

Conclusion and recommendations

Making connections to end violence

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Accord 29 was developed in a time of global uncertainty with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic disrupting social, economic, and political life in countries around the world. Peace processes are not immune to the impact of the pandemic. If anything, peace processes are of a greater importance given the precarious health and social protection systems and deep inequalities in countries affected by violent conflict.

The current complexity of international relations and parlous state of global cooperation for peace and security presents a stark backdrop across the publication. This landscape is volatile, deeply affected by broad currents, including polarised geopolitics, protracted and relapsing violence, sustained presence of violent extremism, proxy wars, populism and resurgence of insular nationalism and xenophobia online and offline, and shrinking space for citizen advocacy and civil society mobilisation.

Early and pre-formal peacemaking is hard to pinpoint due to its secrecy, denial, discretion, and incrementalism. *Accord* contributors have emphasised the myriad of ways in which peace processes commence, falter, restart, collapse and lumber forward again. Shedding light on early and pre-formal processes is vital as they often set the logic and sequencing of future phases, including design of formal processes and their subsequent implementation.

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To complement insights presented in this *Accord* publication, a set of recommendations are provided. These are relevant to a range of actors involved in pioneering peace pathways whether they be involved in a process design and support role, a local or insider mediator, a diplomat wrangling with warring entities to pursue dialogue, a donor looking to provide assistance, or a member of a conflict party seeking insights into the experiences of others who have committed to dialogue and negotiated settlements. Four themes are profiled:

1. Context, actors and factors

- » Rethinking political analysis
- » Sensitivity to political dynamics and hidden peace pathways
- » Enabling civil society, nonviolent actors and movements

2. Complexity and peace pathways

- » Promoting peace ecosystems
- » Conflict party preparedness for dialogue

3. Responsive and accountable peace process support

- » Collaborative coordination
- » Flexible long-term funding
- » Joining up donors, diplomats and peace practitioners
- » Impact measurement and communication

4. Evolving practice

- » Elevating inclusion
- » Smart use of information technology and social media

Theme 1. Contexts, actors and factors

Rethinking political analysis

Improving understanding of the contexts in which peace interventions occur is of unprecedented importance. Necessarily demanding, high quality structured analysis must underpin all peace interventions. This means investing in rigorous research and periodically updating analysis to reflect rapidly evolving contexts.

Understanding relationships among institutions and actors – including existing and aspiring powerholders, and the less powerful – and how these have, and could, change is vital in the pre-formal, collapsed or stalled moments during peace processes. Three compatible approaches can help ensure that peace interventions are more focused, transformative, and adaptable: feminist and inclusive political analysis, digital analysis, and joint analysis.

Feminist and inclusive political analysis frameworks elucidate power relations and forms of authority. Current approaches to analysis of politics and conflict do not always capture complex vertical and horizontal relationships, nor the diversity of actors and forms of power. Despite important advances, too much mainstream analysis still focuses on established elites and male powerholders, excluding much larger constituencies, minority groups and diverse change agents or ‘brokers’. Analysis that is blind to gender and intersectionality does not provide sufficiently detailed understanding of the social and political landscape to inform meaningful change, leading to ill-prepared interventions that are less capable (and willing) of challenging oppressive structural power relations. Given that power is at the heart of conflict, uncovering its sources and manifestations is vital.

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Granular understanding of the *asymmetries between* and *differences within* conflict parties and communities is pivotal to identifying potential entry points and opportunities for dialogue, pathways to transform relationships and behaviour, and the support needs of peace actors. The analytical focus on conflict drivers is yet to be matched with similar attention to peace drivers and how these can be amplified. Inclusive analyses such as those posed in feminist and gender-sensitive frameworks can shed light on these knotty dynamics as well as point to opportunities that may be unnoticed when these dimensions are ignored.

Digital analysis formats are catalytic in enhancing scenario development and visualisation of less overt or established

forms of power. This brings risks, including some related to security, mis- and dis-information, and replication of bias and the digital divide. But effective digital analysis can help expand inclusion – enabling input of a wider range of insights, representation and perspectives, and engaging overlooked constituencies like young people. As discussed in more detail below, technology can also contribute to more inclusive peace programming.

Digitisation can support network analysis, to map complex relationships among communities and institutions in ways that can trace patterns of relational change over time, which can help interventions to be more adaptable. The scale of digital data available is placing increasing emphasis on systematisation and automation of analytical tasks, including using machine learning. Automated analysis is still in its infancy in the peace world, but combinations of human and machine analysis show promise to overcome associated ethical, cultural and practical challenges.

“ Joint analysis in the early phases of peace processes is challenging, but it is not impossible. ”

Finally, **joint analysis** can support collaboration and working to strengths, and is the backbone of strategic divisions of labour by third party actors. In an era of peace process support proliferation, this must be a primary objective. Joint analysis in the early phases of peace processes is challenging, but it is not impossible. This type of analysis can also build trusted and secure relationships among implementation partners working together in consortia and other networks. It can also help hone regional and thematic variations as some partners have more focused expertise in specific areas.

Sensitivity to political dynamics and hidden peace pathways **Context and conflict sensitivity** are not always carefully or consistently applied by peace support actors, and present particular challenges when such actors are looking to engage in unfamiliar contexts or launch new initiatives. While conflict sensitivity is frequently a donor requirement, it is often superficial. Early peace pathways are primarily local. Peace support organisations planning initiatives in a particular context must ensure that nascent or existing pathways are not stymied, undermined or broken. Yet conflict complexity demands much greater attention to detail, and the **Do No Harm principle and practice** remain as powerful today as when first introduced.

Increasing **recognition of insider and local mediation** in recent years and less reliance on Western mediation and liberal peace models are strong undercurrents in this *Accord*. Seeing and valuing local peace capacities in practice means adjusting frameworks of who powerholders are – or could be. For external actors it should guide whom we speak with to inform our analysis and interventions, on what terms and with what methods. The international community can ensure solid support to individuals and entities in such roles with reliable funding (including core and flexible funding) and on-demand advice. Some of the business models for peace support need rethinking. Too often, standard ways of working reinforce or create inequitable relationships where local entities are consigned to ‘enabling’ roles for international actors, weakening global commitments to making sustainable peace a reality.

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Enabling civil society, nonviolent actors and movements
Civil society are often the first local actors to support peace, before government officials, politicians, armed groups, and international actors. In many contexts this is fraught with risks, particularly as space for civil society mobilisation is increasingly being shut down. While the role of civil society in kick-starting peace is well established, enduring path dependencies of armed actors dictating peace trajectories too often take over. Peace support actors can be smarter about interrupting these trajectories through who we engage in political analysis and how we input into designing dialogue processes and mechanisms. Practical options also include affirming civil society ideas and proposals to conflict parties and soliciting their expertise as subject and process specialists; and fostering two-way connections between conflict parties and civil society as early as possible.

Theme 2. Complexity and peace pathways

Promoting peace ecosystems

Linear, orderly peace processes – from ‘getting to the table’, to reaching a deal and implementing it – are a relic of the past. While there is considerable focus on the non-linearity of political transitions, there is far less clarity on what to do in practice to facilitate these types of process. Understanding the **‘ecosystem’ of potential and actual spaces for dialogue** is leading to a reconceptualisation of both the end goal and the procedures of peace processes. This *Accord* has highlighted examples of peace process innovation that have blurred the boundaries between discrete phases:

moving away from mediation track ‘hierarchy’ in Kenya; the possibilities for localised agreements to form a web or bridge to larger change processes in Afghanistan; the potential for alternative inclusive governance spaces outside a formal process in north-east Syria; and young people opening up informal dialogue spaces ‘in’, ‘around’ and ‘outside’ the formal peace ‘room’ or negotiating table.

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Alternative, particularly sub-national levels of governance offer increasingly promising footholds for peace as part of this ecosystem approach. This is particularly important where conflicts are becoming more fragmented, as decision-makers closer to violence and affected communities can support dialogue possibilities. Regionalism also holds promise in the right circumstances, as highlighted in the Ogaden in Ethiopia, where neighbouring Kenya was well-placed to play a significant facilitation role.

Peace secretariats show significant potential to play much larger roles in supporting early dialogue at the national and sub-national level, helping to overcome confusion and navigate impasses before they appear. International actors can support peace secretariats to balance institutionalisation and agility to keep peace pathways open, including through side-by-side advisory support, provision of pools of flexible funding, exposure to evidence-informed policymaking, and continuous in-house learning opportunities at all levels of staffing.

Conflict party preparedness for dialogue

State and non-state conflict parties both have built-in barriers to engaging in peace dialogue that need to be overcome. Assumptions that only non-state parties need peace support are misplaced. State parties are seldom well placed or disposed for dialogue. For state parties, rejection of external peace support is often rooted in the fear of internationalisation, which is a perennial and potentially increasing problem. Wartime demonisation of the enemy is a major deterrent to moving towards dialogue and is especially hard to reverse when framed in counter-terrorism rhetoric and articulated in legal frameworks. Sharing cases where other governments have successfully shifted away from hard security responses to internal conflict can incentivise and inform governments marooned in stuck narrative and protracted violence.

Conflict parties are over-reliant on militarised political capital, and armed groups see disarmament as a loss of leverage. Ceasefires are also becoming harder to secure and sustain. Even when an armed group may be leaning towards finding a pathway into nonviolent politics, there are often many obstacles in their way – from proscription regimes and negative labelling, to lack of negotiation capacity. Counter-terrorism policies and laws increase risks for third parties to support armed groups' peaceful transition. Nevertheless, there are inspiring examples where peace process support organisations have played proactive roles in accompanying conflict parties to identify alternative, nonviolent sources of political capital, particularly enhancing their links and credibility with constituencies, communities or groups – as examples from the Basque Country and Ogeden in this *Accord* testify.

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Theme 3. Responsive and accountable peace process support

Collaborative coordination

The peace support community increasingly references the need for coordination. Here we emphasise **collaborative coordination**, moving beyond perfunctory technical exchange of information to identifying organisations' respective advantages, mandates and commitment to *strategic division of labour* towards effective process support. However, the impulses of many peace process support organisations are in fact 'counter-collaborative' – to 'go it alone', to see others as rivals in a culture of competitiveness, or to be involved in *all* issues. Reinvigorating our approaches to emphasise collaboration first and foremost is a critical step.

Identifying strengths and weaknesses is difficult but essential. Understanding when to 'pass the baton' to another entity or individual better placed to advance the next steps in a process is not an easy step to take. Playing to strengths appears to have worked relatively well in the International Contact Group for the Bangsamoro peace process in the Southern Philippines – a hybrid state-NGO group in which members alternated roles well according to their comparative advantage and stage of the process. The hybrid composition of the group added agility and opened diverse vantage points. But analysis in this *Accord* has shown that even peace organisations working in the same consortium can struggle to share sensitive information or align strategies.

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Flexible long-term funding

Authors in this publication have argued, from different standpoints, for greater flexibility in funding of peace process support, while recognising our collective responsibility to elevate accountability to conflict-affected people and to taxpayers in donor countries. Especially in the fluid and erratic early phases, peace process support can be intangible and hard to quantify – a challenge in an increasingly results-driven era. Donors and peace process investors need to be cognisant of this and put conflict sensitivity first by providing flexible, long-term funding that does not hinge on delivery of tangible results which may not be possible in political processes.

A blend of unearmarked and earmarked funding

can enable local, national and international peace organisations to operate with flexibility and longevity. Accompaniment of local peace influencers and agents or conflict parties looking to engage in dialogue is a long-standing peacemaking technique. This emphasises willingness to commit to being present over the long term to foster trust and knowledge, which are significantly undermined by stop-start and overly rigid efforts due to funding gaps and inflexibility. Funding uncertainty also makes it harder for peace support organisations to take the necessary risks to support early phase work, and such organisations often have to look to multiple donors to support comparatively small activities. Uncertainty means that peace process support organisations are chasing down funding opportunities rather than strategically engaging in processes.

Joining up donors, diplomats and peace practitioners

Initial and periodic exchanges between practitioners, diplomats and donors on respective priorities and constraints can reduce confusion about roles and expectations and increase joined up thinking. This is especially necessary when there is more donor interest in providing everyday peace process support. Hands-on donor involvement can have distinct advantages – such as identifying unexpected leverage points or enhancing donor interest in outcomes. But there can be potential confusion when donors are both financing activities and involved in delivering them. Distilling expectations bound up in funding relationships from the outset and appraising them periodically can assist with clarity.

Impact measurement and communication

The seemingly intangible outcomes of early peacemaking

– trust, relationships, connections and confidence – need to be articulated in much more nuanced ways, to improve peacemaking practice, but also to convince sceptical and anxious policymakers that peace investments are sound and can bear fruit. Early phases of peace processes are nebulous, opaque and prone to collapse, and can sit uncomfortably with increasingly prevalent ‘bad news’ media stories about overseas aid. Peace support organisations need to get better at defining and measuring impact and communicating progress to an array of actors to strengthen pro-peace constituencies as part of efforts to build greater support for investment in peace. These include politicians, non-traditional influencers such as businesspeople interested in social justice and more comfortable with risk-taking, media professionals keen to bring in different perspectives, as well as the public. Support organisations play a pivotal role here with future innovation in how outcomes are measured and communicated. A key challenge is to **identify short-term milestones to mark progress within long-term change**. This implies stronger links to political and stakeholder analysis and understanding what types of relationships need to be transformed and which influence points need to be engaged to achieve broader behavioural change. For example, identifying indicators to demonstrate that armed actors are dedicating time and resources to exploring peace possibilities, are adjusting their tactics and strategies accordingly, and are making space for dialogue.

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Theme 4. Evolving practice

Elevating inclusion

Early phase inclusion is critical to initiate positive path dependency. We now know that exclusive beginnings set the logic of future phases, making it increasingly difficult to inject inclusion later. This is important for principled and pragmatic reasons. Yet inclusion in peace processes means different things to different people. Inclusion is not a ‘settled norm’, as the continuing exclusion that is embedded in most

peace processes makes clear. It is perhaps best understood as a ‘rising norm’. In recent decades it has become more and more associated with representation and participation of half the population – women – and increasingly with overlooked identity groups such as young people, or religious and ethnic minorities. Many of the world’s most lethal conflicts are predicated on tensions over exclusions and identity issues as either a principal or secondary factor. Understanding and effectively addressing the underlying causes of such conflicts is central to durable and stable peace and can only be achieved if marginalised, minority and indigenous groups enjoy meaningful participation.

Gender inclusion requires intensified operationalisation to advance the ‘how’. This means shifting gears from the prevailing oversupply of advocacy on ‘why’ gender inclusion is important. Many decision makers, including mediators, are now much more concerned (and compelled) to act on gender inclusion, but still grapple with effective methods. Efforts to promote ‘inclusion within inclusion’ are critical too – this means long-standing leaders enacting succession plans and creating space for others, ensuring younger women can attain decision-making roles, and ‘walking the talk’ to hold true to the standards we demand of others.

Smart use of information technology and social media

Information technology and social media can support early peacemaking, helping contested, overlooked or remote communities access peace initiatives, and providing communication platforms that can clarify groups’ views and signal their receptivity to dialogue. There are of course risks, as social media can exacerbate hierarchies, propaganda and hate speech, as well as the dangers of hacking. But social media can also support early inclusion, opening up dialogue channels between conflict parties, their constituencies and mediators to build trust when conventional channels are often much more elitist and exclusive.

Peacemakers need to become more adept at using information technology and social media, for example for strategic facilitation and communications. Covid-induced learning in this area has brought a potentially irreversible step-change, which we should continue to invest in. Practically, peace process support teams need to include multilingual, technology-savvy, and diverse staff to augment digital approaches and manage unconscious bias in digital initiatives.