will not respond to the aspirations of the wider society. A national dialogue may provide ordinary Syrians with a better chance to influence their future. However, lessons learnt from other countries indicate that the design and implementation of national dialogue processes often fall prey to donor whims. Ensuring that



women are present at the design of the process and not just as participants will also be of central importance.

In addition to the case studies presented during the panel discussion, also updates from South Sudan were circulated by floor discussants. **South Sudan** signed the Agreement of the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS) in 2015 aiming to end the crisis that erupted in December 2013. The ARCISS was endorsed under strong regional and international pressure but with limited ownership from the conflict parties, let alone the wider population. It was highlighted that South Sudanese women pushed for reconciliation, justice, and national dialogue to be included as part of the Agreement, but implementation and sustainability remains virtually non-existent.

Across the case studies discussed, there has been a variety of strategies to advance women's participation: One of the most common, yet often the most contested, strategy is the use of quotas. While quotas alone do not guarantee meaningful participation, in many cases they help women to gain a seat at the table. In this regard, the panellists questioned why 30% has been stabilised as a norm, and encouraged women to aim for 50%. Another commonly used strategy has been for women to form networks and build coalitions to push for joint priorities. Individual women can also make a difference: For instance, during her presidency H.E Mme Samba-Panza concretely promoted women to leadership positions and set up several mechanisms and tools to advance women's participation in the country's peace process. Unfortunately, shortly after her presidency these seats have been lost again. International, regional and non-governmental organizations can also establish helpful support structures to strengthen the role and influence of certain groups, such as women, while recognising that national ownership is key for sustainability. At times, however, the support provided by international partners has backlashed by directing women's focus to donor related themes rather than local and national priorities. The international community should prioritise encouraging women to be active in politics, and should provide them with what they need for that purpose.

Across the board, it was acknowledged that women tend to face unrealistic requirements related to their capacity. The panellists noted how male representatives do not need to justify their participation in the same manner that women do. All panellists also agreed that too often women are left to discuss 'women's issues' while issues such as security, power sharing and governance are left for men to discuss. It was widely agreed that women should be included in the national dialogue processes as political actors, but importantly, not be treated as a homogenous group. There is a need to systematically identify concrete entry points to exert meaningful political influence.

Session L: History and Narratives in Conflict

The panel commenced with a discussion on whether it is possible to negotiate interpretations of history and forms of remembering the past as part of peace processes. In this context, it is relevant to note that many peace agreements fail after a couple of years of signing. Although interpretations of history have been understood as part of conflict, there has been general avoidance of the possibility to treat history as part of mediation and dialogue processes in both the theoretical and practically oriented literature. History has been taken for granted and understood as an unchangeable structure and non-negotiable issue. However, the panel argued



the opposite: that history is multi-faceted, complex in its range of meanings, and constantly changing. For these reasons, it is also always open to novel interpretations and outlooks. The past can be understood in different ways and it is in that sense open-ended. The forms of remembering and interpreting history can and should be a focus of peace mediation and dialogue processes when genuinely striving for sustainable peace. This cannot, however, be simple, straightforward, or based on traditional negotiation models that pursue compromise. It requires a new kind of dialogic approach.

Several aspects that the new dialogic approach could include were proposed. So far, national dialogues have largely been oriented towards problem-solving, even though the main emphasis should be on problem-finding. Additionally, there needs to be a change in how the past is dominating present thinking and future horizons – an ability to remember differently. As J. Prager has said, “Traumatic memory floods the present as if it were the past; it is a reliving of past experiences rather than a remembering of them.” Peacemakers should give more attention to how conflict creates mutually antagonistic identities and hatred that become anchored in historical narratives and myths. More emphasis should be given to how the practices of understanding these constructs can be influenced. Removing, or at least containing, antagonist relationships is a basic precondition for a durable peace. Practical ways to reach reconciling dialogues include engaging more people and making the processes slower and more long-term. Finally, instead of identities as such, the focus should be on the process of identification: the transformation of narratives, symbols and myths shaping identities as well as recognising the agents using their power to influence identity narratives.

The question about whether it is possible to negotiate or renegotiate interpretations of history was also addressed in the light of Colombia. Several key points were raised: Most importantly, the various parties need to move beyond the narratives that have been at the foundation of the conflict. The need to incorporate the resistance mechanisms by local communities and conflict victims’ organisations into the narrative was emphasised. Additionally, cultural, and educational development beyond what is written in the peace agreement is needed in the process. This happens every day by all members of the society, which is a mechanism for the society to build itself with its history as a base. In violent conflicts, the right to determine history is usually part of the struggle, and is used as a means of justifying specific actions and for reinforcing loyalty to a group, but also for creating conceptions of the enemy. To avoid this, the panel argued that the sooner the history is tackled, the better. Until now, the extent to which this has been done has not been large enough. There is no need to wait. The writing of history should start already during the conflict, since memories cannot and should not be denied regardless of when the writing takes place. However, in the process of history writing, especially if it happens in an early phase, respect is extremely important. Therefore, it is for example not advisable to erase all memorials and statues: Did anyone suggest taking down the Colosseum because people lost lives during its creation?

The writing of history should take place sooner, but it can also be asked for how long after that can actors plead to the history and blame it for the current state? An example of this is the colonial era: the panel discussed that perhaps a statute of limitation should be issued on how long countries with colonial pasts can blame it for the state in which they are at present.

There are examples everywhere about how history plays a role in preventing and resolving conflicts. Historians do not want their work to be abused, but they have often been unable to



react. As a response to this, historians asked themselves what they could do to turn this around. That was the start of Historians without Borders. The network is not exclusive to professional historians, but open to all who are interested in the use and abuse of history with reference to conflict resolution and building peace.

Historians have also been able to defuse the use of history, e.g. in Germany through the practice of Dealing with the Past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). An example of the work of Historians without Borders with the aim for this is a recent meeting between Russian and Ukrainian historians. They did not agree on very many topics, but there was an agreement to continue the work together. The point is to get the other side to listen to the other one's narrative. You don't need to agree with it, but to listen to it and to accept that there are different versions of history. One aspect often ignored is women's versions of history and their role in creating narratives, which might vary considerably from the dominant ones. After all, more important than the past itself is how the past is present in the practices of today. The acknowledgement and acceptance of the diversity of interpretations should be an important goal of conflict transformation, which could be enhanced by reconciling dialogues.

The ways in which people are influenced by history are many and complicated, and therefore the peace processes can benefit from the contribution of historians. They may be able to help in identifying the various narratives going on in the process of conflict and its resolution. The panel agreed however that historians would be better as advisors instead of mediators. They should interact with the mediators, helping them to avoid mistakes by ensuring that the mediators know about the historical aspects. On the other hand, writing history as an academic profession is different than creating memory of what happened. It was argued that if these two are not kept apart, there is a risk for historians becoming elitist. A position for historians in which, unlike in the mediator role, this risk wouldn't be present, is having a role in the transition processes when the peace has already been agreed on. Regardless of the various ways in which the course of history can be interpreted, it was noted that at the end, truth is at the foundation of justice.

History teaching can play a key role in creating narratives. However, according to the panel, people tend to have a more and more limited understanding of history. We are living in an increasingly ahistorical time, so coming up with new and motivating ways of teaching and learning about history would be welcome.

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Reflections from Conference Speakers

Complementarity and the Dialogic Approach: Private Peacemakers in a Complex Peace Architecture

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The field of peacemaking is in turbulent change. There are more peacemaking actors than before but fewer success stories, and an increasing number of violent conflicts tend to resist negotiated agreements. Simultaneously the arising geopolitical trends and the strengthening power-political rationale narrow down momentum for peace diplomacy. One of the major challenges of peace diplomacy is organising the relationship between official Track 1 diplomacy and dozens of private peacemakers.

The Complementary Role of Private Actors

Private peacemakers are certainly not newcomers in the peacemaking field, even if they are still regarded by many as somehow subordinate to Track 1 peace diplomacy. Private actors adopted a prominent role in peacemaking processes in the second half of the 1990s. Some of these new actors, such as Finn Church Aid (FCA) and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm), had a background in development cooperation or humanitarian aid, but some, such as the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), were new non-profit organizations focusing on mediation more specifically. The Finnish actors have become particularly active in mediation in the 2000s, and all three organizations have reached an internationally recognised position in the field. During the past two decades, the field of private actors has professionalised and developed significantly, and private actors have become a central part of the field as flexible actors whose innovative thinking paves the way for reconsidering and reinventing old practices.





For private peacemakers, their relationships with official actors – states and international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) – are an aspect that determines and also limits their range of action. Yet, their role is not just to support Track 1 activities, but also to carry out their own work that complements official responses. Private peacemakers are needed where official actors cannot operate and to engage with parties that official actors cannot engage with. They can be involved in preventive mediation efforts

in sensitive situations where official acknowledgement of an emerging conflict would be difficult or harmful. Their “footprint” in conflicts is smaller and less visible than that of Track 1 actors, and they can therefore act more effectively in a preventive capacity. While states often perceive official interventions as a breach of sovereignty, the engagement of private actors does not present a similar challenge to their ownership of the peace process. Private actors can therefore also be active in contexts where there is no official peace process, preventing further escalation or generating opportunities for a future peace process. They rarely act directly at official negotiation tables, rather their activity reinforces and supports the official process in various ways. They can, among other things, build trust in the official process among those marginalised or neglected by it. Another integral aspect of the work of many private organizations is the prevention of violent extremism and engaging with extremist groups to peace process.

Private actors have also had a considerable effect on the transformation of the normative basis of international mediation. For example, FCA’s activity in Somalia was at the core of the role of religious and traditional actors being formally acknowledged at the UN, with support from Finland as a co-chair of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation. This also led to the establishment of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, with FCA as its Secretariat. Another recent example is CMI advancing dialogue on the difficulties of measuring (especially short-term) impact in complex conflicts. These types of assessments are often expected by state and other donors. Felm, for its part, has been active in two of Finland’s largest current investments in mediation, Syria and Myanmar, in the former cooperating with its partners to support the Women’s Advisory Board to the UN Special Envoy. From this perspective, private peacemakers can be regarded as “smart” actors whose power does not stem from their size, but from their ability to promote new norms and practices among official actors.

It is obvious that in peace processes vertical and horizontal cooperation, design, and coordination are desperately needed. Furthermore, it is important to comprehend the role and added value of private peacemakers in broad terms and to see the private sector not just as a supportive sector for the official one, but as an important and self-sustaining sector of its own. Still, the question of how to organise and cope with the asymmetric relationship between the official and the private cannot be avoided. Manoeuvring within increasingly complex peace processes entails a demand for revisiting practices and rules of peace mediation and the adoption of more flexible roles by different actors.



The Finnish Way: Cooperative Interaction between Official and Private Actors

In Finland, peacemaking has witnessed intensive interaction between the official and the private sector. This approach is based on the Nordic model in general that is characterised by close cooperation between the state, civic society actors and academia. A Finnish particularity in the peace sector are the strong private actors that have focused on mediation and peacemaking. The “Finnish way” offers an interesting example that may have wider significance. In the Finnish context, the official and the private sector form a symbiotic relationship that benefits both. Private peacemakers are not expected, nor do they consider themselves, to work as an extension of Finnish foreign policy, but close collaboration with and significant funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has enabled their broad visibility and innovative operation in various conflict zones. At the same time, they have been able to offer Finland first-hand information from the ground and informal processes. This particular collaboration of the state and civil society organisations is apparent also in the series of National Dialogue Conferences, running since 2014, bringing together stakeholders and practitioners of the thematic in Helsinki. There is a lot of interaction and various mutual learning processes, but it is still obvious that the official and private sectors can never fully merge, as their practices, agendas, and identities are fundamentally different. This type of model requires balancing between different cultures and approaches and, above all, the ability to tolerate these differences. From a broader perspective, this may – much better than well institutionalized hierarchical systems – enable innovative thinking and new kinds of approaches.

Nonetheless, the culture of Results-Based Management, which is dominant in development as well as the peacemaking sector, may be a major obstacle for change. If accepting complexity thinking and transformative goals in a short or even long-term perspective, pinpointing the particular results of particular action is seen as impossible, and projects that are too result-oriented will not allow innovative activity. As conflicts are complex, it is not realistic that one intervention would be the conclusive step towards peace. Rather, the complexity of peace interventions makes for slow progress as well as interruptions and setbacks. Conflicts and peace are not manageable in rational, linear terms, and the peace architecture itself is dynamic and continuously changing. It is therefore not possible to clearly identify the outputs of particular inputs. Tolerance of uncertainty and unpredictability is required from all actors, both official and private, within a complex peace architecture. Situations suitable for classical mediation have become rare and, as Track 1 actors are often incapable of acting in a smooth, discreet, and flexible enough way, a third party is needed to enable dialogic transformation in all phases of the conflict cycle. Their role can sometimes be crucial in enabling peace negotiations.

The Dialogic Approach

Private peacemakers in general, and the Finnish actors CMI, FCA, and Felm in particular, are not uniform in their approach to mediation and dialogue. However, there are also several similarities in their adopted practices and their comprehension of conflict transformation, and this is why it is possible to recognise a new common approach that we have termed a dialogic approach to mediation or peacemaking more broadly. This type of new approach draws from theories on the transformation and complexity of conflicts and is founded on a focus on



dialogue, long-term change and sustainability, and local ownership. It emphasises context-specificity, localised approaches, and the fluidity and flexibility of concepts and approaches, and derives entry points from local actors rather than official mandates. The starting point of such an approach is trust building and the deconstruction of dichotomous attitudes and assumptions rather than seeking compromise for clashing interests and power positions. Merely bringing parties together is not enough. Rather, the creation of different communication channels is seen as an integral part of the peace process.

Rather than focus on the resolution and removal of the state of conflict, transformation theories stress the need for a long-term transformation process from violence into peaceful forms of handling conflict. The signing of a single agreement does not yet guarantee lasting peace, and a formal agreement is not necessarily seen as a necessary end point of a peace process, but rather as one step in it. The risk is that a negotiated agreement halts the transformation process, and therefore it is important that the parties signing the contract also have the ability and will to see to it that the negotiated contract also takes root on the ground. The actors' goal is to support transformation towards peace, which is understood to entail an inclusive, open and socio-politically self-sustaining society. In the complex and shifting conflict dynamics, peacemakers have to be flexible and used to uncertainty. These types of situations require an approach of artisanship that combines strong professional skills with the ability to be creative in the ever-changing operating environment. Private actors also stress local ownership and agency, and aim to work through local partners. Invitation from a local private organization or an official actor has thus surpassed the previously dominating mandate-based system as a framework of operation.

In comparison to earlier understandings of peacemakers as doctors who aim to recognise the cause of illness and find appropriate medicine for it, or even sometimes as engineers that can manage complicated peacebuilding processes, private peacemakers can, to follow CMI's term, be seen as "artisans for peace." The emphasis of the new kind of self-identification is partly on craftsmanship, but also associated with certain artistic features. Peacemaking does not just require crafted skills learned by experience and rehearsing, but also sensitive intuition and creative ability to be spontaneous since it is not possible to copy exact models from previous cases, each of which is unique. Artisanship is about the ability to contact and communicate with the right people, to apply hunch and intuition in working in a complex context, and to recognise the right moments for particular action. It is about taking pride in one's skills, and assuming the ethical responsibility over one's own action. Indeed, the ability of a third party to make itself unnecessary in a revitalised, self-sustaining society is the core of the new ethical ethos.

Peace through Dialogue

Various types of dialogue processes lie at the core of such activity. National dialogue processes create their own, clearly defined operating environment, but it is informal dialogue processes that form the foundation for activities. The latter kind of dialogues can be divided into two types of processes: reconciling dialogues and dialogic mediation. Reconciling dialogues aim to build broad trust and perception of ownership in peace processes by bringing along groups marginalised in or left out of the official process. These processes are often long-term, public and broad, and can for example include engaging religious or traditional actors that enjoy trust in the local religious or traditional structures. The inclusion of women peacemakers and



organizations is a crucial part of long-term work that builds foundations for functioning state structures.

Dialogic mediation often has a more clearly defined timeline and a carefully selected set of parties, and it happens at least partly behind closed doors. The goal of CMI, for example, is to create communication channels between handpicked up representatives of different conflict parties. These individuals represent a certain group, but have mostly been chosen due to their ability to yield broader influence in the society. The purpose of dialogues is to build trust and to open new viewpoints into the future. It is crucial that the process initiated by an outside third party transforms into self-sustaining, locally driven activity that no longer requires outsider intervention.



What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?

Thania Paffenholz

Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative

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This textbox presents findings from a research project on National Dialogues (2015 to 2017) led by the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. It involved a comparative analysis of 17 cases of National Dialogues held between 1990 and 2014. The project aims to contribute to a better understanding of common features of National Dialogues, as well as the political and procedural factors and conditions that have enabled or constrained the negotiated outcomes of National Dialogues. The research findings are elaborated in a longer study commissioned by the United Nations Department of Political Affairs.

Key Findings

- National Dialogues have been used as an instrument to resolve political crises and pave the way for political transitions and sustainable peace.
- While most National Dialogues reached an agreement, only half of these agreements were implemented.
- When National Dialogues resulted in sustainable transitions, there was generally a favourable consensus among elites, in addition to international support and public buy-in.
- However, National Dialogues have often been used by elites as a tool to gain or reclaim political legitimacy, which has limited their potential for transformative change.
- Procedures for preparing, conducting, and implementing National Dialogues, in particular selection and decision-making rules, play a decisive role in whether processes are perceived as representative and legitimate.
- In the short term, National Dialogues have reduced violence by transferring grievances voiced from the street into formalised processes.

What are National Dialogues?

National Dialogues provide an inclusive, broad, and participatory official negotiation format, which can resolve political crises and lead countries into political transitions. National Dialogues have mandates that include political reforms, constitution-making, and peacebuilding. They have clear structures, usually with a mix of plenary and working groups, and have defined rules and procedures for dialogue and decision-making. They may last from several days to several years, and their size and composition can vary considerably, from a hundred participants to several thousand. National Dialogues are typically accompanied by broader societal consultations designed to communicate results of the negotiations and



channel people's demands into the process. One major rationale behind the inclusion of large segments of society within a National Dialogue is to generate buy-in for its outcomes.

Who is Included in National Dialogues?



National Dialogues typically involve principal national elites, including the government and the largest (armed or unarmed) opposition parties, and occasionally the military. Other groups who participate include those representing wider constituencies such as civil society, women, youth, business, and religious or traditional actors. National Dialogues are inclusive throughout the entire negotiation process, meaning that participants are involved in discussions in all phases. Usually it also means that the decision-

making procedures give, at least on paper, a voice, and a vote to all included actors. Nevertheless, the equal participation of these wider constituencies, particularly women, has almost always been challenged by dominant elites.

In Which Contexts do National Dialogues Take Place?

National Dialogues are typically convened at times when the fundamental nature or survival of a government in power is in question. Thus, they are usually intended as a means of redefining the relationship between the state, political actors and society through the negotiation of a new social contract. In such historical moments, pro-change and anti-change forces emerge. The government – generally anti-change – often initiates National Dialogues with the aim of regaining legitimacy by controlling the negotiating process and outcomes. Pro-change forces on the other hand, envisage National Dialogues as an opportunity for redefining the future of the state. For these reasons, both pro-change and anti-change actors have often been able to agree on National Dialogues as a negotiation format. The decision to initiate National Dialogues was also significantly influenced by bottom-up pressures for change, typically in the form of mass protest.

What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?

The research revealed that while most of the National Dialogues studied reached agreements, half of the cases failed to implement those agreements or only implemented them to a limited degree. A set of factors related to the political context and to the process was found to be particularly important in enabling or constraining the outcomes of National Dialogues.



Five political context factors play a decisive role in influencing the outcomes of National Dialogues:

1 | *National elites' resistance or support.* The attitude and behaviour of national elites, which can manifest at different phases of the transition, was found to be the single most important factor influencing the chances of National Dialogues to reach and implement agreements. Elites can be for or against governance reforms. However, even actors and groups advocating for 'change' are not necessarily in favour of democratic reform, as they may co-opt the process for their own partisan interests.

The gains of National Dialogues have also at times been reversed by elites in the implementation stage.

2 | *Public support or frustration.* Public buy-in is crucial to ensure progress in the negotiation and implementation of agreements. Yet, support for the process can decline over time if people become frustrated with delays, diminishing legitimacy, or a lack of progress.

3 | *Support or resistance of regional and international actors.* Various external actors are often involved in National Dialogues (either directly or by proxy) including neighbouring countries, international support groups, or regional and international organizations. Because regional actors usually have more acute interests at stake, their influence has proved more decisive on the outcomes of National Dialogues. They may also benefit from pre-existing relationships with the main protagonists.

4 | *Local dialogue expertise.* National Dialogues have benefitted, both in the pre-negotiation and the negotiation phases, from existing dialogue expertise in a country, such as experiences of local-level mediation. Experienced local facilitators have worked inside or outside of National Dialogues to bring parties together to a position of consensus.

5 | *Experiences from prior negotiations.* Capitalising on previous negotiations in order to avoid the repetition of mistakes has helped to prevent situations of deadlock in National Dialogues.

Parallel to context factors, **five process factors** were particularly influential on the outcomes of National Dialogues:

1 | *Representation of actors, and the process for selecting representatives.* Selection criteria and procedures can support or hinder the broad representation of different social and political groups and therefore the legitimacy of a negotiation process. Selection procedures have been co-opted by elites, who have selected participants most loyal to them.

2 | *Decision-making procedures.* Procedures for decision-making determine, at least on paper, how decisions are validated throughout negotiations. These decision-making procedures are crucial to reaching legitimate outcomes. Most often decisions are taken by simple majority, where each delegate receives one vote. However, decision-making practice can diverge from formal procedures, most commonly when elites take decisions outside the plenary, in doing so excluding other participants.



3 | *Support structures for involved actors.* Support structures have been established by international, regional, or non-governmental organizations with the aim of strengthening the role and influence of certain participants in a National Dialogue. Support structures can provide technical assistance to participants and assist them to build coalitions, allowing them time to agree on common positions. This enables groups to better advocate for their respective interests, which has translated into the inclusion of specific provisions in the final agreement.

4 | *Coalition building among included actors.* Coalition building was found to be a powerful strategy for actors to make their voices heard in National Dialogues for example among women of different delegations or between non-armed and armed groups.

5 | *Choice of facilitator(s).* National Dialogues are almost always facilitated by a neutral party to the negotiations. Facilitators are typically persons with a high degree of political legitimacy within the country or internationally. They have usually played an important role in launching the process and reducing tensions during negotiations. The capacity of facilitators or mediators can significantly shape the process of National Dialogues particularly with respect to how they deal with elites. Facilitators have persuaded elites to keep negotiating in moments of deadlock or designed a process that reflects the composition and traditions of a society.



Dialogue of a Million People in the Peace Machine Concept

*Timo Honkela, Professor
University of Helsinki*

Artificial intelligence, machine learning and natural language processing have influenced various areas of industry and services in multiple ways.

There are multiple reasons why this has taken place. Systems can be built efficiently thanks to the imitation of human learning. This learning is implemented using computational algorithms that can benefit from the availability of large collections of data. The data is more and more often collections of text documents. When there are huge numbers of documents, it is essential that sufficient computational resources are available in a manner. This means both the computational time required and the space of memory in order to store the data and the results. As many important algorithms have been available even for 30 years, the computational capacity is a central explanation why artificial intelligence has become even societally relevant. Another important factor is the idea of simulating human mind and brain rather than trying to code human knowledge manually. Practical examples of the developments in this area of artificial intelligence include evolving robotic cars, improving speech-to-speech machine translation and automated medical diagnosis. Since the beginning of 2017, development of the concept of peace machine has been taking place. The underlying basis has been the author's 30 years' experience in the area of artificial intelligence, natural language processing and machine learning as well as collaboration with scholars in more than ten scientific disciplines. Very important factors supporting the development have been interactions with the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, as well as with the participants of the national dialogues conference. A very informative account on the developments was published by Al Jazeera in English. The peace machine concept will be described in a book that will be published by the end of 2017. The essential support from the crowdfunding campaign was made possible by an article published by the largest Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* in early 2017.

One anticipated application of the future peace machine methodology and technology is the opportunity to organise meetings and dialogues of a million people. This is based on statistical machine learning and natural language processing technologies that can bring together people with related ideas, opinions, and solutions. The modern linguistic technologies can detect similarities in contents in spite of the differences at the surface. Combined with the network technologies, this enables participatory processes and inclusion in spite of geographical distances. Detection of similarities in meaning can be based on large text and speech collections. The central idea here is the use of context. This idea that the meaning of the word can be deduced from the context has been known already for some time e.g. by linguists. Thus, the machine can learn that words like home and house are closely related.



In my own research, an important aspect has been the subjectivity of meaning in addition to its contextual nature. The word fair has alternative distinct meanings. In language technology, the process of choosing between those alternatives is called disambiguation. There are, however, also more fine-grained differences in the interpretation of the meaning of some word or expression. What is meant by *fairness* or *justice*? People are not only of different



opinion regarding various matters, but they are also having a different conceptual view on the contents of various central words and terms. In a face-to-face conversation, we can conduct so-called meaning negotiation. It is becoming possible to conduct computationally based meaning negotiation. In the future, it will be possible to have a box on the table that listens to our conversations. It may say something like this: "dear Ann, what you just said will most likely be understood quite differently by Mahmood than what do you want to express. These meaning negotiating machines can help us in everyday life as well as in the gatherings by a large number of people. The central aim is to avoid miscommunication and to promote mutual understanding.

When there is more capacity and greater availability of the relevant textual data, the same concept of large meeting can be extended to multinational contexts. Meaning negotiation methodologies will be developed towards direction where they can more and more carefully take into account cultural and other complex differences. In order to cross linguistic borders, machine translation systems are also needed. Recently the quality of translation has been increasing substantially thanks to the use of multi-layered neural network technology also called deep networks. The practical consequence of these developments is that in the future speakers of many different languages can participate in the same conversation. The use of meaning negotiation methodologies can help in ensuring that fine-grained cultural and other contextual differences in interpretation can be taken into account automatically. Thus, in the future, machine can serve as a skilful interpreter. Machines do not of course have human life experience, but they can analyse large collections of text and data and imitate simulate human skills in surprisingly detailed way when large enough collection of data is available. The linguistic skills of future machines can be surprisingly high. These kinds of methods and technologies can substantially promote grassroots participation in various societal processes. In addition to formal societal processes, also informal communication will be enhanced.



Improve communication and mutual understanding is not naturally sufficient in improving substantially peaceful conditions in the world. The other two main areas in the peace machine concepts are related to emotions and fairness. Human decision-making takes place through the use of three main components. We benefit from our ability to use explicit knowledge called each in linguistic form and we also gain a huge capacity through our experience in practical life collected in intuition or implicit cognition. Moreover, even more fundamental basis for our cognition is related to our emotional system. Future technologies are giving us to improve the ability to understand our own emotions as well as others' emotional responses that may come as surprise to us.

In the peace machine concept, the third main area is that of fairness. This means that how well the conditions are organised in the societies in such a way that people do not feel that they need to fight violently for improved conditions and against state of injustice. The developments in data science bring more and more methods and tools to improve possibilities to take these developments further. For instance, combining multi objective optimisation techniques with various artificial intelligence methods can help in achieving improved societal condition. We can benefit from the use of systems that can deal with hugely complex conditions and problems.



Annex

A. Concept Note: The Third Conference on National Dialogues

*April 5-6, 2017, The House of the Estates, Helsinki
Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and an International NGO Consortium*

Introduction

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland is organising the third conference on National Dialogues and non-formal dialogue processes together with a consortium of NGOs in April 2017 in Helsinki, Finland. This is a continuation of conferences held in April 2014 and November 2015 which enjoyed wide participation and deepened the understanding of dialogue processes among attendees enabling both a broad range of both stakeholders from multiple countries and practitioners in the field and internationally take the collaborative lessons forward. The conference will again provide a space for joint reflection and in-depth discussion between practitioners, stakeholders and experts working with dialogue processes in different contexts.

Background

Most contemporary conflicts in the world are internal. Often rooted in unreconciled tensions between state, identity and society, intra-state conflicts are often intensified by structural causes for conflict – such as inequality or unemployment. Rarely are such conflicts monocausal, and accordingly, efforts to resolve them need to address the complexity of the conflict.

Over the past three decades, national dialogues have become increasingly common worldwide as a mechanism for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These dialogues have come in all kinds of different shapes and sizes, with varying aims and intentions – to expand political participation (including that in notable cases, of the marginalised population of women), generate new approaches and solutions or manage change at delicate times. This inherent diversity notwithstanding, broad interest has emerged in the potential of national dialogues as a powerful approach in prevention, resolution and transformation of conflicts.

Due to this potential, there is a growing effort to capture the conceptual importance, and richness of practitioner experience surrounding national dialogues. The conceptual debate can be contentious. There are multiple intersecting definitions for what constitutes national dialogue, and the debate is likely to remain vibrant. On one hand, national dialogues can be viewed as a form of mediation that is subject to political interests like other similar processes. Alternatively, national dialogues can be seen to represent a wider process of change, even transformation, for societies, thus being a much wider effort with far reaching impact. Understandably, whether one adopts a narrower or more expansive definition has considerable ramifications for what constitutes “best practice” for the conduct and support of such dialogue.



Beyond the conceptual debate, there exists a large and ever-increasing corpus of practical experiences in nationally owned dialogues, ranging from South Africa and Myanmar to Yemen and Tunisia. In all cases, the common denominator is processes to support change, but in each case the design and implementation is deeply context specific in order to ensure meaningful outputs and lasting positive outcomes.

Contributing to and imbibing from this wider discussion, the series of National Dialogue Conferences have successively focused on different vital aspects and elements of these processes. From the beginning, there has been a clear interest and intention by conference organisers to ensure aspects of gender inclusion are highlighted in the discussions given the experience and potential of the national dialogue model for enhancing this, and related policies of key organisers.

The first National Dialogue Conference,³ held in April 2014, approached the concept with a strong focus on learning: what makes a national dialogue? There are diverse experiences with national dialogues, and it is impractical to focus on any one model as the way to conduct or support dialogue. By situating the discussion within the field of internal mediation and dialogue processes more widely, the first conference aimed to deepen understanding of best practices and encourage sharing, comparative learning and innovation in the conduct and support to these critical processes. By delving into the examples of South Africa, Yemen, Myanmar, Syria, the final report of the first conference captures much of the contextual richness of national dialogues in general, and potential for identifying design and analytical elements.

The second National Dialogue Conference,⁴ held in November 2015, in particular engaged the latter aspects: what elements come together in designing a national dialogue? National dialogues are not always termed so. Likewise, regardless of the mandate received, the underlying processes are not invalidated. In embracing this diversity of design within national dialogues, the second conference sought to advance and hone the ideas developed in the first conference. As noted, national dialogues were also seen as crucial for establishing inclusion for women, youth and minority groups in wider peace processes. Particularly women's role in peacemaking and conflict prevention has now been widely recognised by the UN, but ensuring their active inclusion on all stages of national dialogue processes remains an issue. Once again, providing a space for learning and reflection was a key objective for the conference, coupled with a close examination of emerging cases in Somalia, Myanmar, Yemen and Tunisia. Furthermore, in addition to the reflection achieved substantively, another outcome of the second conference was to solidify the role of the event as a gathering for a wide range of actors to exchange ideas around national dialogues.

Focus

Building on the ground covered in these past conferences, *the third National Dialogue Conference, to be held 5-6 April 2017, focuses on the wider ecosystem of national dialogues: what happens around national dialogues, regionally and locally, and how does this affect them?*

³ Conference report: formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=135470&GUID={1EDD0A95-7358-4D06-BBFE-F6D880C5A944}

⁴ Conference report: formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=154055&GUID={73EDF1CE-020A-45BC-BE2C-405D5B674E72}



National dialogues do not take place in isolation. When zooming out of the dialogue, it becomes apparent that like the countries themselves, these dialogues are intimately affected by the regional and international environment around them. This link between the regional and the national is often acknowledged but less often analysed in terms of how it affects the conduct and design of national dialogues. In exploring the dynamics between the transition processes and regional developments, the conference aims to deepen the common understanding in how these dynamics can be disruptive or supportive to dialogue, and identify ways to translate into improved practice.

Similar dynamics take place when zooming in. National dialogues often assume central roles in transition processes, but they affect and are affected by other national or local processes. Typically, there are multiple tracks and sectors involved, and breakthroughs or slowdowns on any single track affect the other tracks. This is not only a matter of sequencing but also of effective implementation. These relationships between the national and the local are particularly challenging in countries where state authority and singular national narratives are contested. In particular, these dynamics are essential in the implementation of national dialogues, and are an aspect that this conference seeks to unpack.

In addressing these questions, the third conference will also continue and further develop past dialogues on key thematic and process questions, such as inclusivity and formats of dialogue, of the past conferences. In terms of geographic and case focus, the conference also takes stock of concluded processes and their successes and failures.

Thematic and Geographic Focus

The conference is anchored around two related leading thematic elements, which together explore the environment around national dialogues: on one hand, the link between *regional dynamics and national dialogues*, and on the other hand the link between *state, nation and national dialogue*. These leading elements will be explored through several geographic focus areas, in addition to which, other recurring themes, revisiting past conversations will also feature in the conference.

Theme 1: The Regional Dynamics of National Dialogues

Although most contemporary violent conflicts are intra-state, their dynamics, effects and efforts to mediate them transcend national borders. Regional and international actors play various roles – political, military, economic – in conflict/fragile states, it is also important to keep an eye on how regional dynamics affect mediation and dialogue processes. Similarly, it's instructive to reflect, in different settings, on which of these levels women are more or less active and have more or less access to 'real' political processes.

While the role of the international community in assisting national dialogue has been recognised, the role of regional actors and sub-regional dynamics is often less recognised. As these actors are often more closely involved in neighbouring conflict countries – both in peace and in war – their potential for playing conducive or disruptive roles is greater. This raises several interesting elements in process design, inclusion regionally, and how to support national dialogue. The need for coordination is often raised, but beyond linking different tracks of dialogue, it also broaches the question of regional peace infrastructures.



These tensions and possibilities will be considered primarily through the complexities of the **Middle East** regional system. Currently there are multiple, prolonged conflicts in the region – such as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen – and other regional actors exposed or involved in them.

Theme 2: States(s), Nation(s), and Dialogue(s)

Although the term national dialogue has now become commonplace, in many cases it would more accurately be described as a dialogue about a “nation”. In fragile conditions, the overlapping aspects of state and state institutions, national identity and narrative are by no means well defined, and often exist in actively contested spaces.

By focusing on national dialogues taking place along the fragile continuum of state-to-non-state-to-almost-state, it is possible to examine how local-national dynamics interact with national dialogues, and consequently how national dialogues can link with track one functions. For instance, do national dialogues imply one nation and how is that nation defined – how does this interact with inclusivity and pluralism? The complex role of the diaspora must also be acknowledged herein. In all of these issues, gender is a factor often underexplored which could help unlock different entry points. In fragile conditions, legitimacy of the state and political order are often intertwined – what ramifications does this have for dialogues that envisage political change and the introduction of new political mores? In this space, where does the line between building state institutions and building of the polity governing the state go?

The local-national dynamic is considered primarily through the cases of the **Central African Republic** (CAR) and **Myanmar**, both of which bring their own unique complexities.

Other Thematic Focuses

Supporting the discussion of these leading themes is an array of recurring thematic dialogues, following on the past years’ conferences and introducing new elements to the equation.

Along with regional and international organizations, various non-state actors – ranging from religious leaders to civil society organisations, and women’s groups – play an important role in supporting national dialogue and peace processes. In many conflict situations, non-state actors have played a crucial role in advocating for peace and opening informal avenues for dialogue between opposing sides, thus highlighting the need for inclusion. Non-state actors have also often successfully complemented the formal mediation efforts of governments and regional/international organizations.

There are multiple building blocks to national dialogues, which involve inevitable trade-offs and design variables. The close examination of **process design** will continue, with sessions dedicated to specific questions and elements. In these process-focused sessions, some of the topics which may be addressed include: inclusivity and inclusiveness, women, youth and minorities – looking for evidence beyond base assumptions, and self-mediation in processes.

Different national dialogues involve different substantive questions – the core issues that are addressed through the process. The conference will contribute to deepening the examination



of selected **substantive topics**, that are either topical in multiple national dialogues, or are emergent themes in need of closer examination. Some of the provisional topics include local governance and federalism, land reform, transitional justice and governance reform, normative frameworks for SSR and civilian-military relations, political parties, and national dialogue. All of these have gender angles, which have been patchily explored in research and practice, thus the conference offers an opportunity to bring in gendered analysis, which will be a genuine contribution to policy and practice – whether highlighting gaps, or offering fresh analysis and insights.



B. Conference Agenda

WEDNESDAY, 5 APRIL 2017

8:30–9:00 Registration

9:00–09:40 Opening and Welcoming remarks

Special representative of the Foreign Minister on Mediation Pekka Haavisto
Masters of Ceremonies: Ambassador Kai Sauer and Ambassador Sirpa Mäenpää

09:40– Leadership for change: experiences from Namibia

10:30 *President Martti Ahtisaari, Finland*

President Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba, Namibia

Moderator: Juliette Foster, International Broadcaster

10:30–11:00 Coffee/Tea break

11:00–12:45 High-level panel: Regional dynamics, political leadership and complexity

Minister Vadym Chernysh, Minister for Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs, Ukraine

Honorable Astrid Thors, Former High Commissioner on National Minorities, OSCE

Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Dr. Alhaji Sarhoj Bah, AU Peace and Security Department, Head of Division for Crisis Management, Post-Conflict and Reconstruction

Moderator: Juliette Foster, International Broadcaster

12:45–13:45 Lunch

13:45–15:30 Parallel thematic sessions 1

Regional dynamics of National Dialogues in the Middle East

Room: 15 (Plenary room)

Dr. Yasar Qatarneh, Senior Adviser, Crisis Management Initiative (Moderator)

Mr. Marwan Ali, Principal Adviser to the Special Envoy to the Secretary General on Yemen

Dr. Karam Karam, Regional Adviser, Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division (ECRI), UN-ESCWA

Mr. Oliver McTernan, Director, Forward Thinking

Mr. Abdulnaser Al-Muwadea, Author and Researcher, Yemen

Ms. Minna Saarnivaara, Syria Initiative Project Manager, Felm



Youth in national dialogue processes: resolution 2250 an entry point

Room: 23 (Round table)

Ms. Marie Makweri, Peace and Reconciliation Advisor, Finn Church Aid – South Sudan (Moderator)

Mr. Mir Mubashir, Project Manager, Berghof Foundation

Ms. Irena Grizelj, Independent Researcher and Consultant – Youth, Peace and Security

Ms. Irene Limo, Coordinator, Peacemaking Unit, ACCORD

Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Professor, School of International Service, American University & Senior Adviser, KAICIID (Concluding comments / Respondent)

Reconciliation and Transitional Justice

Room: 3 (First floor)

Mr. Jeff Seul, Chairman of the Board, Peace Appeal (Moderator)

Ms. Mandira Sharma, Human Rights activist, Nepal

Mr. Bishnu Sapkota, Board Member, Nepal Transitions to Peace Institute

Ms. Valentina Erazo, Peacebuilding and Participation Coordinator, Presidential Counsellor's Office for Human Rights, Colombia

15:30–16:00 Coffee/Tea break

16:00–17:45 Parallel thematic sessions 2

Local dialogue in the absence of National Dialogue in MENA

Room: 15 (Plenary)

Mr. Mahmoud Ramadan, Common Space Initiative/Syria Initiative (Moderator)

Ms. Raeifa Samie, member of the Women's Advisory Board of UN special envoy for Syria Mr. Stefan de Mistura

Ms. Eva Ziedan, COSV

Mr. Maruan El Krekshi, Head of MENA, Crisis Management Initiative

Mr. Martin Griffiths, Executive Director, European Institute for Peace (First Commentary)

Regional organisations' support to national dialogue processes

Room: 23 (Round table)

Mr. Itonde Kakoma, Head for Sub-Saharan Africa, Crisis Management Initiative (Moderator)



Dr. Alhaji Sarhoj Bah, AU Peace and Security Department, Head of Division for Crisis Management, Post-Conflict and Reconstruction
Ambassador Hamuli Baudouin Kabarhuzato, Director for Political Affairs and Early Warning, ECCAS

Dr. Aleu Garang Aleu, Coordinator, IGAD Mediation Support Unit
Dr. Brown Odigie, Program Officer, Mediation Facilitation Directorate, ECOWAS

Ms. Stella Sabiiti, International Consultant and Expert on APSA

Ms. Yvette Ngandu, Coordinator, AU Peace and Security Department (Commentator)

Ambassador Corentin Ki-Doulaye, Crisis Management Initiative Senior Adviser (Commentator)

Land Reform and Local Governance

Room: 3 (First floor)

Mr. Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj, Senior Coordinator, Syria Initiative, Common Space Initiative (Moderator)

Ms. Shirley Moulder, Chair of the Board, Peace Appeal Foundation (Moderator)

Mr. Anas Joudeh, President, National Building Movement

Ms. SiuSue Mark, Political Economist for Land Governance, Erasmus University

Mr. Tommi Tenno, Technical Director, Niras (Commentator)

17:45–18:00 Reflections of the day and comparative lessons from the field

Dr. Thania Paffenholz, Director, Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative at The Graduate Institute

Masters of Ceremonies

18:00–20:00 Cocktail event

Hosted by Under-Secretary of State Anne Sipiläinen, MFA Finland

Location: House of the Estates

THURSDAY, 6 APRIL 2017

09:00–9:10 Opening of day 2

9:10–9:30 Keynote: Peace from a different perspective – Dialogue of a million people

Professor Timo Honkela, University of Helsinki

9:30–10:00 Coffee/Tea break

10:00–12:00 Parallel thematic sessions 3



Dialogue in CAR: Historical pathways, local dynamics and the role of regional influence

Room: 15 (Plenary)

Mr. Pekka Haavisto, Special representative of the Foreign Minister on Mediation (Moderator)

H.E. Mme Catherine Samba-Panza, Former President of the Central African Republic

Imam Modibo Bachir Walidou, Deputy Imam of the Central Mosque in Bangui

Ambassador Hamuli Baudouin Kabarhuzato, Director for Political Affairs and Early Warning, ECCAS

Mr. Caesar Poblicks, Projects Manager for East and Central Africa Programme, Conciliation Resources

Building peace architecture in the Middle East

Room: 3 (First floor)

Ambassador Nureldin Satti, Crisis Management Initiative Senior Adviser, retired Sudanese diplomat and former senior official at the UN and UNESCO (Moderator)

Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Dr. Seyed Hamzeh Safavi, Director, Institute for Islamic World Futures Studies

Mr. Cengiz Çandar, Distinguished Visiting Scholar, Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Studies

Grassroots participation in the Myanmar peace process

Room: 23 (Round table)

Ms. Thuzar Thant, EBO Programme Manager (Moderator)

Mr. Sai Sai Ngin, Director, White Benevolence – Environmental Research and Education, Shan State Common Space

Mr. Min Htay Aung, Mon State Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring Committee Member, Mon State Common Space

Ms. Nan Mya Thida, Director, Research Institute for Society and Ecology, Karen State Common Space

Ms. Nang Phyu Phyu Lin, Gender Advisor to the CSO Forum + Gender Equality Network

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:00-14:45 Parallel thematic sessions 4



Lessons in process design and potential for self-mediation (UN advisory and policy)

Room: 23 (Round table)

Mr. Hannes Siebert, Senior Technical Advisor, Common Space Initiative (Moderator)

Dr. Andries Odendaal, Senior Associate, Centre for Mediation in Africa, University of Pretoria

Ms. Roxaneh Bazergan, Senior Political Affairs Officer, UNDPA

Ms. Luxshi Vimalarajah, Programme Director, Berghof Foundation

Mr. Jonathan Harlander, HD Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Women shaping the agenda in National Dialogue processes

Room: 15 (Plenary)

Dr. Thania Paffenholz, Director, Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative at The Graduate Institute (Moderator)

H.E. Mme Catherine Samba-Panza, Former President of the Central African Republic

Ms. Nang Lao Liang Won (Tay Tay), Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) & Women's League of Burma (WLB)

Ms. Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen, Yemeni Writer and Researcher

Mr. Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj, Senior Coordinator, Syria Initiative, Common Space Initiative

Ambassador Ann-Sofie Stude, UNSCR 1325 National Focal Point, MFA Finland (First Commentary)

History and narratives in conflict

Room: 3 (First floor)

Dr. Timo R. Stewart, Researcher (Moderator)

Dr. Erkki Tuomioja, Former Minister, Member of Parliament, Finland

Dr. Marko Lehti, Academic Director of Master's Programme in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research, University of Tampere

Ms. Paula Gaviria, Presidential Counsellor on Human Rights of Colombia (Video Greeting)

14:45-15:15 Coffee/Tea break

15:15-16:40 High-level panel: Activating the local level potential for national processes

Ms. Anne Sipiläinen, Under-Secretary of State, MFA Finland

Ms. Rina Amiri, Former Senior Mediation Expert, UN

Mr. Antti Pentikäinen, Executive Director and Convener, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers



Moderator: Ms. Tuija Talvitie, Executive Director, Crisis Management Initiative

16:40-17:00 Reflections and Learning for Future

Consortium closing remarks: Ms. Tuija Talvitie, Executive Director, Crisis Management Initiative

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland closing remarks: Under-Secretary of State Elina Kalkku

Masters of Ceremonies



C. List of Conference Participants

Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj	CSI
Mohammed Abu-Nimer	KAICIID Dialogue Centre
Erik af Hällström	MFA Finland
Martti Ahtisaari	CMI
Erbay Akansoy	Cyprus Dialogue Forum
Alviina Alametsä	Parliament of Finland
Marwan Ali	Office of the Special Envoy to the Secretary General on Yemen
Mania Alkhatib	Suomi-Syyria Ystävyyssseura ry
Khalid Al-Maini	
Mohammed Al-Mamari	Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman
Abdulnaser Al-Muwadea	
Sayyed Al-Razawi	Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society
Hussein AL-Taee	CMI
Rina Amiri	
Antti Ämmälä	CMI
Mathew Andreas Nangombe	Namibia
Kathy Angi	Felm
Eeva Anundi	Press
Mario Arang Awet	University of Juba
Mohammed Ariad	Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco, Finland
Mikko Autti	OSCE
Abraham Awolich	SUDD Institute
Modibo Bachir Walidou	Central Mosque in Bangui
Hamuli Baudouin Kabarhuzato	ECCAS
Roxaneh Bazergan	UNDPA
Fulvia Benavides	Cotes Colombia
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Cengiz Candar	Stockholm University
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Vadym Chernysh	Ukraine
Roxana Cristescu	CMI
Marina Danoyan	CMI
Isaiah Dau Majok	SSCC
Miriam de Andrés de Castro	Spain
Lual Deng	Ebony Center for Strategic Studies
Noora Dietrich	MFA Finland



Anisa Doty	FCA
Martti Eirol	MFA Finland
Ahti El Massri	Interpreter
Romdhane El Fayedh	Tunisia
Maruan El-Krekshi	CMI
Mohamed Elsanousi	FCA
Valentina Erazo	Colombia
Oskari Eronen	CMI
Juliette Foster	BBC
Jennifer Freeman	Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice / Women
Ben Freeth	Peacemakers Program
Aleu Garang Aleu	Mike Campbell Foundation
Michelle Gehrig	IGAD
Guerrino Gelmi	Dialogue Advisory Group
Beatrice Githieya	Interpreter
Martin Griffiths	FCA
Irena Grizelj	European Institute for Peace
Jonna Haapanen	Independent
Pekka Haavisto	DEMO Finland
Outi Hakanen	Member of Parliament, Finland
Gunilla Hamne	MFA Finland
Seyed Hamzeh Safavi	Peaceful Heart Network
Emmi Hänninen	Institute for Islamic World Futures Studies (Iran)
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Minna Havunen	Namibia
Wolf-Dietrich Heim	Felm
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Marja Jørgensen	South Africa
Tiina Jortikka-Laitinen	FCA
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Priscilla Joseph	Kuch Women Peace Network in South Sudan
Anas Joudeh	National Building Movement
	Women Parliamentary Caucus of SSudan National Legislature
Dusman Joyce James	Demo Finland
Anu Juvonen	CMI
Itonde Kakoma	MFA Finland
Elina Kalkku	MFA Finland
Katri Källbacka	Conference team
Elisa Kallio	UN-ESCWA
Karam Karam	Sitra
Janne Kareinen	Felm
Jarkko-Pekka Kärkkäinen	CMI
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Saana Keskitalo	CMI
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Marko Lehti	CMI
Elina Lehtinen	MFA Finland
Kirsikka Lehto-Asikainen	HD Centre
Yodit Lemma	ACCORD
Irene Limo	FCA
Sara Linnoinen	Namibia
Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba	Interpreter
Juan Luis Moreno	LIAS
Job Maats	



Sirpa Mäenpää	MFA Finland
Selma Magano Simon	Namibia
Titta Maja	MFA Finland Permanent Mission Geneva
Simba Makoni	Zimbabwe
Marie Makweri	FCA
Hans-Christian Mangelsdorf	MFA Germany
SiuSue Mark	Erasmus University
Ed Marques	Independent
Katherine Marshall	Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs
Denis Matveev	CMI
Oliver McTernan	Forward Thinking
Delphine Mechoulan	IPI
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Hameed Jumaa	UAE
Walid Moubarak	CSI
Shirley Moulder	Peace Appeal Foundation
Maria Mountraki	WCC
Mir Mubashir	Berghof Foundation
Wolfgang Mühlberger	FIIA
Elizabeth Murray	USIP
Nan Mya Thida	Karen State Common Space
Phramaha Napan	
Thawornbanjob	Temple - Wat Saket
Jussi Nummelin	MFA Finland
Erik Nyström	FCA
Andries Odendaal	South Africa
Brown Odigie	ECOWAS
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Katariina Oivo	MFA Finland
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Janne Oksanen	MFA Finland
James Oyet Latansio	SSCC
Ceylan Özen Erisen	Republic of Turkey
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Lea Pakkanen	Felm
Anne Palm	WISE
Marja Papunen	Conference team
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Timo R. Stewart	Independent
Mahmoud Ramadan	CSI
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Kristiina Rintakoski	Felm
Seppo Rissanen	Felm
Paula Roque	Independent
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Sai Sai Ngin	Shan State Common Space
Timo Salo	MFA Finland
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Anne Saloranta	Embassy of Finland, Namibia
Kari Saloranta	
Angela Salt	Tony Blair Faith Foundation
Catherine Samba-Panza	Central African Republic
Raifah Samie	Women's Advisory Board
Sofie Sandström	MFA Finland
Bishnu Sapkota	Nepal Transitions to Peace
Alhaji Sarjoh Bah	AU
Nureldin Satti	CMI
Kai Sauer	MFA Finland
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Mandira Sharma	Nepal
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Hesham Youssef	OIC
Maria Zeniou	Cyprus Dialogue Forum
Eva Ziedan	COSV



D. Opening Remarks by Pekka Haavisto, MP, Special Representative of the Foreign Minister on Mediation

Presidents, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Participants,
I would like to warmly welcome all of you to Helsinki, Finland, and to the **Third Conference on National Dialogues and Non-Formal Dialogue Processes**. I am pleased to note that so many of you from different parts of the world are represented and bring in your expertise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference on National Dialogues is continuation of two conferences held in 2014 and 2015 in Helsinki. These conferences enjoyed a wide participation and deepened the understanding of dialogue processes. We are privileged to provide again this year a forum for you to share and reflect together experiences from national dialogues and non-formal dialogue processes across the world. While the two earlier conferences focused on the concept of the national dialogue as such, this conference aims to expand the thinking in two directions: first, how the regional and local dynamics affect the peace process; and second, how the national dialogues reach the actors and issues beyond the main agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current global situation presents a challenge to the wellbeing of countless people. Today's conflicts consist of complex sets of official, unofficial, international, regional, national and local actors with a number of evolving linkages. Their impact on human beings is greater than ever. The number of people fleeing from war or conflict is on the rise. At the same time the resources for tackling the increasing number of ongoing crises are insufficient.

Mediation is one of Finland's foreign policy priorities. Equally Finland puts increasing focus on the participation of all relevant stakeholders and on the role of inclusive dialogues as means to achieving lasting peace. Finland places a high value on dialogue among cultures and religions. Also young people have a lot to offer to building peace and resilience in their societies. It is clear that these issues have to be fully on board when we try to find solutions to the very complicated and intertwined problems of our time.

Even though we have done much to develop mediation, we have not been successful enough in preventing armed conflicts. Too much effort has gone towards responding conflicts instead preventing them. We need at every turn to ask ourselves how mediation can be used effectively to address armed conflicts in the Middle East, in Africa, in Ukraine and many other places. Meanwhile we need remember that there are positive experiences - such as Colombia - from which to learn.

Global mediation and preventive diplomacy efforts should be enhanced and be given more focus to. In this regard I welcome the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' initiative to enhance mediation capacity, both at the United Nations Headquarters and in the field, and to support regional and national mediation efforts. But these efforts cannot be successful unless sufficient resources are put in place for implementation and all relevant stakeholders are on board. A dollar spent on mediation and conflict prevention can save us many in the future. But we are not there yet.



I want to highlight the importance of women's full participation in decision-making. Equality is a matter of security. I firmly believe that equal participation of both men and women is a crucial component in any peace process, including national dialogues to reach sustainable peace. While the international normative framework provides a strong basis for women's inclusion, the implementation of the agenda is still lacking behind. Stronger implementation requires at least two elements: Skills and tools required for better inclusion of women as well as support to concrete steps implementing the women, peace and security agenda. Finland has supported both of these efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last three decades, National Dialogues have become increasingly common worldwide as a mechanism for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. They present a valid way to overcome internal rifts, to rebuild relations between the state, its institutions and different interest groups and to reach a new social contract in a conflict-torn society. National Dialogue can be mechanisms for fundamental change. They are also cost-effective compared to external interventions, in particular military interventions or sanctions.

I am confident that National dialogues provide an excellent platform for advancing long-term peace specifically from two perspectives: local ownership and broad inclusion. These are the key attributes of any successful peacemaking process. It is important that the people who are directly affected by armed conflict are in the driver's seat in finding solutions which are best suited to the realities they are facing. Local level activities can feed into the official negotiation processes. And sometimes when the formal and high level negotiations are facing problems and challenges, local action becomes the only way to hold the peace process ongoing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Often the path from conflict to long-term peace requires parallel processes; international efforts, national state building and reconciliation processes as well as local peacemaking efforts. No single actor alone can solve a conflict. There is need for strong platforms where different actors can contribute to peace making based on their own strengths. Finland will do its best to make sure this complementarity will be further strengthened and developed. I certainly hope this conference will be of great use for all of you in your tasks on the field of national dialogues and non-formal dialogue processes. I encourage you to be bold, innovative and persistent in conference discussions.

I thank You.



E. Conference Background Papers

Multiple Histories and Peace Mediation and Dialogues⁵

Marko Lehti

University of Tampere

Main points:

In violent conflicts, the right to determine history is usually also part of the struggle, and is used as a means of justifying specific actions and for reinforcing loyalty to a group, but also for creating conceptions of the enemy.

Peacemakers should give more attention to how conflict creates mutually antagonistic identities and hatred that become anchored in historical narratives and myths, and how the practices of understanding these fabrications can be influenced. Removing, or at least containing, antagonist relationships is a basic precondition for a durable peace.

Focus should not be on identities as such but in the process of identification: on transformation of narratives, symbols and myths shaping identities as well as on recognising agents using their power to influence identity narratives.

More important than the past in itself is how the past is present in the practices of today. The acknowledgement and acceptance of the diversity of interpretations should be an important goal of conflict transformation, which could be enhanced by reconciling dialogues.

Is it possible, as part of peace processes, to negotiate interpretations of history and forms of remembering the past? Although interpretations of history have been understood as part of conflict, there has been general avoidance of the possibility to treat history as part of mediation and dialogue processes in both the theoretical and practically oriented literature. History has been taken for granted and understood as an unchangeable structure and non-negotiable issue. This paper is an attempt to argue the opposite: that history is multi-faceted, complex in its range of meanings, and constantly changing. For these reasons, it is always open to novel interpretations and outlooks. The past can be understood in different ways and it is in that sense open-ended. This paper argues that the forms of remembering and of interpreting history can and should be a focus of peace mediation and dialogue processes if we genuinely claim to be striving for sustainable peace. This cannot, however, be simple, straightforward or based on traditional negotiation models that pursue compromise. It requires a new kind of dialogic approach.

⁵ This paper is a revised version of the article "Multiple Histories and Peace Mediation" published in A. Blåfield (ed.), *The Use and abuse of history*. Helsinki: Siltala 2016, pp. 234-263.



In violent conflicts, the ownership of history and the right to determine history is usually part of the struggle. It is often used as a means of justifying specific actions and for reinforcing loyalty to a group, but also for creating conceptions of the enemy. The attainment of sustainable peace requires dismantling antagonisms and conceptions of the enemy that are maintained by historical narratives. The argument of this paper is that forms of remembering and of interpreting history can be a focus of peace mediation and dialogue process, and – if we are really after sustainable peace – this is precisely what they should be. This in turn requires paying attention to reconciling antagonistic identities as well as to the essence of historical thinking, and finally, to forms of reconciling dialogue.

Peacemakers should give more attention to how conflict creates mutually antagonistic identities and hatred, which become anchored in historical narratives and myths, and to how the practices of understanding these fabrications can be influenced. The problem with dominant rational models of peace mediation is that antagonisms and hatred created through conflict situations are often left unattended.⁶ The peace process, in other words, is understood mechanistically: the mediator is akin to a doctor, whose task is merely to identify the illness and its cause, and then to seek a cure.⁷ However, conflict strengthens and incites us-versus-them arrangements, at all levels of society, be they local, national, or international. Removing or at least containing this division is a basic precondition for a successful peace process. From an identity-based perspective, the uncovering of the roots of the conflict may not be the most important thing, since it is not in any case possible to return to the pre-conflict state of affairs. What may well be of more use may be to examine how the various sides' conceptions of the causes of the conflict have changed, how these conceptions form part of the self-understanding of communities, and how the very idea of causes is itself intertwined with power-maintaining structures. This goal then is not to identify and rectify the original causes of the conflict, but to recognise and change how the causes and their significance are understood as things currently stand.

For example, ceasefires have not yet brought lasting peace to Ukraine. Building sustainable peace demands breaking down the many oppositions to which the conflict has given rise. The antagonisms of the Ukrainian case include those between Russophile factions and nationalistic Ukrainians, Ukrainians and Ukrainians, Russia and Ukraine, as well as between Russia and the West. The question is therefore not only of reaching an agreement between elites, but also of achieving far more broad-ranging settlements between groups and communities. A wide rift and a fundamental lack of confidence have developed within the Ukraine but also between former sister-nations. Whereas early in the conflict Ukrainians still distinguished between “bad Putin” and “good Russians,” now all Russians are perceived as the enemy. The further both sides adapt to thinking of each other only as the enemy, the more difficult it is to achieve a return to the conditions that existed before the outbreak of conflict. At the same time, the flexible conceptual border that formerly existed between what it was to be Russian or Ukrainian has now narrowed and hardened into a mutually exclusive rift.⁸

⁶ Deiniol Lloyd Jones (2000) ‘Mediation, conflict resolution and critical theory’, *Review of International Studies* 4, 26, 650.

⁷ Jeffrey Praeger (2008) ‘Healing from History: Psychoanalytic Considerations on Traumatic Pasts and Social Repair.’ *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, 407.

⁸ Oleg Kozlovsky (2015) ‘Can we ever be Brothers Again?’, *New Eastern Europe* 5, 18, 53-60.



In the popular imagination, history is often presented as one explanatory factor of the emergence of conflict. And it is of course true that understanding a given conflict requires knowledge of a region's history and an ability to grasp the various social processes, decisions, and reactions that have led to escalation of the conflict. However, history is often used as a way of oversimplifying diversity and complexity. When put to such uses what is at stake is often not history in the genuine sense but instead metahistory and myth. These sorts of metahistorical conceptions can take the form of e.g. ideas of a clash of civilizations, such as between Russia and the West or between Islam and the West. These phenomena are assumed to contain super-historical structure and dynamic relations that are further reinforced by the way in which they are applied to specific conflicts or acts of violence.

In the 1990s, the wars associated with the breakdown of Yugoslavia were seen in the West from the perspectives of several Balkan-related stereotypes. It was widely believed in Western countries that violent ethnic conflicts over history somehow came more naturally to the Balkan peoples than to civilised Europeans. Historical memory was also understood as being different, and was believed to be linked in the Balkans to primordial blood feuds. The cruel acts of the forefathers were believed to be fresh in the memories of the present generations of Balkanese, fuelling conflict from the moment that the structures of the Yugoslavian state that restrained the conflicting ethnicities were demolished. Hatred, violence and barbaric cruelty were seen as distinctively Balkan characteristics, to which the only real solution was Europeanization, i.e. civilization. Such interpretations were of course wildly mistaken, and were especially harmful to the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁹

It must be remembered that violence severely affects identities and stories of the past. Us-versus-them, friend-enemy divisions and other dichotomies become reinforced through conflict, and further intensify it. Such battle lines bring to the uncertainty of conflict a certain existential security. They also give a sense of meaning in the midst of chaos and help a community maintain some feeling of self-worth. In the case of Bosnia, the division into three nationalities was imprecise before the 1990s. The identification of Bosnian Muslims, in particular, as a separate nationality, , was more the outcome of war than a cause of it. To highlight their separateness from the Serbs and Croats, the Bosniaks salvaged from the past Ottoman influences that others had cast off, and in the process religion attained a greater role. Strengthening of the internal cohesion within the three different ethnic groups, thereby creating a growing divide between them, reinforced the feeling of mandatory belonging to a distinct national group, and excluded the idea of a common Bosnian identity. Nonetheless, in Bosnia before the war, and especially in the capital Sarajevo, there were many whose ethnic background was mixed and who made little of it. In the censuses carried out during the Yugoslavian era, these people tended to tick the Yugoslavian category. Not because they necessarily subscribed to the state ideology, but because of their cosmopolitan, urban and ethnically indifferent heritage.

The Dayton peace agreement that was negotiated by the United States in 1995 was premised on a division of power between three ethnic groups or nationalities. In the agreement, these

⁹ Marko Lehti (2002) "Ymmärtämisen haaste. Balkanin mielenmaisemaa kartoittamassa (The Challenge of Understanding: Charting the Balkan Mindset)", *Idäntutkimus* 3, 5-17.



nationalities and the sharp division between them were accepted without questioning their historical roots, and were assumed to be untouchable historical facts that had an incontestable right to self-determination. Over the last two decades or so, each and every Bosnian has had no option but to identify himself or herself as belonging exclusively to one or other of these three nationalities. Education and other services are organised along this inflexible division. It is no longer possible for anyone to exist outside of nationalities, as it was before the war. The societal structures put in place with the Dayton agreement make this impossible.¹⁰

A second error in the Western conception of mediation is to put heavy emphasis on the violent history of the Balkan region: ethnic conflicts are understood as practically normal, with the result that the overarching goal of mediation was a new, controlled situation. Unfortunately, it was the Dayton agreement itself that instated the ethnic divisions created by war, thereby destroying the last vestiges of multiculturalism that had survived from the Ottoman era. Historically, towns and even villages in the region were ethnically and religiously diverse. It is wrong to romanticise pre-modern times, but these multicultural communities did have well-established ways of living and working together. Coexistence was founded on a certain level of mutual respect, even in cases where genuine interaction was rather scarce. The Dayton peacemakers, however, seem to have been entirely ignorant of the multicultural administrative tradition of the region, which was simply overlooked.

A third error is that although history was of course strongly present in the Balkan wars and above all in Bosnia, there were few clear relations of cause and effect. The warring sides often made concrete reference to history and the past through symbols, historical sites, theatrical rituals, and forms of dress. Appearances were an important part of the message, but on the other hand things are not always what they are portrayed to be. For example, the destruction of historical monuments became an important part of the ethnic cleansing project of the Serbs. Communities were robbed of historically important mosques, and other sites and items of key symbolic value. Most attention was paid at the time to the destruction of the ancient Mostar bridge by Croat artillery. The bridge was rebuilt after the war with EU support – and, ironically, by Turkish builders – but it still does not connect the Bosniaks' old town to the modern Croat town of Mostar.

During the war many references were also made to the struggles and atrocities of the Second World War, and as way of justifying the various sides' own actions and endowing them with historical significance. For example, some Serbian paramilitary factions took to wearing the WWII uniforms of the *Četnici*. From outside it looked as if the Second World War was still unfolding in Bosnia, in the 1990s. In a sense it was, in a rather perverse and postmodern way. Cathie Carmichael has written of how young Serb fighters copied their uniforms, replete with historical errors, from Serbian war movies of the 1980s. And it was a boom in these kinds of

¹⁰ Roland Kostić (2013) "American nation-building abroad. Exceptional powers, broken promises and the making of 'Bosnia'," in Eriksson and Kostić (eds.) *Mediation and Liberal Peacebuilding: Peace From the Ashes of War?* Routledge, 27-37; Sirkka Ahonen (2012) *Coming to Terms with a Dark Past: How Post-Conflict Societies Deal with History*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 120-148.



films that fed the Serbian nationalist self-image and warped popular interpretations of history.¹¹

The forms of interpreting history and remembering the past are indeed intertwined in several ways as part of conflict, and they become important parts of the efforts of groups to justify their own goals and ownership. The idea of historical continuity is an important part of the construction of shared identity and ownership, for example of a certain area. Efforts are made to forbid competing interpretations, and the other side is displayed as an alien intruder. The focus of historical struggles can be traced back in time through the centuries, as was the case for instance with the Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo. From a historiographical perspective, the question is in many ways absurd, but even still in many ways politically explosive.¹² History becomes the fuel of hatred and opposition, making it almost impossible to maintain a clear view of how things actually were before the war.

After war, the interpretations of history that were created in the course of violent conflict are often stronger than they were before. Their exaggerated significance is due to their being used to justify and bolster gains that were made through war. The dichotomy between *victims* and *perpetrators* can even be strengthened, because how the conflict is remembered and spoken of attains a central role in the post-conflict construction of identities. Often, the forms of memory are given institutional expression and official actors, such as the state itself, seek to control what is said of the past, and how. When certain closely delimited historical interpretations come to determine the dignity and self-esteem of a community, the situation can lead to “securitization” of memories related to the conflict. Securitization is the development whereby the challenges and open criticism that are fundamentally characteristic of democratic discussion are forbidden, and in which dissenting interpretations are seen as destabilising, as a threat to the dominant group.¹³ It is also quite common that stories and beliefs about a past conflict spread over time to apply to a group’s own history, and so the conflict is framed as a natural continuation of ancient animosities.

The role of historical narratives in post-conflict changes is major: narratives that stress maintaining animosities and sharp divisions keep the conflict alive in people’s minds, even after the actual fighting has ceased. Such narratives that prey on and play up oppositions are hard to supplant, because often the community has used these tales to give added security to their own collective identity. The prospect of setting aside simplistic us-and-them- divisions can easily be seen as a threat to the dignity of the group, or even as an existential threat. Indeed, letting go of divisive interpretations of the past requires a psychologically difficult reappraisal of the foundations of both one’s own identity and the whole group’s collective identity.¹⁴ In post-conflict situations, communities often take refuge in forms of collective memory that provoke opposition.

¹¹ Cathie Carmichael (2002) *Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans. Nationalism and the Destruction of Tradition*. Routledge, 48-50.

¹² Kinga Gadjia and Monika Eriksen (2015) “The Problem with Memory,” *New Eastern Europe* 5 (18), 142-148.

¹³ Maria Mälksoo (2015) “Memory must be defended: Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security,” *Security Dialogue*, 3, 46, 221-237.

¹⁴ Bahar Rumelili (2015) “Introduction” and “Ontological (in)security and peace anxieties: a framework for conflict resolution,” in Rumelili (ed.) (2015) *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace anxieties*, London: Routledge, 19.



On the other hand, the condition for a sustainable peace process is precisely the transformation of those oppositions. Often this change in historical interpretations is thought of as happening over extended time, taking decades. In my view it is important to ask whether this process could be expedited from the very beginning of the peace process, or even recognised in the early phase of conflict when this could become the target of preventive mediation. Inversely, it is equally important to ask whether at the outset of peace processes decisions are being made that unwittingly, yet directly bolster these oppositions? Do third parties have any possibility to influence the forms of collective memory without simultaneously adding to the feeling of threat? Peace mediation that rests on historical interpretations can, if it fails, do much to stall future developments towards peace.

Although present-day peace mediation methods and models do not attempt to influence the prevailing historical interpretations or forms of collective memory and do not understand these as negotiable issues, the significance of both national and ethnic identities for a community is widely recognised in the conflict resolution field. The prevailing means and methods, however, in the views of many peacebuilders do more to reinforce oppositions than to relieve them. Good examples of this are the power-sharing agreements that have been reached for example in Bosnia, Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

The modern power-sharing model, called the consociational model, has its roots in the theoretical models developed by Arend Lijphart in the 1970s. In their updated form, these power-sharing deals between ethnic groups have been widely used in the negotiated peace agreements of the past two decades or so. Some of these, such as the aforementioned Dayton peace agreement, have been fiercely criticised, while e.g. the Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement of 1998 has been widely presented as something of a success. Developments in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement have indeed been positive for the most part, but less so than what is sometimes led to believe. For example, Andrew Finlay has criticised the Northern Ireland peace model for locking in the existing available identities, and for thereby reinforcing the division between the two community identities. Finlay's argument, then, is that the Good Friday arrangement institutionalised the ethnic divisions, and although it has succeeded in quelling the violence, the seeds of the conflict are still present in the diametrically opposed identity stories that prevail in Northern Ireland. Finlay believes that there would have been a possibility to think differently about the situation, and to help create new identities and historical interpretations that support them. If the aim is to support change, then any transformative process that is based on dialogue between groups and that is not hampered by any preordained goal or envisioned end point, would be best.¹⁵

The basic problem with the way identities are approached in these power-sharing models is that identity is understood inflexibly. Most of the models in use are still based on a somewhat updated, but basically unchallenged primordial model of group identity: nationalities and ethnicities may not be explicitly claimed to be perpetual, but their existence is seldom questioned and they are instead taken as given. This is so even when the conflict has brought about major changes to the general situation. External mediators too often accept the participating sides' own interpretations of the supposedly clear, supposedly historically

¹⁵ Andrew Finlay (2011) *Governing Ethnic Conflict: Consociation, identity and the price of peace*, Routledge.

sanctioned divisions between the groups. If we instead could interpret identities as continually in flux, the solution models would be completely different. At the same time, peacemakers seldom acknowledge their own power to shape identities. Yet the normative power of the mediator to accept or reject various determinations of identity is considerable, in particular in peace mediation. Peacebuilders can either unconsciously or consciously wield normative power to determine groups even by such seemingly innocent acts as using a certain name for a group or other specific terminology, or even just by assuming the existence of a particular group. By either emphasising the principle of national self-determination or by downplaying it the mediator is already exercising normative power.

If identities are to be seen as dynamic and contingent, focus should not be on identities but identification. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper stress how identity narratives feed into the idea of homogenous groups and clear boundaries, but this is nonetheless part of identity politics and one should not conclude from it that identities are the uniform. Although communities may favour certain forms of remembrance as the only possible ones for them, individuals may relate to these forms in markedly different ways. Borders are always more or less blurred, and dividing lines are rarely static. If we emphasise the processes of identification, then the focus is on narratives, symbols and other devices used to create, enforce and reinforce a sense of togetherness. In this way, the agency behind these identifications also becomes more apparent.¹⁶ When attention is turned to research on conflict resolution, the effect is even more radical. The identities of communities must be respected, but they need not be taken as self-evident. An effort should be made to identify especially those history-related stories and interpretations that are at the core of self- and group-identification and which, by the same token, are used to construct enemy images. The expression of identification processes during and after conflict is a basic requirement for reconciliation among interpretations of the past, but so is the acknowledgement of those who enact these identities. This acknowledgement requires expertise that has the ability to grasp how history is used and how remembrance can take on several different forms. Historians and other (theoretical) experts are not necessarily the best people to organise peace mediation, but they can offer indispensable help in identifying and understanding the identification processes at play during conflict as well as the actors behind them.

Reconciliation processes related to history and dealing with the past are generally held to be extremely slow, usually spanning across generations. In Finland, for example, reference is often made to the idea that it is only now, after a century of independence and a century after the country's bloody civil war that the old dividing lines and wounds of that time have healed.¹⁷ It is true that momentous changes mostly do not happen with a click of the fingers. Hatred does not soften into forgiveness overnight, nor does hostility turn to tolerance. The changes in the opposite direction, however, can be alarmingly rapid. My question is therefore: could ongoing reconciliation processes be supported in a way so as to diminish the duration required for dealing with the past? And further, what could mediators do on this score? In minimum it should be ensured that no fruitful possibilities in this regard are left unexplored.

¹⁶ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) "Beyond Identity," *Theory and Society* 29, 1–47.

¹⁷ Ahonen 2012, 27–35.



Opening up the significance of history as part of peace processes requires reconsidering the meaning of history in itself. Susanne Buckley-Zistel approaches the problem from the perspective of hermeneutics, and in particular through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer who wrote: “the future is a beginning.” Although Western thinking is largely based on conceptions of linear progress, our way of envisioning the past is strongly bound to our conception of the present and our expectations of the future. Past, present and future form a circle in which the later two dominate our view of history. Put simply, if the parties to conflict imagine a shared future, then it is possible that they can also bring themselves to imagine a shared past. The hermeneutic approach emphasises the fact that there is no single conception of the past. It is always open to interpretation. New ways of remembering the past are the key to the fusion of horizons called for by Gadamer. They also enable the breakdown of oppositions and the achievement of peaceful coexistence, once the boundary between them and us can be seen to be flexible. According to Buckley-Zistel, peace processes must therefore allow for negotiations on identities, the goal of which is to transform how the past is remembered and how the prospect of a shared future has heretofore been shunned. Such a peace process really has no closure, and its ultimate goal is not uniformity but the acceptance of diversity.¹⁸

According to Jeffrey Praeger, society must make an effort to envision a present in which the past conflict no longer controls one’s daily experiences, feelings, and political decisions. Through this kind of transformation, it also becomes easier to listen to the other side.¹⁹ The control of the past is thus not a question of the past at all but of how the past is present in the practices of today. As such, peace mediation and dialogue processes should be able to support this change in various ways. The means of doing so could be very diverse, as can be seen from the proposals that have been made. It is, however, important to remember that the starting point for transforming the significance of the past is not necessarily an external expert’s supposedly objective study of what has actually occurred, nor in legal investigations of war criminality. In this light, the truth and reconciliation commissions that have been used in many peace processes do not serve the goal of transforming the past. However, before considering other possible methods, it would be good to deliberate what is actually being pursued by changing historical conceptions.

During and after conflict, historical stories and rituals of communal commemoration feed into oppositions, reinforce and increase divisions, and shut out certain groups. The post-conflict situation typically involves emphasis on the victimization of one’s own group and the guilt of others. These roles appeal strongly to emotions, but at the same time they are used to build a sense of security. Interfering with them can therefore provoke severe reactions. The goal of the process can thus not be to directly break down these divisions by transforming historical interpretations, which may not be mutually compatible. In this sense, the goal can also not be to form from them a united and harmonious historical conception. In post-conflict situations, the sense of the justifiability of one’s own conception can be heightened, making opposing conceptions seem all the more threatening. The acknowledgement and acceptance of the diversity of interpretations is therefore the most important goal of transformation.

¹⁸ Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006) “In Between War and Peace: Identities, Boundaries and Change after Violent Conflict,” *Millennium* 1, 35, 3-21.

¹⁹ Praeger 2008, 416-418.



The underlying requirement for this transformation is to see representatives of the other side not as enemies to be destroyed but as opponents to be constructively engaged with. This change is vital to the formation of mutual respect.²⁰ What mutual respect means in practice is another matter, but I will not here consider the relation between respective and historical narratives.

From this perspective the interpretations of history and the various practices and rituals of remembering are the focus of change. At the same time they are the prerequisite for change, since the process must be able to create new practices that drive and guide change. The aim is the maintenance of mutual respect between the parties by enabling each to maintain their self-esteem and self-respect. Such a process can only proceed incrementally, not in leaps and bounds. Change is almost impossible to bring about if each community barricades itself away from the others through their own interpretations of history. When this happens, the reason is typically their fear that broadening or questioning their own historical truths poses an existential threat to the community. Following the ideas of Buckley-Zistel and Praeger, it is clear that the starting point for change lies not in directly challenging the prevailing historical interpretations but instead in attempts to imagine the present and the future in new ways. Efforts must be made to relieve the burden of the past as a determinant of the present and future. This requires that the most painful elements of historical memory are recognised, and that key elements of this kind are presented for open discussion. This enables new memories of the past, the kind that are not so tightly controlled by one's community or that are not burdened with such heavy existential significance.

The possibility of reinterpreting the past in this way opens up the potential of being freed of the idea of history as a straitjacket on one's conception of the present and future. In this way individuals from previously opposed communities can find common interests, be directed toward a common future, and can imagine shared possibilities. This also makes it possible to find reinterpretations of the past that support peaceful coexistence.

As I have argued, conceptions of the past are often highly representational, being related to monuments, buildings and sites of historical significance or public rituals that sacralise some historical event. These public expressions serve two purposes: they reinforce the memories of the community, and give individuals the possibility to identify with and emotionally share in the story of the past that is offered. Second, the erection and destruction of monuments and public rituals can also serve to build borders, and to visibly exclude those who are considered different. The ability to influence historical interpretations should first be directed at precisely these forms of presenting history. It also offers a potential concrete focus for mediation efforts and dialogue platforms. The underlying goal, however, is to open up the identity stories of one's own community and to reach acceptance of the diversity of historical interpretations. Acknowledging the sufferings endured by the other side is a precondition to getting this process started. The attainment of change requires sacrifices and the breakdown of securitised ways of thinking. The outcome of the process, if it is successful, may be a broadened horizon

²⁰ Chantal Mouffe (1999) "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," *Social Research* (3) 66, 754-756; Rosemary Shinko (2008) "Agonistic Peace. A Postmodern reading" *Millennium*, 6, 39, 478-480.



of experiences and a new practice of questioning things that narrow the outlook of the community.²¹

This is far from an easy goal, as antagonist identities offer ontological security for communities. Reinterpretation of history might be understood as a threat to the very existence of community, thus possibly creating fundamental resistance against reinterpretation. Seen from this perspective, staying in violent conflict may in fact offer an ontologically secure position when transformation towards peace is seen as an essential threat. According to Oliver Ramsbotham, the narrative style that accompanies violent conflict is radical disagreement – not simply a difference of interpretation of some point, but rather the complete opposition of starkly different worldviews. The situation then becomes one of an existential struggle for complete dominance, including legal, of one absolute truth over all other interpretations.²² When this is the situation at the outset, conflict is not a question of misunderstanding but of fundamental discord, often accompanied by stark power inequalities.²³ The decades of festering conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is a classic example of radical opposition, and demonstrates how difficult it is to bring about any change in such a situation. Ramsbotham points out, however, that hate-filled interaction between enemies, which is based exclusively on blame, is nonetheless a form of dialogue, and as such this kind of agonistic dialogue offers at least some ground for progress. In such agonistic dialogues the third party, i.e. the mediator, can attempt to reveal the foundations of the disagreements by urging the opposing sides to explain their statements. This could be an opening, however narrow at first, through which the hostilities could be toned down. If this can be achieved, the next important step is to strengthen the sides' strategic commitment to the process. The road to reconciliation necessarily entails acceptance of diversity, and as such can be an exceedingly hard road. As such, it is vital that all sides, including the mediator, understand the slowness of the process – whatever progress is made will most likely consist of a succession of very small steps. It is equally vital to begin the treatment of problems not by hastily trying to solve them, but by trying first to really understand them.²⁴

The dominant problem-solving model of traditional peace mediation does not support this sort of approach. Professional mediation work has traditionally relied on small-group, elite-based negotiations, and the task list of such negotiations has invariably been interest-centred. This entails the negotiating sides leaving emotion outside the room before coming to the negotiating table.²⁵ This kind of approach requires that the sides have the ability for rational discussion, which is far from being something that can be taken for granted in the midst of or immediately after a violent conflict. Remembering the past cannot be handled through rational, interest-based and solution-focused mediation. Instead, there is reason to consider whether dialogue offers a better model for transformation.

²¹ Karin Aggestam (2013) "Recognitional Just Peace" in K. Aggestam and A. Björkdhal (eds.), *Rethinking Peacebuilding. The quest for just peace in the Middle East and the Western Balkans*. Routledge, 44.

²² Oliver Ramsbotham (2010) *Transforming violent conflict. Radical disagreement, dialogue and survival*. Routledge, 1, 163.

²³ Lloyd Jones (2000), 655.

²⁴ Ramsbotham 2010, 165, 169.

²⁵ Lloyd-Jones 2000, 650.



In recent years national dialogue processes have become popular, and have largely focused on constitutional regulation and renewal, and on negotiating internal divisions of power. In contrast to externally guided processes, national dialogue processes have been seen as local processes in which outsiders at most provide funding or training. Clear models have been developed for carrying out these processes. Various dialogue processes have been put together in Northern Africa and the Middle East in particular, and the awarding of the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize to the team behind the Tunisian national dialogue process indicates the promise of these models. The national dialogue in Yemen was just a few years ago held up as an exemplar of a process that supported the official peace process, but since then the country has sunk into chaos and violence. One indicator of the severity of the contradictory nature of the present situation is that the models being used are based on highly legalistic, formal solutions, and often neglect dialogical processes that aim at national reconciliation by mediating the opposing interpretations of the past and the forms of commemoration.²⁶ According to Antti Pentikäinen, “the process remained too elite-centric and did not facilitate enough grassroots reconciliation. More importantly, it failed to address some of the crucial underlying causes of conflict, which raises questions as to whether the standard approach to dialogue gives sufficient consideration to the need to build legitimacy before entering into dialogue about how to establish or reform institutions.”²⁷ It can be also argued that the Yemen dialogue, in particular, and the national dialogue process in general, do not attribute to antagonistic relationship and presume that this would be merely spillover effect.

There is a need for a particular kind of reconciling dialogue, which would contribute to antagonistic relationships, but that kind of dialogue cannot be based on a problem-solving model. Following sociologist Richard Sennett Sergei Bakhtin’s idea of dialogue offers one plausible alternative. Bakhtinian dialogue does not aim at a solution by finding common ground between opposing sides but instead emphasises that as the process progresses the individuals involved become increasingly aware of their own outlooks, and in this way are able to expand their understanding to also encompass the views of the others present. Whereas traditional dialogue is problem-solving, the Bakhtinian model is problem-*finding*. Instead of looking for solutions, it emphasises the crucial role of listening. Or to put it another way, whereas traditional dialogue is solution-centric, Bakhtinian dialogue is continuity-centred.²⁸ This sort of model is clearly more appropriate to dealing with interpretations of history and for building reconciliation between hostilities founded on practices of remembering the past. The requirement for the transformative process is the ability to create pathways towards acknowledgement of the differences of view relating to historical memories. Each participant in a Bakhtinian dialogue argues from his or her own standpoint, but must also be ready to listen. The starting point is the interpretation of two opposing conceptions of truth, the foundations of which need to be identified and explained. An external mediator can help in and further such a dialogue in many different ways – one of which is simply to concentrate on facilitating the dialogue without intervening in it him/herself.

²⁶ Charlotta Collén (ed.) (2014) *National Dialogue and Internal Mediation Processes: Perspectives on Theory and Practice*. The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²⁷ Antti Pentikäinen, “Reforming UN Mediation through Inclusion of Traditional Peacemakers,” *Development Dialogue* 63 (2015), 68.

²⁸ Richard Sennett (2012) *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, London: Allen Lane, 19-30.



In the literature on peace processes and also in the literature on peacebuilding protocol a distinction is made between mediation and reconciliation. Mediation requires breaking the chain of violence, and is characteristically premised on short-term goals. Mediation is usually carried out between carefully selected representatives of conflicting parties. All in all, mediation is goal-oriented negotiation in small groups at close quarters towards a specific outcome. Reconciliation on the other hand is longer-term work that is focused not only on elites but on the entire populace. Whereas the agenda of mediation is negotiation over materialistic interests, the reconciliation process focuses on healing the traumas of conflict and on settling oppositions. The time for reconciliation comes around when the threat of violence has largely lifted, and when the society has been made more stable. The difference between mediation and reconciliation need not however be so sharply delineated. Many researchers have shown that even though the timescale of mediation is short, the agreements that it produces have far-reaching consequences for the subsequent parts of the broader peace process.²⁹ Moreover, it is too often that successful peace mediation is followed by a state-building process (supported by the international community) in which reconciliation is given far too small a role. In other words, it should not be assumed that mediation automatically leads to acts of reconciliation. I would argue that when we approach the peace process from the perspective of oppositional and hostile identities, there is a call for *reconciling dialogues*. Of course, negotiations are still needed to bring about ceasefires and a cessation of other violence as well. But because mediation either provides the groundwork for or shuts off the possibilities for some possibility or other, the mediators should always make an effort to be aware of the politicised nature of identifications and of their importance to the peace process. Reconciling dialogue is needed not only between chosen elites – it must also be applied to wider groups and be inclusive as it is crucial for the change how new interpretations are accepted and agreed by the larger population. Thus, the ability to promote change and new interpretations are essential for participants of dialogue platforms.

Even from the earliest stage, an effort should be made for mutual enemies to find a way of becoming not friends but the next best thing, namely each other's opponents. Changes in historical interpretations begin from small details, so it is important to negotiate not only the overall peace plan but also matters of local concern. No two peace processes are the same. The very nature of the violent conflict itself – whether a civil war, an interstate war, or an occupation – has an effect on how the problems are approached, as does the relationship of the community with the past, and as do culturally influenced understandings of peace and negotiation. In general, one cannot overemphasise the importance of mutual respect to bringing about positive change, and of the importance of each community being able to maintain its pride and sense of self-worth. Equally important is it to emphasise that the goal of dialogue should not be harmonization, but acceptance of diversity.

²⁹ Michael Eriksson and Roland Kostić (2013) "Peacemaking and peacebuilding: Two ends of a tail" in Eriksson and Kostić, *Mediation and Liberal Peacebuilding, Peace from the Ashes of War?*, London: Routledge, 9, 17.



The Prospect of Leveraging Local Dialogues into National Dialogue in Libya

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Libya is, nearly five years on from the overthrow of Gaddafi, a deeply divided territory. An absence of national consensus over the past few years, which would be possible through effective and credible national dialogue, has made Libya a failed state. Libya's territory is currently administered by a complicated and competing selection of militias, ministries, and political assemblies that have led to a political stalemate that is almost in its third year. Despite this bleak picture, there have been a significant, but underreported, set of successes in local dialogue. These have ensured that much of the civil conflict currently remains frozen, and have held off a further deterioration into deepening civil war. What are the factors that have led to the failure of national forums for dialogue, and to limited successes in local dialogue? And what can we learn from these local dialogues for furthering an effective national dialogue in Libya?

1. Context: Resurgent Local Authority, Fragmentation of National Authority

Libya, unlike its neighbours, entered its period of transition without a unified military operating with a clear operational command structure and doctrine. As 2011 began, most of the country's security sector was controlled by brigades close to the Gaddafi family, and by the secret police. During the 2011 uprising, this already segmented security sector was further crippled by mass defections and destruction of its infrastructure by bombardment by France, the US, and then NATO.

In the shadow of this bombardment was a steady empowerment of mobile militia groups linked to the local councils that became empowered throughout 2011. Due to the dynamics of engagement and a military strategy coordinated between the rebels and international actors, most support ended up being routed through the towns of Misrata and Zintan. Misrata had been under siege since February, and Zintan was conveniently placed as a staging ground for a pincer attack on Tripoli. In the aftermath of the fall/liberation of Tripoli, this resulted in both Zintan and Misrata having significant power in the capital city, with the ability to influence national politics.

Politically, elections were pushed through without significant security sector reform, which resulted in cities, tribes, and ideological factions continuing to compete for influence, both in the parliament and through militia politics. A further slide into militia rule was caused by the failure of the security sector initiatives negotiated (with the support of the intervening powers) between the Executive and the UN. Poor performances by successive heads of government, combined with the dispersal of authority among cities, tribes and ideological factions, led to an erosion of Executive authority and a focus on the Parliament as the key site for national debate on any matter.

By the end of 2013, with the Prime Minister subject to kidnapping, the Executive had lost effective authority in the country. Meanwhile, a Political Isolation Law passed in 2012 had limited the ability of former regime officials to participate in politics creating further obstacles to national political dialogue.



In August 2013, in this context, the National Dialogue Preparatory Commission (NDPC) was launched with over 50 advisors led by a strategic team. The NDPC built on the early work by a number of activists, former political prisoners, lawyers and other notables, supported by USAID, Bell Pottinger, and others. Some initial work was carried out, but the National Dialogue Preparatory Commission never had a clear mandate. And what mandate it had was further eroded as new elections prompted a constitutional crisis and further state disintegration.

Elections in the summer of 2014 initially held promise for the renewal of parliamentary authority, but security concerns prevented the ballot reaching some areas. Low turnout meant that the results, although showing dissatisfaction with the parliamentary politics up until then, were not decisive or convincing to all. The newly elected Parliament, i.e. the House of Representatives, was therefore in a compromised position from the very beginning. It is in this context that several parliamentarians, including a former Deputy Prime Minister, decided to boycott the Parliament. A few weeks later, some members of the Parliament who had been elected in 2012 (the GNC) decided that the elections themselves were illegal, and in response reasserted their power in Tripoli.

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) was left in a position where it initially tried to persuade the boycotting members of parliament to return, and then to develop dialogue between the two competing legislative authorities. The later effort, called the “Libyan Political Dialogue”, became the focus for the international community to re-establish a roadmap for the two parliaments to come together. The Political Dialogue never was able to establish a reputation as a legitimate site of national dialogue. It suffered from numerous allegations of corruption and privileging of leaders that became prominent during the 2011 uprising, as well as a structure that separated certain actors from the main dialogue (separate tracks were seen as a token effort). The inclusion of local authorities was something of an afterthought. What was clear by the time that it reached an “agreement” was that it had very little buy-in from the militia groups, tribes, and local authorities that held sway in the country. Although it was a somewhat successful dialogue between two compromised legislative bodies, it could not be said to be a site of effective national discussion, debate, or dialogue.

The Libyan Political Agreement was proclaimed in Shikhrat at the end of 2015. It was on very shaky foundations from the outset, and since then allegations from Libyans that it was forced on them by the international community have continued. Operationally, the disjointed political structures at a national level did not become clearer after a Government of National Accord (GNA) was established. In fact, they became more complicated. Sites for national level debate and discussion remain as elusive as they were prior to the Libyan Political agreement coming into force. A complicated but low-level armed civil conflict has continued unabated, and although it is seen to have limited the effectiveness of the GNA, there has been very little change on the ground. There is still a fragmented jigsaw of militias, local councils, and tribes, each competing locally and nationally for control. The involvement of several regional and European states, each backing certain militias, and some of them backing competing sides, is symptomatic of the situation.

2. Local Dialogues: their origins and prospects



While sites of national level debate, discussion and dialogue have remained compromised throughout the post-Gaddafi period to date, local dialogue has been somewhat more effective. This is hardly surprising in a context where there is significant fragmentation of national institutions, and where militias, local authorities, and tribes, were empowered throughout the transition and remain the strongest actors on the ground.

However, the roots, dynamics and impact of specific local dialogues are important to be aware of. I will briefly describe different local dialogue efforts in the south, in the western mountains, and in the area around Misrata. The focus will be on how they were initiated, what happened, who was involved, and how successful they were.

Inter-Tribal Dialogue in Sebha with Third-Party Local Mediators: This local dialogue stems from a conflict that was the break of an enduring tribal alliance due to dynamics in the 2011 uprising. The Awlad Suleiman and Gaddadfa tribes had been historical allies, and have a long track record of supporting one another, along with another strong inland tribal group, the Warfalla. At the start of the 2011 uprising, both groups remained loyal to Gaddafi, but during the 2011 uprising, key figures in the Awlad Suleiman tribe, such as Abdul-Magid Saifalnasr, joined the rebels. This had the result of destabilising the Gaddafi-era and pre-Gaddafi pitting two of the largest inland tribes against each other. The Sabha also includes another dimension however, with the continued presence since mid-2014 of the Misratan militia, the Third Force. The stated aim of this latter militia is to bring peace to a restive city.

The Warfalla on the other hand, was internally split, with the Warfalla heartland town of Baniwalid becoming the site of armed confrontation between pro-revolution and anti-revolution elements. Clashes continued into 2012 in Baniwalid, between pro and anti-revolution militias. The May 28th Brigade supporting the NTC's Local Council was pitted against Brigade 93 supporting the Baniwalid Social Council. The competing local authorities wrestled with the government, and by the middle of 2012 the Social Council had established control over. Between 2012 and 2013, the Social Council remained in control of the town. With the lack of effective governance structures in Libya, it expanded its reach at the end of 2013, taking on 60 members from the tribe across Libya, and reforming as the Social Council of Warfalla Tribes.

When conflict intensified in 2015, the Social Council of Warfalla Tribes deployed a delegation to the city to meet with key representatives of the Awlad Suleiman and Gaddadfa tribes respectively. Meetings were held separately with tribal leaders, and an agreement was made on the formation of a joint committee to oversee the reconciliation efforts, which included members of the Awlad Suleiman and the Gaddadfa as well as the Social Council of Warfalla Tribes.

This contributed to the easing of tensions between the two tribes. However, in November 2016 there was an escalation of fighting due to an incident in which a woman's headscarf was ripped off by the pet monkey of a shopkeeper. This was taken very seriously as a gesture of disrespect, and resulted in a very fast escalation of violence, first with attacks against tribe members, and then a further escalation involving the use of heavy weaponry. Initial dialogue efforts between the tribal groups efforts did not succeed. The involvement of the Social Council of Warfalla tribes, elders from Augila, and Margharha, succeeded in bringing about a ceasefire, and a further tribal agreement was signed.



Dialogue between towns and militias in the Nafusa Mountains with local and tribal mediators: This dialogue stems from the breakup of relations between towns in the wider Nafusa mountains region after the escalation civil conflict between rival militia alliances in 2014.

As stated above, due to the dynamics of the preparations for the takeover of Tripoli in 2011, Zintan entered the post-Gaddafi period with a strong military presence in Tripoli. This changed in the summer of 2014, after escalation of violence between rival militia alliances that came in the aftermath of criticisms of the GNC's legitimacy and of the validity of elections. Demands were made that it be replaced with a new parliamentary body. By the end of summer, Zintan had retreated from Tripoli, and from the "frontline" in their battle against Libya Dawn.

In this highly volatile period, the allegiance of towns in between Zintan and Tripoli became of major strategic importance. It was under these circumstances that Zintani militias, accusing the town of collaborating with Libya Dawn, occupied parts of Kikla. Thousands of its inhabitants were displaced. This led to a broader escalation between the two towns, including arresting people based on their identity, as well as harbouring of those accused of carrying out criminal acts by both sides.

By 2015 reconciliation efforts were already underway, taking the form of joint committees of the towns' notables, mediated by figures from a third-party town, Asaba. Asaba was considered neutral because although it had taken political positions, it had not engaged in fighting, either in the 2011 uprising or afterwards. The reconciliation efforts initially focused on prisoner exchanges, which were carried out in June 2015. In the first round of talks, 16 prisoners were released: 12 from Zintan and 4 from Kikla. These initial goodwill gestures were followed up with further meetings of the joint committee, focused on the drafting of a roadmap for the return of displaced people, and commitment to the de-escalation of violence in the region.

By early 2016, representatives from both of the towns signed an accord. In the accord, they agreed to the withdrawal of Zintani forces from Kikla, and to their substitution by a mixed force from the towns of Al Motrid and Zawiya. These two towns were seen by the representatives of Kikla as neutral actors. The accord also included an agreement on the return of displaced people and the ending of tit-for-tat arrests, and on the handover of those accused of criminality to a third, neutral party. Kikla has remained relatively peaceful since, however it took a further year or more for significant numbers of people to return and for schools to reopen.

Elders from Alasaba, acting in their role as neutral third party mediators, also carried out similar processes between the towns of Zintan, Warshefana, Zanzour, and Gharyan in early 2015. Each process was rooted in similar dynamics: they first focused on the exchange of prisoners, and then moved step by step towards greater reconciliation efforts. In the case of the Zintan-Zanzour dialogue efforts, these were able to work towards an agreement that included commitments to not support others in any violence involving the two towns.

The internationally-supported local dialogue between Misrata and Tawergha: This dialogue aimed at addressing both the complicity of the Tawergha population in the siege against Misrata in 2011, and the cleansing of the city later in the year by Misratan militias. The goal ostensibly was to achieve the necessary steps that would allow the return of the Tawergha population to their town, and to address the crimes committed by both sides.



The dialogue process was formally initiated by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya in May of 2015. The Mission convened an initial meeting of leaders from the two groups in Tunis, focussing on the formation of a Joint Committee. A further meeting was held in July to establish the terms of reference for the Joint Committee, addressing issues of justice, reparations, reconciliation, the return of IDPs, and the need for a road map.

The communities nominated representatives for the meetings, and met for initial discussions in Tunis, Geneva, and Tripoli. In these meetings, the parties agreed on several confidence-building measures, including the release of prisoners, the facilitation of school and degree certificates by the local authorities in Misrata, and on informal meetings between families of both sides.

A formal meeting at the end of 2015 of the Joint Committee, centred around the establishment of a roadmap, and started to frame the time in question, the persons responsible, and to detail the types of reparations required, the reconciliation efforts necessary as well as establishing a process for the identification of missing persons. Further meetings were held beyond this point to hammer out the specifics of a deal. By the end of Summer 2016, an agreement had been reached that detailed the specifics of reparations, and gave dates for the return of people, and for the setting up of a fund. With slow progress made on any of the steps that had been agreed on, representatives of both committees met independently in March 2017 to refer their agreement to the Presidential Council, which is the executive body of the Government of National Accord.

What are the prospects for these dialogue processes? Inter-tribal peace in Sebha remains very fragile. Although successive local dialogues have been held, conflict has been quick to return, and is very sensitive to escalation. The environment is not yet ready for a sustainable solution in Sebha. What might be the reasons for this? The lack of a broader security arrangement in Southern Libya is one: the Misratan Third Force maintains a continued presence in Sebha, and the broader alliances in the north of the country are attempting to co-opt southern tribes in their broader national struggle. The local dialogue was effectively a social dialogue with little relation to the security sector realities in the town. Agreement on the fate of the Misratan Third Force in Sabha is essential for sustainable peace.

The Misrata-Tawergha deal, while on paper successful, has not brought much positive change on the ground. Tawerghans have not returned to their town, which continues to be vandalised by individuals from Misrata. There are clear limits to the agreement itself, which, although being detailed and comprehensive, was reached with substantial international involvement, and was carried out in parallel to the Libyan Political Dialogue. Implementation of the agreement rests on the fate of the Political Dialogue, and the continued lack of authority of the Government of National Accord limits any progress on this. It is very difficult to remove the dialogue from this broader national political context.

It is the set of deals reached in the Nafusa Mountains that continues to have the greatest prospect for sustainability. These processes were locally instigated, local third-party members were found to mediate them, and local solutions were found to address the issues of the parties. However, although the dialogue processes were successful, these areas remain in a highly strategic position, and the sustainability of peace in the region is intimately linked to



the broader political and military struggle in the country. What therefore is the relationship between these local dialogues and a potential national dialogue?

3. The Relationship between National and Local Dialogue

Local dialogue has proven effective in de-escalation, reconciliation, and peacemaking. With all national forums for debate, discussion and dialogue either compromised, fragmented or both it is tempting to see local dialogue as the answer to Libya's problems. Is it possible to establish a broader national dialogue out of Libya's local dialogues? What is the likelihood of this happening, and what are the challenges?

Local dialogues have been able to address local conflicts, but have had limited effects on a national scale. Why is that? The key point to remember here is that the elements that have supported local peacemaking, such as historical allegiances, tribal relations, positions taken during the 2011, are precisely those that continue to be mobilised in the broader national civil conflict. So, just as tribes and historical relations are a vital aspect of local dialogue, tribes and their historical allegiances and fault lines are being mobilised to build broader political constituencies in Libya. These constituencies can both promote peace and support civil war. This dynamic will be of increasing importance in the escalation of violence in 2017.

Furthermore, local constituencies in Libya have sought security assistance from abroad in the absence of national security sector reform and consolidation. Although security assistance from abroad in the form of training and equipping was to be expected in the period after 2011, the piecemeal and fragmented approach that was taken by key international actors encouraged local militias and the different attempts at forming the national army to seek arms from regional neighbours. This has linked regional, international competition to sub-national conflict in the country. Just as in a two-level game, national reconciliation needs backing from regional actors if it is to be sustainable.

Even taking all these considerations into account, is Libya ready for a national dialogue? Are the conditions better than in 2013-14? What can local dialogues do that successive direct attempts at national dialogue could not?

First, local dialogues can encourage the engagement of groups that have been isolated, or have isolated themselves, from the national processes. Successive attempts at national governance have failed, because specific groups have either been excluded from or have felt themselves excluded from discussions. For certain towns and tribes, this came down to the positions that some of their leaders took in 2011. Baniwalid, for instance, which maintained its independence until relatively late in 2011, and then was able to push pro-revolution troops out shortly thereafter, has not been invested in the successive governments in Tripoli.

Second, they encourage the engagement in real terms of those with authority on the ground. Local dialogues focus on tangible issues that are important to local communities. Participants are included and engaged with based on their capacity for local influence, and based on their ability to commit to and then uphold agreements. Authority and commitment derived in this way, which requires a combination of social leadership and youth activism, reflect both the residual form of social organization from the pre-Gaddafi and Gaddafi era, and the reality of the youth activism that spurred on the 2011 transition.



Third, local dialogues allow national level discussions to be carried out at a local level, without having to address complicated discussions about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of national institutions. It is encouraging to see how discussions regarding the role of towns or tribes in the overthrow of Gaddafi have been overcome in local dialogues, once the question of national legitimacy is taken off the table.

In summary, there are in some very obvious ways greater opportunities now for an extended national dialogue based on local dialogues to succeed, than there previously was for attempts at national dialogue before. But there are also some clear challenges if this were to take place.

Local dialogues have greater chances for success in Libya, as they are able to put aside highly contentious discussions about national authority. In other words, the current fragmented state of national authority is closely compatible with the idea of a series of local dialogues. Looking back, the National Dialogue Preparatory Commission faltered precisely because it was out of step with the reality on the ground: the country was not ready for it. It did not have investment from many actors from many sides, for different reasons. Some were not invested in the national project that it supported. Others wanted to see stronger forms of transitional justice occur first. So, whereas there was only one government when the National Dialogue Preparatory Commission was initiated, the broader national project was already fractured, and this meant that civil war soon broke out.

The current ambiguity in national institutions is also a clear stumbling block. Unfortunately, the Government of National Accord did not really help to clarify this ambiguity. The GNA and its Presidency Council—like the other formal institutions created after 2011—remain somewhat virtual, with little real ability to the authority they claim to have into progress on the ground. It is this lack of capacity that makes them reliant on militias, and that makes them currently such weak actors. In the case of the Misrata-Tawergha dialogue, the success of the agreement reached is tied to the success of a National Government. This puts both in a fragile position. If a set of local dialogues are to be built upon and leveraged into a national dialogue process, there needs to be continued openness on the issue of which, if any, of the governing bodies is legitimate. Insistence on any particular one either limits the possibilities for local dialogue, or limits the prospects for local dialogues to be implemented.

Another challenge to leverage local dialogues into a national one involves Libya's main cities. Cosmopolitan areas such as Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata and Derna, which most of Libya's population live in, are not as simply and clearly divided as the rural areas. Local dialogue between different towns, or between different tribal groups in the same town, has been effective, but this format breaks down in Libya's population centres. This is because they are considerably larger, more diverse, and their populations are less influenced by traditional forms of authority. That said, the issues at a local level in these areas are very similar to those being discussed between towns and tribes – namely, the presence of militias, reparations/justice for criminal acts, and the de-escalation of violence. A consideration for the future is, whether there is an opportunity for metropolitan dialogue initiatives.

4. Prospects for a new Local/National dialogue in 2017



The prospects for a new national dialogue remain limited in early 2017. Libya is currently undergoing another cycle of violence, and no one alliance of actors is able to overpower the others. Foreign actors are involved just enough to ensure continued violence, but not at such levels or with such coherency to tip the balance one way or another. This leaves Libyans in a position where they are continuing to compete for control of the nation—and therefore for the country's future. In this bleak context, local dialogue seems to offer a chance for national peace on the basis of discussion and agreement.

Briefly, for this to happen there must be a clear approach as to what local dialogues are imperative for national cohesion, and which ones are not. These then need to be prioritised. A local dialogue between Warfalla-linked groups and Misratan-linked groups would clearly be a priority due to the symbolic role that friction between the two plays, and due also to how it represents many of the social cleavages in the post-Gaddafi era, as well as their comparative size, military capacity, and the influence they have on others nationally. Internal dialogue processes may be required as a preliminary step to undergird this, especially in light of recent schisms in Misrata. For these to succeed, they need to be carried out without preconditions or expectations as to which national bodies are legitimate, and which are not.

Land Reform and Local Governance in National Dialogue Processes

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This paper explores land issues in national dialogue processes through the case studies of Myanmar and Syria. In both countries land is a major issue contributing to conflict but can also be an entry point for dialogue. Understanding the specific nature of these land conflicts is a vital step in their eventual resolution. Although land is a central and obvious conflict issue, land conflicts in Myanmar and Syria disguise other societal conflicts. They are just the visible part of a more serious conflict that is rooted much deeper in the society and its history. Land conflicts reflect the general inequality or unfair distribution of wealth, voice and power in a society and/or the discrimination against certain groups, such as women or ethnic minorities. The paper argues the importance of developing a systemic approach of synchronising different levels of land-related initiatives. An appropriate level of detail regarding land and other resources should be included in the national dialogue process and eventual peace agreements. To support this, the possibilities of existing legal framework should be fully used, thought put into creating new legislation where necessary, and local reconciliation infrastructures should be developed.

1. Introduction – importance of addressing land conflicts in national dialogue processes

A variety of global trends have led to a heightened awareness of land issues at the international level. Population growth is placing rising demands on arable land, water and other natural resources and environmental degradation, exacerbated by climate change. Furthermore, with increasing globalization of economies, a number of factors drive the global land rush. These include the fear of food insecurity especially after the global food price spike in 2007; the



volatility of fuel prices; the creation of industrial zones; new environmental imperatives based on the carbon trade; and the financialisation of land to hedge against risky investments. Competition between users and land-uses increasingly results in confrontation and, at times, in violent conflict.³⁰

When land governance and market institutions are weak, opportunities for economic gain through corrupt and illegal action can become widespread, as more people lose access to land on which they depend for their livelihoods. As greater numbers of people are left with fewer options to lead dignified lives, they may choose to engage in advocacy or extreme politics. Throughout history and around the world, many social upheavals have been related to discontent around the management of land. Land conflicts often have extensive negative effects on political, economic, social, and ecological development. When evictions and land grabbing become prevalent, people lose confidence in the state and social capital breaks down³¹. Land conflicts affect different groups in different ways. Not only do they generally have a stronger impact on the livelihood of the poor than that of the rich, but they also impact differently on men and women, urban and rural populations, ethnic majority and minority groups.

The changing character of violent conflict manifests also through land issues. Civilians now represent some 80 percent of conflict-related casualties. In many cases there is a dramatic increase especially in woman-headed households, many of who face challenges accessing or inheriting land. The illicit export of high-value natural resources such as diamonds, timber, and coltan has become a way of financing conflicts. Many protracted intra-state conflicts can continue for decades, resulting in multiple waves of population displacements and returns. Violations of housing, land and property rights (HLP), as well as international calls to restore HLP rights through restitution, are increasingly common.³² As we see in Syria for example, displacement-induced urbanization is a common tactic in modern conflict, serving to consolidate territorial control while simultaneously straining state and international resources to cope with a huge influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

In Syria and Myanmar land is closely tied to conflict in many ways, both directly and indirectly. Myanmar is a fragile state undergoing a period of profound economic and political reform following a period of conflict and isolation. As the poorest country in South Asia, land is the main asset for many people, especially in rural areas where most of Myanmar's population lives. However, most farmers have weak tenure security, and in the recent past have been exposed to land expropriation by the Burmese army and other state institutions of a military dictatorship. Additionally, in conflict-affected ethnic states, the strategy of government forces and non-state armed groups to finance military operations by leasing land to investors has led to land grabbing on both sides.³³ Because of these factors, land is a priority topic on the agenda of the Political Dialogue process at the national level. Land issues are also debated within the ethnic state-based dialogues.

³⁰ UNDP 2011, 14.

³¹ Wehrmann 2008, 1.

³² Ibid.

³³ Henley 2014, ii



Syria's ongoing civil war is a result of complex interrelated factors, including religious and socio-political tensions, the erosion of the economic health of the country, and a wave of political reform sweeping over the Middle East, North Africa and Levant regions. Water scarcity and climatic conditions and their impact on land have played an important role in the deterioration of Syria's economic conditions and urban – rural dynamics. The war has caused massive displacement of people and issues such as displaced individuals' living conditions; illegal and undocumented HLP transactions; HLP disputes; access to land for livelihoods; land contamination with landmines; and lack of personal identification and HLP documentation need to be considered. In addition, displaced women are facing particular barriers in accessing their HLP rights. The peace process in Syria has so far been fixated around issues related to political transition and power sharing. Very little effort has gone into mapping the magnitude of the HLP problem and the way it may affect the peace process. However, one can discern several levels of concern that should be addressed even before a political deal is reached.

That land is linked to conflicts, and so to peace processes, is generally accepted by scholars, policy makers and activists across ideological divides. But how land policies, violent conflicts and peace processes are linked, and how to position land policies within peace processes has not generated consensus.

Despite the reality on land conflicts, governments and the international community have in the past been ineffective in developing systematic and effective strategies to address land grievances and conflicts. Land is seen as too politically sensitive or too technically complicated to lend itself to meaningful resolution. As experience has demonstrated, this is a mistake.³⁴ Recent studies have shown that conflicts associated with natural resources are twice as likely to relapse into conflict within the first five years after the end of hostilities.³⁵

To try to address this gap, many guidelines for how to address land issues in mediation and peacebuilding have been developed.³⁶ Land issues have often been included in peace negotiations and agreements. However, the focus of negotiators tends to be on the broader issues of disarmament, elections and constitution-making. The implementation mechanisms related to land issues are often left rather vague. As a result, experience suggests, land-related clauses may go unimplemented.³⁷

Stakeholders, practitioners and technical advisers in both Myanmar and Syria are currently thinking how to address the immediate land issues as well as how land issues are negotiated in the framework of the overall national dialogue process. The following two chapters provide an overview of the current land-related debates in Myanmar and Syria and explore ways for how existing legal frameworks can be used to address the land issue and how the strengthening of local government structures and inclusive processes could be supported to manage diverging interests and competing claims.

³⁴ UNDP 2011, 14

³⁵ UNEP 2009, 11

³⁶ See for example Wehrmann 2008; UNDP 2011; DPA and UNEP 2015

³⁷ UNDP 2011, 9



2 Land Reform and Ethnic Politics in Myanmar

2.1 Land across Multiple Regimes

The current system of land governance in Myanmar is very much influenced by the system put into place during the colonial era (1824–1948)³⁸. England, after it seized control of Lower Burma in 1855, used the Burmese rice plantations to feed workers in plantations in India, in tea and rubber plantations of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Malaya (Malaysia), and in the sugar plantations of the West Indies³⁹ as well as its own industrial workers. The need to rationalise the rice and taxes to be extracted from Burmese farmers served as the impetus for the introduction of a system to assess individual land holdings and to introduce the idea of an “individual landholder’s right”⁴⁰. As the precursor to the cadastral maps, the British administrators introduced a scheme in which “the land of every cultivator was to be measured up, and he was to receive a statement showing that he possessed so many fields and so much garden land.”⁴¹

On 30th April 1962, right after a military coup, General Nay Win declared a policy called the “Burmese Way to Socialism,” which articulated the three central concepts to the leadership: “nationalism, socialism and Buddhism”⁴². Under this declaration, the military government headed by the Burma Socialist Program Party, the only party to exist from 1962 to 1988, passed a series of laws⁴³ that initially sought to promote smallholder farmers and to undo the growing concentration of land in the hands of *chettiar* moneylenders from Madras India. At this time, important laws such as the Land Nationalization Act (1953) gave the state ultimate rights to the land while the Tenancy Law (1963) defined farmers as tenants on state-owned land. In addition, the Farmer’s Rights Protection Law of 1963 which was enacted to prevent confiscation of land by civil courts in the event of debt-defaulting farmers. Nevertheless, the state remained the sole landlord to tenant farmers who cultivated crops in accordance with the state economic plan, without allowing freedom of crop choice. Starting in 1974, the military heavily extracted surplus from farmers both in terms of land confiscations and forced paddy procurement⁴⁴¹⁵. Farmers had to sell a quota of their paddy at minimal prices to the government, which then used it to feed civil servants, soldiers and to gain export earnings—contributing greatly to the decline of the sector. In reaction to this, with the official declaration of a transition to a “market economy,” the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)⁴⁵¹⁶ created a new policy in 1991 to promote private investment in agriculture production, called the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Instructions, or “Wasteland Instructions.”⁴⁶ The titling-focused land tenure reform initiated by the Government of Myanmar (GoM) in 2012, with the passage of the Farmland Law and Vacant, Fallow, Virgin Land Management Law (“VFV Land

³⁸ Burmese kings, who owned all land, also extracted surpluses from farmers who were allowed tenancy rights to the land through cultivation. Even during the reign of kings, an informal land market was already developed in many areas. For more information, see Mark 2015, 3.

³⁹ Wolf 1982, 319–20.

⁴⁰ Furnivall 1991 [1939], 116–31.

⁴¹ *ibid*: 124.

⁴² Steinberg 1982, 76.

⁴³ Hudson-Rodd et al. 2003.

⁴⁴ *ibid*.

⁴⁵ ¹⁶ This was the name of the military state from 1988 to 1997, headed by General Than Shwe. (Saw Maung 88–92)

⁴⁶ Mark 2015, 5.



Law’), continues the legacy of the colonial state when it first started surveying individual land holdings.

2.2 Land issues in Myanmar’s political transition and peace process

Land ownership, access, allocation and use are at the heart of many of Myanmar’s political and economic contests, such as:

- Land has been a significant focus of public debate and social mobilization following Myanmar’s 2011 transition. Past and recent land acquisition and land grabs have been and continue to be a significant source of grievance against the state, the military, “crony” businesses, and some non-state armed groups.
- Recent changes in land policy and administration not only brings the possibility of securing land tenure for the country’s cultivators, but it also informs the allocation of extractive resources such as timber, minerals, oil, gas, and water.
- As Myanmar’s economy has opened up, land markets have attracted significant domestic and foreign investment. While this may contribute to economic growth, it has also driven up land prices and risks triggering further land confiscations.
- Control over land and land- based natural resources has been at the centre of many of Myanmar’s long-running conflicts between the central government and ethnic minority groups.
- For many in upland communities, customary land and resource rights remain significant not just as a source of livelihood, but also as a source of social, cultural and political identity. These *de facto* ‘customary’ tenure systems govern local use and access, but are only beginning to be recognised by Myanmar’s *de jure* land tenure regime, i.e. the draft National Land Policy.

In 2012, marking a new phase of titling-based land governance reform, the GoM passed the two new, above mentioned, land laws. These laws are intended to strengthen Myanmar’s formal land administration system through the issuance of land use certificates (LUCs), thereby creating a land market. To address a highly fragmented legal regulatory framework governing land, the Government adopted a new National Land Use Policy in January 2016. This policy aims to provide a broad framework for governing Myanmar’s land use, land tenure and land administration. While generally considered progressive, it has not yet been translated into law.

These changes in land governance coincide with an intense period in which the central government is negotiating a national ceasefire and has entered into a political dialogue between the central government/military and ethnic armed groups (EAGs), as well as civil society. Land plays a central role in Myanmar’s long running armed conflicts and its prospects for peace. Many EAG’s desire for more localised control over territory from the military government contributed to conflicts in the first place.

Land features prominently in the peace process and subsequent political dialogue between government and ethnic armed and political groups. Restitution for past land grabs, resettling refugees and IDPs, recognition for local customary land rights, devolved authority to allocate land and to collect land and resource revenues and to have a say in large scale land-based investments will all likely be at the centre of the negotiations. In this context, getting land governance right matters not just for economic growth and poverty reduction; it matters for



laying the foundations for lasting peace, for creating the space for constructive political dialogue and for rest

Different Dimensions of the Land Issue

There are different but related dimensions of the land issue, including:

Land Titling: The 2012 Farmland Law sets out a new framework for the governance of farmland. The Farmland Law creates private-use rights to sell, exchange, access credit, inherit and lease land. In a significant break with past legislation, the Farmland Law develops a legal market for farmland. While the GoM claims to have titled farmers in all states and regions, the certification process, however, has yet to make much progress in some parts of Myanmar—particularly highland and conflict-affected areas. In these areas, farmers land is administrated by armed groups such as the KNU or to rely on informal systems to access land. Given the government's limited capacity, use of out-dated maps, and corruption, the quality and fairness of the certification process appears to be inconsistent.

Customary Land: Neither the 2008 Constitution nor any of the land laws provide legal protection for customary communal land practices (e.g. *damaucha*, *miyopalai*)—even though these were legally recognised in the colonial era. In *Scheduled Areas* under the colonial administration, the British provided political and administrative authority and land to traditional headmen in exchange for their loyalty. Even after the passage of new land laws in 2012, most ethnic minority communities still follow customary laws for land. There are comprehensive customary land tenure systems in many ethnic minority states. In such systems, there is a variety of land categories: forests, rotational fallow, individual plots, sacred spaces, community plots, to grow animal fodder, to mitigate against disasters, etc. Ethnic armed groups prioritise recognition of customary land in the national dialogue.

Land Confiscations: Large land concessions were allocated by the military government after it adopted a market economy. In conflict areas, land and land-based resources have helped to finance conflict with the *tatmadaw*, NSAGs and armed militias using land as a source of revenue, including to harvest and trade timber, jade and in the North, opium. Over the past six decades, civil wars have contributed to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, to widespread land expropriation and to pervasive land tenure insecurity in conflict affected areas. While active conflicts have relied on land and resource revenues, periods of peace have also triggered a scramble for land and resources. During the early 1990s ceasefires military actors, the state, NSAGs and domestic and external investors entered border areas to acquire rights to land and resources.

The 2012 VFV Land Law has also created scope for **land expropriation of customary lands**, which often have not formal state recognition. This leads to enclosure of communal lands (such as village forests, grazing lands and fishponds) and land under shifting cultivation. Increasingly, investors together with local authorities are charging farmers with 'trespassing' and 'vandalism' (criminal codes 427 and 447), even though many have been cultivating this land for years.

Ethnic Land Issues



While the land issue is on the agenda of the national dialogue, there are opportunities within the existing legal framework to address ethnic land issues. As concerned stakeholders deepen their engagement over the future of Myanmar's land governance, not only best practices from other countries, but there are opportunities in the existing legal framework that can be used to address ethnic land issues.

The **National Land Use Policy** uses language that recognises the existence of customary communal land for the first time. Much remains to be done to achieve full protection of this type of land. Going forward, the government intends to translate this policy into a National Land Law. Following this, appropriate institutional arrangements will have to be put in place. The fact that the law development process overlaps with the political dialogue presents an opportunity to translate the outcomes of the dialogue into legal protections for ethnic minority lands.

Land Laws Revision Process: There are ongoing processes to revise the 2012 VFV Land Law and 1896 Land Acquisition Law. This presents an opportunity to include language that recognises customary land (in that it is not categorised as VFV land) and to ensure appropriate compensation when included in a land concession.

Land Restitution: Even as many areas are faced with risk of new land confiscations, the central government is currently dealing with past land confiscations. The Parliamentary Land Confiscation Scrutinizing Commission investigated many of Myanmar's past land expropriations and recommended the return of 474,000 acres in 699 cases. The NLD government is continuing the Commission's work with the Land Reinvestigation Committee, a multi-ministerial committee to act on the return of illegally confiscated land. These efforts have mostly been in areas not affected by conflict, but groups such as UNHCR are looking at how these mechanisms can be expanded to post-conflict areas.

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was ratified by the Government of Myanmar on 13 September 2007. The UNDRIP promotes a set of rights "for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world" (Article 43). Because the GoM has never taken a clear public position as to whether or not there are indigenous peoples (IPs) in the country, there has been no substantial movement on enacting protections for indigenous peoples. The IP rights language remains relatively new in the country's political debates, but is starting to slowly enter political debates. UNDRIP has been referenced in the national dialogue and in the English translation of the 2015 Ethnic Nationalities Protection Law, which currently only includes social and cultural rights. Depending on the progress of the national dialogues, it can later expand to political and economic rights, including over control of territory. Some argue that the indigenous concept can *further strengthen* the claim to self-determination made under the umbrella of federalism. There is a possibility of using these two together.



Ethnic politics can be fluid and contradictory, constructed in response to the politics of a particular place and time⁴⁷. The role of ethnic politics in the shaping of land institutions in Myanmar is also not straightforward. The dichotomy in Myanmar is around the more popular concept of “ethnic nationhood” versus the emerging discourse of “indigeneity.” Advocates of the former idea promote it in their claim to separate, but equal members of a federal union (which the Shan, Kachin, and Chin claim to be founding states). It is a movement that is grounded in a historical national struggle for rights to self-determination without apology. Proponents of the IP discussion often cannot claim to be founding members of the Union, and do not have the state apparatus to legislate their rights e.g. Nagas. While ethnic minority groups, both armed and non-armed, have been making noticeable efforts to coordinate a common political position in regards to the right to territory in recent years, they continue to struggle with the most inclusive and effective way to formulate their political claims.

The fragmentation of ethnic alliances is further exacerbated not only by the challenge of discourse, but also in historical social structures that continues to weaken ethnic unification within and between groups. This is the case not only between the major ethnic groups, but also within the numerous sub-groups. In Chin State, the remote terrain, different language groups, and diverse animist practices all contributed to the creation of a tribal society that faced great pains in constructing a common nationalist identity. The Karen faced equally if not greater obstacles in the creation of a pan-Karen identity.

Myanmar’s current state-building project presents an opportunity for ethnic peoples to make an effort to find common ground. Recently, most ethnic minority groups chose to organise themselves according to ethnicity (as opposed to the state/region of residence) in order to create a more unified political front within each group. This is key to strengthening the position of ethnic minorities in national dialogues, and to shift the norms and balance of power in the direction of a more federal system of land governance and more ethnically inclusive land institutions.

This will likely take a longer-term timeframe. In the meantime, it is important to support the ongoing legislative and administrative processes that can strengthen land tenure for all ethnic groups.

3 Who will Own the City? Urban Housing, Land and Property Issues in Syria

The traditional land tenure systems in the Levant are complex and overlapping, stemming from hundreds of years of evolution in the legal as well as the socio-economic conditions. By the end of the 19th century the Ottoman authorities moved to codify the land management system and homogenise the legal framework for registering property. The move was mainly driven by a dire need to secure the tax base of the empire. It was part and parcel of a wide reform to readjust the relationship of a growing urban middle class to the State. The reforms however, preserved a very wide variety of traditional land tenure systems and enshrined them within a new legal code. The process of narrowing the legal definition of property and moving from a common law “deed” to a Civil Code “title” system was finally accomplished during the French

⁴⁷ Yashar 2005.



mandate 1920–1946. The French not only changed the legal framework but instigated a wide bureaucracy to delineate rights, demarcate the physical property, register the tiles, cross reference registers, and adjudicate disputes. The system was innovative for its time but could not cope with the increasing demand on urban properties in the post-colonial period. The rapid rural to urban migration starting in the second half of the twentieth century imposed major demand for housing and real estate in the main cities. The process of transforming peri-urban rural lands to urban brown field properties was part and parcel of a new social contract to coopt the urban middle class into the ruling Baath party patronage starting from 1963. Supply-side subsidies and a promise of a free hold homeownership for all was a dream that the State could not meet. Unresolved contradictions remaining from the transformation of the traditional tenures into modern registries accumulated and added to the inability of the State to manage urban growth properly. These contradictions were an important factor among the root causes stirring in the country before the outbreak of the conflict 2011.

The over-bureaucratic nature of the cadastre system necessitated the creation of temporary records in 1974, but those temporary records lacked the rigor and solid documentation process (delineation without demarcation on the ground). The cadastral system could no longer keep up. Furthermore, the socialistic orientation of the economy drove the State to issue new laws to regulate land speculation and concentrate all urban expansion in the hands of the public sector. This led to a subjective exercise of the power of eminent domain. The expropriation process disgruntled many communities as they were poorly compensated and saw their lands being then distributed to provide housing for civil servants and the middle classes needed by the State to secure political stability and services. The haphazard procedures added insult to injury and drove many peri-urban communities away from their traditional residences as their villages were being absorbed by the growing cities. Moreover, the State invested differently in urban management processes in the different parts of the country. In some cases and under the guise of securing border areas, stringent regulatory processes were imposed on communities suspected of disloyalty to the State (the Kurdish dominated north is the most prominent case). Finally, the inability to resolve age-old problems of collective land holdings and the commons established as religious and charitable endowments contributed to the shortage of legal land for development.

Spontaneous settlements grew around the main urban areas. The larger cities had by 2011 over half of their populations living in informality. However, informality is not of one simple type. Different types of informality existed in and around the major cities. Some extreme cases involved downright squatting on public and private lands. While others involved some level of security of tenure (settlements between owners and squatters endorsed by the courts but unrecognised by municipal planning departments, agreements of usufruct rights, etc.) Yet other forms of informality involve densification of brown field properties illegally without obtaining proper license. The municipalities of Syria opted to deal with the matter in different ways. Some preferred to advance urban services to spontaneous areas while others were more reticent. The provision of urban services by the State often provided auxiliary forms of registration (water and electricity meters and bills). A real estate market emerged in parallel to the formal real estate market and the two influenced each other considerably. The different levels of informality and quasi-legal documentation available featured as important determinant of land prices and of community solidarity to capitalise on land prices in their areas, creating another economic stratification process in the cities.



The early manifestations of the conflict took place primarily at the urban/rural interface. HLP issues played a major part in mobilising disgruntled communities. The State thought at first to segregate this issue from other causes of grievances (human right abuses). The first two years of the conflict witnessed a laissez-faire attitude in the spontaneous settlement areas. The State looked the other way while these areas added no less than 10% to the housing stock in less than one year. However, the demonstrations against the State did not subside and the idea of appeasing communities to quell the uprising seemed to backfire. The rebellion took a sharp turn towards heavy militarization by the early part of 2012. Most of the front lines in the battles took place in peri-urban areas and in the small and medium cities where urban growth was rapid and the HLP rights most vulnerable. Indeed most of the damage to the housing stock estimated at over 33% of the total value of the pre-war housing stock was to be found in these areas.

Many voices within the government started to advocate for a permanent solution to the spontaneous settlement areas taking advantage that most of their inhabitants were forced out either as refugees in neighbouring countries or as internally displaced persons in Syria. The lucrative potentiality of the destroyed peri-urban areas as possible sites for re-development created pressure to compensate loyalist cronies and to allow them to invest in “reconstruction solutions” based on private public-partnerships where the original populations were the weakest link. Some laws were issued to test the ground for a possible neo-liberal framework of reconstruction even while the battles were raging (law 66 for 2012). These experiments created impetus for further land speculations in the most devastated areas. The chaos and corruption created in the past six years engendered new forms of fraud, forced sale of property, forced evacuations of residents under whimsical pretexts (partly using the fact that the less than perfect tenure documents in those areas were illegal). Women were often most affected, as the fate of disappeared male heads of households was not recognised by the State.

Furthermore, in different locations and under different guises all parties to the conflict participated in ethnic and or sectarian cleansing and resettlements of displaced families in the vacated properties of the displaced persons of the other communities. This phenomenon is still confined to specific locations and is mainly reflective of the practice of local actors and warlords and cannot be looked at as a major policy directive yet. However, as the conflict continues, the assumption is that displacement will become permanent and that HLP infringements will become part of an ethno/sectarian grand redesign of Syria. To that extent HLP is increasingly featured as a core issue facing the peace building process.

3.1 Impact of the HLP to the peace process

The peace process has so far been fixated around issues related to political transition and power sharing. Very little efforts have gone to map the magnitude of the HLP problem and the way it may affect the peace process. However, one can discern several levels of concern that should be addressed even before a political deal is reached. These concerns will play into the hands of all types of spoilers to the process if not addressed.

- Most of the internationally recognised operations involving HLP issues in the post conflict situations tend to address grievances that accumulated during the conflict. In Syria, addressing pre-conflict grievances is essential.



- There is no reliable judiciary system that can be trusted with the issue. The establishment of an independent judiciary framework will be part and parcel of the political negotiations. These negotiations have not produced any viable visions yet for the separation of powers, or for that matter how the fragmented Syrian territory will be re-aggregated in the future.
- The fixation of all the actors on the formal HLP documentation process (both actors working from Damascus and actors working across the border) may lead to a bias against the semi-legal documentations that most displaced Syrians had enjoyed in the past.
- A good deal of the HLP transactions were recorded outside the State institutions in para-legal religious authorities and make shift courts. These courts will be subject for incrimination in any future political deal that will consider the human rights abuses of all actors to the conflict. There will be a tendency among such para-legal actors to destroy their records to avoid future incrimination.
- While the official national narrative has been fixated on freehold ownership as the main dominant pattern of tenure, the reality (even from before the war) is that many urban areas have different forms of tenure (leaseholds, pawns, borrowing) etc. Attention should be made not to reinforce the old unsustainable forms of tenure and should focus on developing alternative frameworks and socially acceptable norms to the untenable freehold ideal. The weak position of women to negotiate solutions among an increasingly more militaristic and patriarchal social order will further disenfranchise women from HLP rights.

International support to address the HLP issue

Interventions on the HLP issues are only now starting to take traction among the international donors and actors. Some of the issues to be considered are:

- The architecture for adjudicating HLP disputes cannot only depend on the formation of special commissions (as was the case under the Dayton agreement). The restitution of HLP rights cannot be incorporated into the repatriation and resettlement of refugees annexes of the political agreement. They should be addressed as part of the reform of the judiciary at large. Para-legal institutions must somehow be incorporated into the deal to avoid chaos created by wartime HLP transactions.
- HLP issues will be generally looked as part of the greater reconciliation efforts between the different communities in Syria. Resources must be provided to develop local reconciliation infrastructure. The focus cannot be left to a national top down peace process.
- The HLP issues in Syria will be overwhelmingly in urban areas where the real estate markets will be critical in instigating the reconstruction process. Donors should avoid the temptation of supply-side solutions to the issue, and instead focus more on demand-side solutions: microloans, especially for women, hedges against evacuations and sharp price hikes (not rent controls), housing coupons, etc. In short, HLP issues in semi-legal spontaneous areas must come with strong but well calibrated financial instruments to forge the win-win deals on the ground to resolve disputes.



- The issue of tenure will also have to be addressed with a critical review of the status of women in the absence of men heads of households. Women are the main heads of households in many areas and in the overall the percentage of women headed households have increased several folds in Syria. Yet the legal framework still favours the male next of kin. The issue of HLP will require close linkage to the discovery of the fate of the disappeared and the kidnapped. It will also require negotiating some basic changes to the law to provide women with more equitable solutions in the case of inheritance.
- Many of the neo-liberal models being proposed for Syria are already promoting the notion that HLP issues are unsolvable. The solutions they are proposing involve creating an urban tabula-rasa displacing IDP's permanently by providing them with minimal compensation matching their poor tenure status, and then preparing the land for re-development. The donors should focus on the right of the city as a precondition for advancing money for urban project, much as they are focusing on human rights and political transition as pre-requisites for reconstruction funding.

4 Conclusion

Land conflicts in Myanmar and Syria are the visible manifestation or outcome of the often-invisible power and politics concerning access to and use of land. People seem to have limited knowledge of who has what influence on the way decisions about land are made and enforced, or how these individuals and groups use that power.

The complexity of causes leading to land conflicts, as well as their diversity and the large number of different actors involved, requires an integrated, system-oriented approach for solving land conflicts and for preventing new ones. The examples from Myanmar and Syria demonstrate that the different levels of addressing land issues should be linked and synchronised, from national to regional and to local levels.

Restitution of land rights is internationally recognised as the preferred option for restoring land rights after conflict. However, when addressing land conflicts and HLP issues it is important that the process does not focus only on restitution of the most recent conflict but it is equally important to address the historical structural issues fuelling land disputes. Otherwise there is a danger that past injustices are legitimised and new ones created. Therefore a more extensive land reform might be needed to address the structural causes of conflict, such as unequal access to land or land concentration. Since the time frame to achieve such reforms and desired settlements can be quite long there is also a need to understand the current legislative and administrative processes upon which national peace processes can build.

Implementation of land-related agreements has often failed because peace agreements have not been specific enough in their land provisions. Both in Myanmar and Syria, an appropriate level of detail regarding land and other resources should be included in the national dialogue process and eventual peace agreement, although achieving this can be challenging. When levels of trust and confidence between the parties are expected to be low, it can be important to



include more detailed provisions in peace agreements to provide sufficient assurances, and not to leave issues open to interpretation.

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"Self-Mediation" Structures & Procedures of National Dialogues – Managing Complexity, Breaking Deadlock and Building Consensus

Common Space Initiative

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of National Dialogues, as seen from a planning and facilitation perspective, is its bewildering complexity. In Burma, the Panglong conference met for the first time in January 2016. It consisted of 900 representatives from the government and army, ethnic minorities, 18 armed groups, and more than 90 democratic parties and groups. In Yemen, the National Dialogue Conference had 565 representatives, representing political parties and movements, ethnic representatives, women and youth, 50% to represent the South and 30% women. Not only is the sheer size of such meetings intimidating, but more so the range of political interests, the depth of distrust, the seeming irreconcilability of competing interests and issues, and the fragility of the arrangement that must hold all together. It is accepted that given the home-grown quality of National Dialogues, there will and should be no one-size-fits all answer to the above questions. There seems to be an almost naïve



assumption that dialogue will be successful if only protagonists can be brought into the same room (or hall). This is not the case, as the list of National Dialogues that did not have any lasting impact is considered, as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Togo, Yemen, Bahrain, Swaziland, Sudan – to name but a few.

The following dynamics regarding planning for and managing National Dialogues deserve ongoing attention:

1. Many National Dialogues fail because of political capture. This happens when the ruling party or external actors seek to control the outcome of the process by exerting undue pressure on who to include, the formulation of the agenda, and the procedures adopted. What options are available for facilitators when faced with political capture? What rules of engagement need to be in place to ensure a level playing field?
2. The inclusion of the military, armed or highly radicalised groups that may resort again to armed resistance or violent disruptions, is a particularly complex and important issue. It is important to understand the drivers and root causes behind radicalization, but also how to engage in dialogue with radicalised groups given circumstances of international policies and sanctions. It is equally important to understand the dynamics of changing the “instruments” of dealing with existential conflicts (from military tools to dialogue tools). This is an acute dilemma faced by facilitators of dialogue. Ongoing reflection and research is very critical.
3. The process of fostering confidence in dialogue as a viable option needs much attention. Military actors in particular must be convinced to move their conflict from the battlefield to the dialogue table. It implies the existence of a “table” that inspires confidence and promises better alternatives to military strategies. But what precisely does confidence-building entail? What does confidence-building mean in a context of terror attacks, drones and clandestine or open external support for military options? Is a “mutually hurting stalemate” indeed a precondition for successful talks?
4. Interference in or pressure by external actors adds to the stress placed on National Dialogues. The management of external actors therefore poses considerable challenges to the facilitators of National Dialogues. At the same time, few National Dialogues could take place without some form of external support, whether political, technical or financial. It is important to develop a better understanding of risks associated with undue external interference, but also of international indifference. It may also imply the development of codes of conduct for INGOs who seek to provide support, but without consideration of what is already in place and without respect for the principles of collaboration and national ownership.
5. Essential elements that need to be agreed on in the initial dialogue framework agreement that precedes the start of the National Dialogue. These elements include criteria for inclusive participation, mandating of dialogue structure and outcome, and establishing formal links to constitutional, governance and change instruments, inclusive political managing structure(s) and accountability mechanisms, decision-making procedures, core principles and values, agreement on its purpose, objectives and what it is intended to change and agree on, namely, the development of an inclusive broad agenda framework. Among other essential elements are the appointment of a multi-partial, non-stakeholder-driven secretariat and management, financial and administrative responsibilities, etc.



"Self-mediation" procedures and design elements in National Dialogues

One of the many consistent patterns in failed or weak formal National Dialogue processes is the absence or under-development of deliberate, integrated and coherent designs of "self-mediation" components and procedures. We will outline a few here for discussion:

a) The strategic process, dialogue roadmap and facilitation strategy that is implemented has been shown to have a determining impact on the outcome of dialogue processes. There are various matters in need of ongoing discussions and joint learning in this respect, including:

- The most appropriate and contextual infrastructure for the talks, including the formation of management and facilitation task teams, the structure of the table (or conference room), facilitation strategies, committees, expert panels, and procedural rules.
- Consistent and structured practices regarding the generation of options (research, consultations, comparative studies, stakeholder proposals, hidden messages, technical committees, drafting committees, etc.)
- The procedures, techniques and structures for decision-making, deadlock-breaking and consensus-building (One Text, technical experts, options generation, indabas, dialogue circles and trees, interactive multi-track processes, etc.).
- Decision-making arrangements (full consensus, sufficient consensus, voting for consensus, 2/3 majority, or a scale or combination of options).

b) The role of shared knowledge creation to enable dialogue participants to operate from a basis of credible and jointly owned knowledge is increasingly recognised. Attention to this aspect would include:

- identify information gaps
- structured and systematic ongoing mapping of stakeholder proposals, positions, interests, their common ground and differences (to feed into the facilitation strategy design and One-Text decision-making process)
- enable joint knowledge creation and "fact discovery";
- move from "facts and perceptions" to "facts and facts" — acknowledging and seeing each other's realities
- technical information and common understanding of conceptual frameworks and systems
- jointly developing inclusive agenda frames that acknowledge the needs, hopes, brokenness and expectations from all sides
- ongoing joint conflict assessment and facilitation strategy development by Secretariat, Facilitation Task Groups, Technical Committees and Consensus-building bodies.

c) The National Dialogue should also enable people's voices to be heard. This includes linking tracks 1, 2 and 3, welcoming and respecting submissions from the public, and ensuring a constructive media policy.



Working towards a working definition of formal National Dialogues – evolving common understandings from past two conferences

Following the discussions and reports from the Helsinki National Dialogue Conferences in 2014 and 2015, some shared understandings have emerged that we cover in this section. There remain, however, significant areas that need joint reflection and research to capture the extent of these instruments' extraordinary complexity. The recent publication of the Berghof/Swisspeace handbook for practitioners, the HD publication for third parties support, and the ongoing development of the Peace and Dialogue Platform have all contributed significantly to the evolving body of knowledge emerging from these processes.

In order to define formal National Dialogues a number of distinctions were made during the past conferences. First, a National Dialogue is a highly inclusive process involving, as far as is possible, the complete spectrum of political diversity in a society. It is therefore to be distinguished from processes, often conducted by external mediators, that engage only with armed actors or the most prominent protagonists.

Second, the objective with National Dialogues is to arrive at a new constitutional dispensation or a fundamental re-organisation of the political and statutory landscape. It can therefore be distinguished from, for example, international mediation interventions that have the intention to achieve a very specific political or military settlement (such as, for example, SADC's mediation of the crisis in Madagascar) that do not necessarily require a substantive revision of the constitutional foundation of a society.

Third, these dialogues, as in Myanmar, South Africa, Yemen and Lebanon, have a formal character, meaning that they are set up in order to impact on the statutory landscape and that have, therefore, to feed into formal legal procedures. They are therefore to be distinguished from informal or Track Two dialogue processes.

Fourth, formal National Dialogue processes, especially those that have been successful, may not be restricted to a once-off event, but may evolve through different formats and conclude in a constituent assembly. In both South Africa and Nepal the National Dialogue took a decade to produce a new constitution, relying on different iterations of the dialogue platform across this period. In some countries, such as Lebanon, a National Dialogue platform has been established to pursue ongoing dialogue in the aftermath of a political settlement.

Fifth, and very importantly, National Dialogues are homegrown and self-managed processes. In Myanmar 5 stakeholder groups from more than 90 parties, government, army and armed groups designed their own dialogue frameworks. Collectively, they spent the last two years negotiating the final dialogue and change instruments. While national stakeholders may accept external support in some or other form, a National Dialogue is not mediated by external actors nor designed to meet international interests or concerns. It is, first and foremost, a national attempt at solving its own contradictions. Part from its formal constitutional role, the National Dialogue also becomes a shared space for reconciliation and to develop common visions for their future.

A working definition of a National Dialogue is, therefore, that it is a formally mandated process of political dialogue that is inclusive, self-mediated and aimed at forging broad consensus in



a highly diverse and polarised society on the values, principles and rules that should govern peaceful co-existence. A National Dialogue may take place at various stages of a peacemaking process and need not take place in the same format. It is therefore an open, adaptive process that should be defined by its broad objective and thrust and not by the particular format it takes.

The questions and considerations for this session include:

- What are the planning, management, facilitation, shared knowledge and procedural measures that must be in place in order to manage the complexity of National Dialogues?
- What are the key structural and “self-mediation” elements that needs to be built into formal National Dialogues to enable consensus-building, common understanding of issues, and deadlock-breaking?
- National Dialogues as third-party instruments for mediation, and National Dialogues as sovereign “self-mediation” instruments
- Comparing negotiation, mediation and dialogue across tracks.

The One-Text Negotiation Tool

The one-text process is a systematic, collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to negotiations, technical task groups, national dialogues, and constitution-making. This approach allows parties in a negotiation to collectively explore common ground, identify their difference, generate options, work towards consensus-building, and finally agree on a single text. This process is called one-text because literally one text is drawn from stakeholders’ perspectives and identified common ground.

The One-Text Negotiations Tool facilitates the development of a “One Text” document allowing stakeholders to track their respective positions, identify common ground, note their differences and pave the way to the generation of options.



STAKEHOLDER POSITIONS

STAKEHOLDER 1	STAKEHOLDER 2	STAKEHOLDER 3	ETC.
ISSUE 1			
X Y Z	Z X X	Y Z X	
ISSUE 2			
Y Z X	X Y Z	Z X X	



The Youth Space of Dialogue and Mediation ⁴⁸

Mir Mubashir and Irena Grizelj

Throughout human history, young people have been pioneering activism and nonviolent movements towards socio– political change. In recent times, markedly since the ‘fourth wave democracy’ uprisings in the Arab world, the international peacebuilding field has been putting much due emphasis on the role of youth as crucial peace agents. A (much due) United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security was recently adopted, urging greater representation by young men and women in the prevention and resolution of violent conflict.

Young people⁴⁹ – individuals, organisations and networks – constructively involve in socio– political development and change through activism, volunteerism, student unions, youth wings of political parties, and community development, to name a few. This paints the picture of the youth space – the multi–dimensional space that young people create, shape and sustain.⁵⁰ Is there, within this space, the youth space of dialogue and mediation – the space of young people transforming conflicts with a dialogic and mediative art?

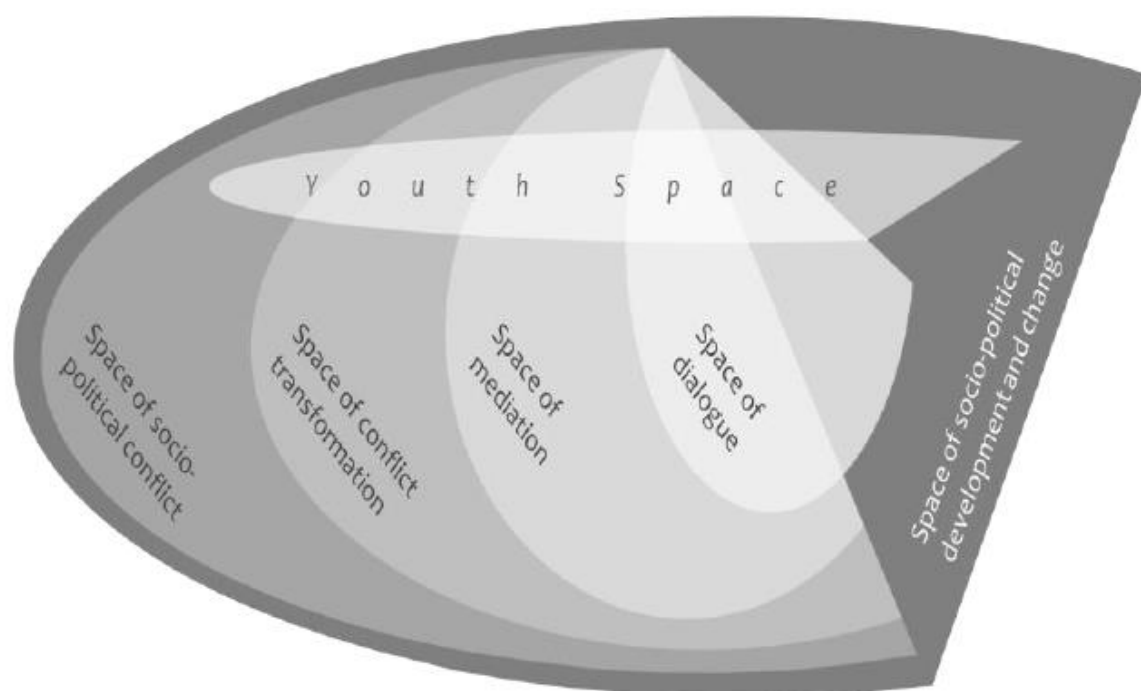
We endeavoured searching for and exploring this space. We did so, not by taking a mediator or a dialogue facilitator hat and trying to see how it fits on those who we think are youth. Rather, we looked at the spectrum of the peacebuilding efforts of the whole of society and explored what in this context is considered and felt as the youth space of dialogue and mediation. In the following, we share the key insights from our exploration.

⁴⁸ This paper is based on an exploratory study commissioned by Finn Church Aid (FCA) to the Berghof Foundation. Primary field research was done in Myanmar and Ukraine respectively by them. The synthesis paper of this study is forthcoming. ***The information and views set out in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Berghof Foundation or Finn Church Aid.***

⁴⁹ For the purpose of this paper, ‘young people’ will roughly consider those in the age range of 18–35, covering their biographical phases of ‘youth’ (15–24) and ‘young adulthood’ (25–44). This range is slightly higher than that of UNSC 2250 (18–29), however, it was our observation that ‘youth’ is felt and expressed in different ways across cultures, which is important to consider.

⁵⁰ This however does not indicate that there are no ‘non–youth’ dynamics. Indeed, older people (35+) do contribute to the youth space.





We endeavoured searching for and exploring this space. We did so, not by taking a mediator or a dialogue facilitator hat and trying to see how it fits on those who *we think* are youth. Rather, we looked at the spectrum of the peacebuilding efforts of the whole of society and explored what in this con-text is considered and felt as the youth space of dialogue and mediation. In the following, we share the key insights from our exploration. Peacebuilding efforts of young people are usually well-recognised, celebrated, and supported. The dialogic and mediative aspects of these efforts, however, do not get the deserved leverage. There are two main reasons for this:

Not adequately recognising youth potential or benefitting from it

In hierarchical societies and systems that see age as proportional to capacity and quality, it is not unusual that young people's dialogue and mediation efforts have a hard time getting through. They are seen as immature, inexperienced, not ready, and too emotional or emotionless (depending on the context) by the older generation. Their offers to mediate or to facilitate dialogue are therefore largely dismissed. While this is a demotivating factor, young people tend to be persistent in creating alternative avenues to contribute. Conversely, young people themselves are often unaware that their peacebuilding efforts are mediative and dialogic in nature. This is often instinctual, or learned from observation and experience.

Recent years have seen a growing demand of youth inclusion and participation in national dialogues, especially in light of the youth-driven uprisings in the Arab world. The experience so far has been mixed – not included (Jordan); or included but not given any decision-making power or any substantial role in the implementation phase (Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain). Young people do get more traction in community level dialogue and they can be influential, albeit informally. One reason for this discrepancy between formal and informal levels of dialogue can be attributed to how we usually shape our 'inclusion paradigm'. Often, it gets too focused on quantity and not quality, or even a 'good' quantity does not necessarily end up guaranteeing



quality. What often gets lost in the process is a conscious effort to *benefit from* youth approaches to dialogue. Furthermore, we usually get so hyped up about formal processes that we lose sight of the systemic connection between informal and formal processes. In many cases worldwide, young people contribute substantially to such informal processes. Last but not least, initiatives by national and international organisations tend to jump into bolstering youth participation by ‘empowering’ them, often as per ‘a prescription’. Despite how sincere and well-intentioned such initiatives might be, they often fail to recognise that young people *already have* power, and that needs to be nurtured and supported. Sometimes, however, young people themselves are unaware of their potential, which is an argument to create the space for self-discovery. Another interesting aspect of power is how in the young-old relationship power dynamics are often contentious – older people do not want to ‘lose power’ to younger people, and younger people strive to ‘get hold of the same power’ as older people. The latter, if it does not happen, may prove to be ‘self-disempowering’ and shroud the true potential of youth.

Having a constricted view of mediation and dialogue

In the peacebuilding field, the predominant analytical lens for mediation is heavily skewed towards international mediation in inter-state conflicts. Mediation is seen as a problem-solving tool, and a ‘facilitated negotiation by an outsider-neutral third party’, i.e. ‘the mediator’ (usually a charismatic global figure or a supra-national organisation). Since the late 1990s, this analytical lens has been upgrading with the emergent concept of ‘insider mediation’, which is basically a *re-discovery* of the fact that mediation is an age-old tool that has been used by ‘wise men and women’ such as traditional and religious actors. More recently, framings of ‘everyday’ peace(building) / diplomacy and a ‘whole of society’ approach to peacebuilding are encouraging a more realistic, nuanced and holistic understanding of how in our complex socio-political space, the constructive space of conflict transformation coexists with the space (violent) conflict.

Within this, we see the *space of mediation*, which is characterised by efforts of *transforming tense, violent or broken relationships* between or within communities and societal groups, by facilitating the flow of communication, addressing the motivation and attitude behind violent behaviour, and renewing social contracts, to *enact* mutual interests of sustaining nonviolent and constructive relations. These efforts are expended in different capacities by a range of people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and skills. Most importantly, these efforts are not tied to a functional (mediator) role, but rather based on emotion derived from the deep connection to the issues and relationships in the conflict. They can be elders, community leaders, religious leaders, ex-combatants, students, politicians, businesspersons, etc. They come in all shapes and forms with regard to their gender, sexual orientation and age. This means young people as well, and this is a consideration that usually escapes our analytical lens for mediation. For dialogue, our analytical lens tends to be less skewed, but nonetheless inadequately analysed.⁵¹

⁵¹ What is more readily analyzed and understood is the form of dialogue and negotiation that young leaders and collectives have with state actors regarding representation in governance and policymaking. This is however a slightly different scope from what we focused on in this exploration, viz. mediation and dialogue in contexts of (violent) socio-political conflict. On a related note, in the ‘Global North’, young people pursue professional qualification to become mediators and dialogue facilitators. The learning and application environment range from peer-mediation in school/college or parent-child mediation in family settings to alternative dispute resolution in civil cases.



In some of the stories we listened to during our exploration, we could take away that young people have the acumen to *identify the need for dialogue or mediation* in the conflict context and they contribute in the best of their capacity to address that need. They venture to *create the atmosphere and stimulate people* to get into a process. In certain contexts, young people are in a more advantageous position to *con-front deep-rooted attitude* in a reflective manner (for example that of ‘otherness’ and enemy) for promoting empathy. They strive to *build confidence and trust* among conflict actors and *facilitate collaborative problem-solving*. All these *inspire and rejuvenate* the older generation/ conflict actors to think and do differently and fill in the dialogue or mediation process. More often than not, however, the formalisation of such a process eventually makes people oblivious to the informal process that led to it. In other cases, highly visible formal processes or informal processes led by older people and involving mainly older people shroud informal processes pioneered by young people. In formal peace processes, not seeing young people at the ‘table’ however does not necessarily invalidate their connection to and influence on the processes. In Myanmar, for example, young people convene community voice to feed into state-level and provide technical support for formal peace structures (government, political parties, and ethnic armed groups/organisations).

Young people have their distinct approaches and methods for dialogue and mediation

The following are broad strokes that shape young people’s approach and method to dialogue and mediation:

- Their efforts come out of their personal experience with conflict. They see violent conflict as an impediment to the socio-economic development required for their successful future. This makes them almost ‘impatient’ for peace, and they strive to make peace their business.
- They have different realities, experiences, stake in and perspective of conflict than their older generation. In addition, young people today have a broader, more globalised connection to the world, which contributes to their interest to know about other cultures and be more sensitive towards them. This often prompts them to break out of any generational pattern of perceptions about the issues around conflict in their societies, such ‘the other’, trauma, guilt, religion, coexistence, sexuality, gender roles, etc. They also tend to be generally more sensitive and reactive to injustice and oppression. These are advantageous towards a constructive approach. Indeed, research has shown that young people, esp. those born in post-war times, are generally more open to dialogue and cooperation, compared with the generations that have been directly affected by war and atrocities.
- Certain virtues and characteristics like curiosity, courage, defiance, non-conformity, energy, and passion play out with a different force in this biographical phase called ‘youth’. Certain things make more sense to explore, through learning, experimenting, failing and succeeding.
- Personal identity and background – student, social worker, artists, entrepreneur, religious actor, politician, political activist, offspring of a mediator, ex-combatant, former child soldier, etc. – also determine much of the above.
- Innovation and creativity strongly underline young people’s methods for dialogue and mediation, in experimenting with different forms of dialogue, also non-verbal dialogue that builds trust and empathy and stimulates intra-society healing.



- Especially in recent decades, they have greater access, familiarity and innovation with technology, e.g. massive use of social media, which they can employ in their quest for peace.
- They have the pragmatism and acceptance that change happens slowly and in small scope, and being receptive and appreciative of the given scope of action and change (e.g. the small but powerful moments and change happening ‘in the room’).
- Last but not least, volunteerism is a prominent backdrop for youth dialogue and mediation – doing something from an innate need and not as a pursuit of career or money.

Although the lack of access to formal levels of dialogue and mediation is a common youth grudge, this very informal relationships they have with conflict actors prove to be advantageous in certain contexts. For example, in a civil war context, the (formal) asymmetric relationship among non-state armed groups, state actors, and traditional political and societal elites is usually a tense one, where maintaining trust is a constant challenge. Young people, in contrast, due to their undefined and informal relationship to all these actors, can allow constructive engagement and dialogue on issues of conflict, even in hierarchical systems. Having said that, in less democratic societies, youth is seen by certain societal elites as a threat to their status quo. Even in these cases, however, persistent initiatives of constructive engagement and dialogue often proves to be useful. In certain areas of work, such as interfaith dialogue, young people are seen as less threatening.

Young people have their ways of navigating hierarchy and speaking to the right people for the right purpose. In Myanmar and Yemen, for example, young people have played a role in negotiating with armed groups on the human rights situation of communities, including the release of civilians recruited from their communities. One ethnic youth group in Myanmar, as another example, have proven to be much active in synthesising a community voice and approaching armed groups and having dialogue with them on alternatives to the violence and war economy. Young people have also actively negotiated with international corporate firms in case the latter’s activities or policies adversely affect the communities. A youth organisation in Kiev believes in strategic relationship with state actors, and have built rapport with the state and secured their office premises in a ministerial building – to remain transparent and also having open doors for dialogue.

A great part of recognising young people’s dialogue and mediation efforts rests on becoming aware of their potential and adjusting our analytical lens (discussed in the first hypothesis above). This, in turn, opens up the opportunity to understand their challenges and needs. Certain challenges of young people are generic challenges they have in broader peacebuilding work:

- **Funding.** Difficulty of getting funding for own projects ideas. The logic of funding instruments of donors are yet to catch up with the ‘youth trend’.
- **‘Work’ vs. volunteerism.** For students, it can be a dilemma of balancing volunteerism, working to provide for family or to sustain self, and completing studies.
- **Representation.** Given that young people are increasingly becoming global citizens and in their context being heavily interconnected with a diverse set of actors, it gets difficult for others to assess who they represent and whose interest they serve.
- **Overburdening.** Intense youth efforts in peace work often leave them tired and emotionally strained, often leading to burnout. There are instances where, out of the



resulting frustration, young people have decided to go back to ‘normal life’ – to not be involved in peace work anymore, earning a living or going to study / live abroad.

Overcoming these challenges requires support. Indeed, in many contexts, young people and their organisations and networks get support from their fellow citizens. National organisations are increasingly responding to the need of strengthening youth agency to be agents of peace, either by making them part of the organisation (staff) on ongoing initiatives or as part of special youth-focused/ led programmes and projects. International and regional organisations are similarly adopting ‘youth programming’ by offering dialogue, mediation and conflict resolution trainings and ‘empowerment’ projects (on and with youth) all over the world. Search for Common Ground and Peace Direct are very much committed in this regard. Additionally, a number of forums of youth exchange programmes and platforms (e.g. UNOY, PATRIR, INEB, ASEAN Youth Network, CAYN, EU youth ambassadors) convene young people regionally and internationally to promote cross-national learning and exchange. Regional dialogue fora like YaLa–Young Leaders have been an energetic force in cultural diplomacy both online and offline for the Middle East working towards regional peace. Ukrainian youth are active part of Council of Europe’s regional dialogues on security and cooperation, but also country-specific discourse. Myanmar youth are also active in South/Southeast Asian forums on regional politics and peacebuilding.

Sustainable support requires time, patience and commitment. It also requires an approach that embodies non-dependency. The INGO/donor system of projects and trainings keep proving to be unsustainable. The model set by the Young Facilitators process in Abkhazia – Georgia – South Ossetia by Berghof Foundation is worth looking into. It sure took quite a number of years of slow and steady development, with a core group of young people gradually capacitating themselves as dialogue facilitators and mediators. The path was thorny, with challenges from society, local organisations and donors. The commitment of these young people, and their conviction to break out of protracted conflict were well recognised and supported, but for a great part with a mentor role. The Young Facilitators have been founding NGOs and engaging in their own projects in bilateral or trilateral teams that cut across conflict lines, with little to no foreign or third-party involvement. Eight years down the line, one sees the fruits of this long process on a larger societal canvas – shifted perspectives, willingness to have an honest dialogue with ‘the other’ and greater level of empathy across the three regions.

The peacebuilding field has come a long way. Remarkable achievements have been made over the decades. There is however a certain stagnation in the field with regard to assumptions, terminologies, conceptualising and theorising that define and influence our work. This is especially apparent in how the larger peacebuilding machinery operates worldwide – in its invention of buzzwords, following of ‘trends’, and in the sheer energy that needs to be spent on convincing that certain kind of peacebuilding work that people are *anyway* doing are actually great and need to be acknowledged and supported. Then with this support as well, we are very fond of training, empowering and building capacities of people – women, religious leaders, business people, rebels and most recently, youth. In doing so, we tend to neglect ‘humanising’ the issues that these people relate to. We put them into categories, decide what they should be doing for peace, and expect our ‘theories of change’ to play out fine.



We have been getting better at ‘context-specificity’, but there is much work to be done in ‘person-specificity’ and the humanisation of their issues. Humanising is about considering that the persons we are talking to and talking about have their personal and collective stories, which are intricately connected and related to the issues. The examples in this paper illustrate this to some extent. Humanising also means having the openness to understand this complex connection through the language and emotion that go into their narration of and reflection on the issues. This would help us understand their action, inaction and potential in peacebuilding, which is more important than our attribution of them. In an ever-changing world, our attribution, definition and conceptualisation anyway need to be dynamic, whereby we need to keep re-theorising and expanding our theories. This applies to all kinds of categories; this paper being about youth, we argue for approaching our understanding of youth through person-specificity. The hypotheses discussed in this paper along with the few examples, based on an exploration with limited scope, will certainly benefit from further explorations.

In the following, we share a set of reflections / questions as discussion starters for us in the peacebuilding field who are excited about United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 and want to engage with youth.

- We could lose the very essence of youth if our starting point of engagement is youth as just another category. Youth being a biographical phase that every human being will live through, there might be much value in nurturing the youth ‘space’, not as a special, isolated bubble, but in context of the whole of society.
- The ‘inclusion’ paradigm can be misleading and frustrating when it does not happen as expected. Instead a ‘whole of society’ approach of joint learning and action could be a more holistic approach – where everyone is encouraged to contribute with their own strength, passion, skill, vision, etc. regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and religion.
- Another danger with the inclusion logic is representation; broad social categories like ‘women’ or ‘youth’ shroud the natural differences that exist within such groups. Inclusion, no matter how well-designed and materialised, would mean exclusion of marginalised members of such social groups.
- Slogans like ‘give youth a voice’ and ‘let youth voice be heard’ can be seen as problematic, because they express a certain expectation (or even plea!) from someone. Does this not subtly disregard the very youth agency we so strongly believe in? Provocatively speaking, how about ‘make your voice heard’ and ‘be loud and clear’ – addressing young people instead, to mean ‘exercise your agency!’?
- Should our idea of ‘support’ really be about teaching, training and ‘empowering’ them? How about, instead, mutual learning about what we all do, what we think and what our potential and aspirations are, and thence explore possibilities of *mutual support*?
- As ‘preventive’ and ‘corrective’ measures, we engage in intensive work on ‘troublemaking’ and ‘at-risk’ youth. It may be much more valuable to nurture the youth space and facilitate a process where these young people can discover their place within this space where they can explore for themselves what their agency is and how they can contribute.
- Stories are powerful. Stories can be inspirational. Let us share more stories of young people who are already constructively exercising their agency and creating change in their contexts.
- Networking and facilitating networking – creating and stimulating systemic connections – can be the best form of support – among youth and within and across societies.



- “Young people are not the future, they are the present” – we adhere to this realisation. Sure, what they explore and learn today will influence how they will contribute to the world of tomorrow. By creating a future-bound trajectory for youth, we may fail to recognise their agency of today and how they do and can contribute today.

A flicker in the darkness

The violent armed conflict between Ukrainian military and pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine continues to cost lives and displace many thousands. In a city close to the contact line, people suffer from the pain and trauma of war and of losing their home and loved ones. They see their life as dark and hopeless. *AM*, a young woman has seen her childhood home destroyed, her parents living in misery. She has taken up the challenge of bringing back light of hope to her hometown. She knows it's a daunting task, and it'll take time.

AM invites her community to informal community gatherings, where she tries in the best of her ability to offer a warm and cosy atmosphere with some sweets and coffee (which, in these times of war and agony, is literally and figuratively luxurious and comforting). She invites peace-builders from around the globe (either physically or via skype)—who have the experience of a traumatic past (and present)—to share their story of struggling for peace and reclaiming hope in their communities. This sharing becomes a process of transforming pain and stimulating empathy.

It was not an easy process to begin with. With strong emotions, agony and anger, they have initially struggled to listen to each other, and often could not help blaming, denial and defensive trends. This, however, was something authentic, which they needed to go through, and was essential to figure out their personal and collective issues, limits and capacities for empathy. The space created by *AM* was safe to do that. The dialogue that followed

was thus also authentic – a collective process of dealing with the past and imagining a new future. A low-key, informal dialogue process, *AM*'s initiative stands out due to its organic growth and deep, transformative nature, among the plethora of dialogue initiatives in Ukraine.

Behind the scenes

Myanmar's current young generation has grown up in the midst of one of the longest civil wars in the world. Young people are desperate for an end to the violent conflict, however their voices tend to be ignored by elders in the hierarchical social system. The current peace process is a complex affair, given the multitude of positions and interests of the huge number of conflict stakeholders. A youth space in this process is yet to flourish.

A young man *SO* from Myanmar's Northern Shan State has his own ways of navigating through this system. He has always been interested in observing and understanding problems. He recalls his early attempts as a child at settling disputes on the playground between children fighting for the winning prize in traditional kite matches. Now 34 years young, *SO* is still very visible in his community, creating spaces of youth dialogue and trust-building. He is convinced that young people of this generation are in a position to end the decades of civil war. One of the co-founders and initiators of the Ethnic Youth Conference and a key leader and contact among youth, *SO* is often called upon to support community-level dispute



resolution. With both ‘natural’ qualities for mediation and having built credibility with the community and community leaders over several years, *SO* is able to facilitate ‘underground’ negotiations within and between the community, armed groups and government leaders. In this regard, *SO* has a skill in identifying the key actors who can effect change, building trust and persuading them to initiate a negotiation process.

Ensuring synchrony

Although quite afar from the eastern Ukrainian regions be-sieged with armed conflict, Dnipropetrovsk suffers from a heavy load of internally displaced people (IDP). While the communities have hosted them have so far generally been empathetic to their fellow countrymen, it has also been putting a strain on the social and economic conditions of the region. Many people say that the undeniable latent conflict may potentially be triggered to become violent.

How can this be prevented? How can communities in Dnipropetrovsk become resilient? While a lot of international and local NGOs are trying to create processes of dialogue, they usually fail to attract people. But why? According to *KR*, a young artist-activist, people are not ‘ready’ for conventional sitting-at-a-table kind of dialogue; not yet. What he therefore tries is *non-verbal* dialogue. He has trained himself in the art of drumming.

The ritual of a Drum Circle is a collective drumming endeavour that is indigenous to many cultures around the world. The reverberations of drumming pass through body and soul and connect people dialogically on a very different level. It is fun, energetic and spiritual. *KR* invites locals, IDPs, military personnel who otherwise do not interact. More of-ten than not, these people, having gone through the process, start interacting, eventually engaging in verbal dialogue on issues of the community.

Intergenerational dialogue

In most cases, intergenerational dialogue is initiated by young people, e.g. the Young Facilitators in the South Caucasus. The relationships between Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia have long been difficult. As an effort to transform the very strong apathetic or bitter sentiments that most of the older generation nurture, the Young Facilitators have taken the initiative to foster dialogue and empathy. They are part of an energetic group of people from all three regions who realise that all the negativity, however justified they may be, is not constructive for anyone.

In their ‘biographical salon’ process, life stories and war memories are shared in intergenerational groups. Older and younger people interact: older participants add their

experiences, younger participants (respectfully) challenge dominant narratives and share their views. They engage the whole of society: IDPs, students, ex-combatants, students, journalist, politicians, and lawyers in these dialogue activities – helping their own society to understand the other society, normalise relationships and stimulate forgiveness, by improving communication and building confidence and trust.

Interweaving threads of faith

Dialogue on and between different faiths is a passion of *M*, a young activist in Myanmar, who is Catholic, but looks Muslim / Hindu due to his descent. In 2012, when violent conflict erupted between Muslim and Buddhist communities, he became scared



for his and his family's life. He realised that it was crucial to address the fear and hatred that was spreading between people from different faiths. For that, M knew he had to reach out to the elders and religious leaders, which proved more difficult than he had imagined. He works closely with his friends in youth religious networks, and uses the connection to request meetings with elders of different faiths. They do not always want to meet, and it takes several attempts before a positive response comes. In these meetings, M tries to get to know them, and asks simple questions about their religion. Then they get curious about his religion, giving him the chance to bring the facets of different religions onto the table. This proved to be a roundabout but fruitful way for many elders to learn about other religions, since they normally did not take the initiative to meet the others.

Dialogue is creative

The Theatre for Dialogue initiative by a bunch of young enthusiasts was founded as a movement of solidarity with the 2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. They wanted, as an alternative to violence, to have dialogue through creative means of interactive theatre. They wanted to *humanise humanity* by endeavouring to create a culture of dialogue to balance the culture of monologue. The young activists engage in dialogue with communities to analyse their issues using the interactive theatre methodology. An artistic process captures the issues into plays, which form the background of interactive public performances where the actors and spectators are stimulated to engage dialogically to find solutions of their common challenges. The spectator becomes the 'spectator'. Different forms of dialogue are created with Forum Theatre, Playback Theatre and Documentary Theatre. Real issues of real people are enacted, empathised with and talked about.

Outreach and transparency

One key approach of *SO* (from Northern Shan State, Myanmar) that sustains his credibility, is remaining open and transparent with the community and everyone he deals with during negotiations. To this end, he additionally utilises social media and news outlets. His pictures from Facebook are used by media outlets, and his factual statements, based on observations, are also quoted by the press.

"It's simple: if they don't meet, they won't understand one another"

This is how the Union of Karenni State Youth (UKSY), a network of Karenni (Kayah) youth organisations in Myanmar, rationalised their initiatives of making encounters possible between elder leaders of ethnic armed groups and political parties who rarely met and spoke together. Through first assembling and building trust between different youth organisations, as well as youth wings of the armed groups and political parties, UKSY created a strong and inter-connected youth network. Then they worked to bring together the older generation of leaders. One creative method for dialogue is through the invitation of the different ethnic armed groups and political parties as panel-list speakers on thematic workshops. This simultaneously obliged the conflict parties to face one another and listen to one another's perspectives as panellists (which fosters understanding), as well as enabled the community to voice their perspectives and ask questions directly to the leaders. The impact of their initiative is evident in the fact that their state has had significantly reduced violent armed conflict since 2012. "Now, they rarely fight because we brought them together", explains UKSY.



In Myanmar's hotbed of communal conflict, young volunteers in Mandalay take up dialogue in action (diap Praxis) by creating community projects to engage community members from different faith in solving issues problems that affect the whole community, such as environmental

protection. Similarly, in Ukraine, young volunteers engage local people and IDPs in community development activities. This, despite not being verbally dialogic, addresses latent conflict between the groups and fosters an unspoken social contract of solidarity with 'the other'.

Influencing local governance

In Tunisia, local youth councils enjoy the trust of local government authorities and politicians who, for one, consult the council in matter of local budgets, where the young members are able to negotiate community interests. As of late, a national youth council is in the making... and the hopes are high.

Persistence pays off

In Abkhazia – Georgia – South Ossetia, young people have, through persistent but respectful challenging of age-old stereotypes, been much successful in breaking down walls between 'us and them'. A prime example is how in Abkhazia – a much more closed society than Georgia, their 'biographical salon' initiative of intergenerational dialogue on the memories of war is slowly gaining traction. Such

developments are allowing them a different kind of access to their communities, elders, and even state actors. This definitely makes further dialogue initiatives easier for young people to do.

Commitment promotes credibility

Deeply caring about the ongoing conflict, S from Myanmar's Northern Shan State often travels to communities displaced by the armed conflict to get into dialogue with them and assess the kind of support they need. Over time, this level of personal commitment builds his trust and credibility at the community level. Being active in the community gets him the attention of elders, who then responds to his wish to speak to them about issues of the community. Further, it keeps him well-prepared for negotiating the community's concerns with state and non-state armed groups.

