



Pathways to peace talks

Supporting early dialogue

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Cover photo: People from the Somali Regional State in Ethiopia gather at a conference organised by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in April 2019 to discuss the Asmara peace deal and the ONLF's transition from an armed group to a political party.
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Findings and recommendations

Below are findings and recommendations for how third party support for the early phases of peace processes can be more effective. These are drawn from a three-day joint analysis workshop convened by Conciliation Resources in February 2019. Workshop discussions are summarised in more detail subsequently.

Strengthening practice

Raise the bar on the quality of early inclusion:

Early peace dialogue is largely done in secret and is still largely dominated by men – mediators and armed actors. This sets up a low inclusion threshold for a peace process, shaping which issues matter enough to be negotiated as well as who negotiates them going forward. There are a range of mechanisms and modalities for greater societal representation across different phases of a peace process, but there are major gaps in knowledge about how to support more inclusive engagement early on. Workshop discussions identified three ways in which third parties can help to enhance the quality of early inclusion in peace processes in order to establish more positive path dependencies:

- **Invest in non-violent social-political movements and local peace capacity:** Especially in the early phases, peace processes risk feeding into negative path dependencies by privileging the participation of armed over unarmed actors. Although the boundary between violent and non-violent movements for change is not always clear-cut, support for the latter is comparatively weak or seen as too risky. In order to create more conducive environments in which sustainable peace initiatives can grow, there is a pressing need to invest in inclusive spaces for dialogue among non-violent groups, as well as groups who use violence to explore priorities and pathways for peaceful change.

- **Support civil society to prepare for peace talks:**

Civil society actors need assistance to prepare for early phases of peace processes, to gain the confidence and technical skills needed for negotiations. This can help to challenge the exclusivity of more conventional approaches to early dialogue. It also responds to a particular challenge of ‘ineffective’ or ‘shallow’ inclusion, whereby civil society individuals who have gained access to early dialogue through an inclusion mechanism and may have legitimacy, nevertheless remain marginalised due to their lack of experience of negotiation, and so cannot exert influence or input substantively into talks.

- **Enhance the quality of early inclusive political analysis:**

Setting up and sustaining effective peace interventions requires cogent political analysis – of sources of conflict, but also of peace. High-quality analysis that incorporates gender perspectives and conflict sensitivity is yet to be a core feature of peace process support, however. It is especially scarce early on, when prospects for peace may appear low, and interest and involvement in supporting peace initiatives is limited and focused on armed actors by and large. Analysis needs to examine gendered identities and power dynamics and should engage widely with local and external actors – including more difficult groups such as those with conservative and extremist views, and even proscribed actors. Local perspectives and insights are often missing from early interventions when external mediators are establishing their presence. Third party organisations can take a lead by sharing analysis methods, networks and innovations. Donors can also be influential by investing in preparatory analysis capabilities, and by requesting and supporting regularly updated inclusive political analysis, beyond the requirements of funding proposals.

Commit to early coordination through strategic division of labour: The exponential growth of mediation, facilitation and third party peace support has brought dynamism, but also coherence and coordination challenges. These are heightened in early dialogue, when third parties may be vying for influence and conflict parties are incentivised to 'shop' for a sympathetic mediator. Secrecy, discretion and funding competition also inhibit effective coordination. Poorly designed, sequenced or duplicative interventions once set up are hard to untangle. Creative ways are needed to establish coordinated division of labour in peace processes early on. The International Contact Group for the Bangsamoro peace process in the Southern Philippines provides an innovative hybrid model of states and INGOs working together, which, with creativity and will, is applicable and adaptable to informal, early peace work elsewhere. The Contact Group had a mandate to promote dialogue and coordinate inclusive process support, providing a vehicle for institutions to play to their strengths, support the facilitator of the peace talks, and reduce duplication of effort across both formal and informal mediation tracks.

Support armed groups to engage in peace dialogue: Armed groups are typically trained to fight, not to talk. Preparing for dialogue requires significant changes in orientation. Third parties can help armed groups in a number of ways, to gain knowledge and skills to prepare for dialogue; develop pro-peace strategies and infuse cultural shifts within different factions; consult with constituencies to broaden their legitimacy; and reach out to long-term adversaries as a stepping-stone to more structured engagement. Technical support can be essential to navigate specialist issues such as legal and technical requirements of constitutional and security sector reform, or the politics of international

diplomacy and funding mechanisms.

Engage with religious traditionalists and conservative movements: Peace practitioners increasingly acknowledge the role of religious leaders and communities in peacebuilding. But they tend to avoid those with views regarded as highly conservative or extremist. Engaging solely with 'friendly' religious actors in early phase peace practice separates the process from constituencies that may encourage and manipulate divisions to foment violence. Excluding such potential spoilers early on leaves the door open for them to undermine the process subsequently. A wider spectrum of outreach is necessary to be truly inclusive in order to navigate divergent worldviews; find common ground with radical leaders and conservative movements; and transform relationships among antagonistic constituencies.

Recognise the peace potential of social media and technology: Social media, 24-hour and 'fake' news can undermine nascent peace processes. But information technology can also play a positive role, for instance when members of armed groups like the Taliban have used it to promote pro-peace messages internally. Third parties should look beyond risks and explore how best to use social media, for example by supporting conflict parties to communicate in smarter ways with their constituencies.

Understand new mediation actors and their approaches: There is growing interest in mediation from non-Western states. China has now appointed a cohort of envoys deployed to conflict zones – from Syria to Venezuela and Myanmar. It also has a burgeoning think-tank community and major geopolitical ambitions, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Peace organisations need to build links with Chinese peacemaking efforts to better understand their perspectives and possibilities. Western-oriented peace communities are currently ill-prepared to engage with China and need to develop

the requisite networks, language skills and knowledge of Chinese policy.

Refining funding and support

Review counter-terrorism policies so they do not block early peace dialogue: Proscription of armed groups has made pre-negotiations harder, longer and more convoluted, with third parties increasingly wary of engaging with armed groups through fear of being too closely associated with them – and sanctioned as a result. Despite growing need, safe spaces for dialogue are more and more scarce while debates over which groups can and cannot be involved in peace initiatives are increasingly politicised. Counter-terrorism policies and laws need to be reviewed for conflict sensitivity so that they do not adversely affect efforts to engage armed groups and movements in early peace dialogue.

Flexible and reliable funding and support:

The peace and security funding landscape is changing. Increasing emphasis is being placed on multi-million-dollar trust funds and quick-impact deliverables, which is squeezing support for early peace dialogue. Unpredictable, unplanned or ‘un-logframe-able’ local work with conflict parties is essential to enabling peaceful change but is becoming harder to sustain. Discussions identified two areas where support for early dialogue can be strengthened:

- **Accompaniment and relationship-building:** Developing relationships with and among warring parties and communities embroiled in violent conflict is essential to build momentum for peace. Third parties can play a vital role accompanying parties as well as communities and preparing them to reach out to adversaries as a stepping-stone to more structured engagement. But facilitating relationship-building is inherently incremental, unpredictable, painstaking and time-consuming. It requires adaptable approaches and funding to prise open, seize and maximise windows of peacemaking opportunity. Information exchange on conflict-sensitive approaches and flexible funding among donors, conflict parties

and third party organisations can help build higher-impact peace support for early dialogue and emergent peace processes.

- **Rethink timeframes and funding models to support local peace organisations:** Funding models are increasingly risk-averse and geared towards multiple and fast deliverables over short timeframes. International funding processes often bring pre- and externally-determined framing and set priorities, which can contradict local interests, capacities and strategies. Supporting peaceful change requires long-term horizons, possibly over many years. Assistance for local actors committed to tackling structural violence does not necessarily imply big grants but does need to be predictable and consistent.

About the report

How peace initiatives get off the ground sustainably and inclusively is a vital but comparatively uncharted challenge for effective peace support. In February 2019 Conciliation Resources convened a three-day dialogue among a range of people with hands-on experience of the early phases of peace talks and peacebuilding processes from different regions and perspectives. This *Accord Spotlight* publication distils the discussion.

Conciliation Resources has long explored the elusive 'ingredients' that combine to establish peace processes – or to revive processes that have got stuck or have reverted to violence. How to support pathways to peace talks through meaningful dialogue and respectful relationships lies at the heart of Conciliation Resources' peace practice in conflict-affected contexts such as Bougainville, Colombia, Kashmir, the Horn of Africa, the Caucasus, the Philippines and Nigeria.

The meeting drew together individuals living or working in areas where discreet, sometimes clandestine and often protracted efforts had culminated in formal peace negotiations or were still striving to do so. All participants had experience of multi-track peace processes – from within political movements, former armed groups, community-based organisations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and regional and multilateral organisations, as well as governments.

Participants reflected on challenges, good and poor practice, and trends associated with the early phases of peace processes – occurring before formal mechanisms such as negotiations begin and sometimes decades long. This was an opportunity to self-reflect and ask each other: What are the values that underpin this work? What policies, trends and concerns affect practitioners' work today? What approaches have a higher chance of achieving positive progress? Are critiques of conventional approaches matched by better alternatives? The perspectives of people with many years' experience were shared with younger colleagues bringing fresh angles and ideas to familiar challenges.

The analysis is primarily aimed at the third party peace support community. We hope others with an interest in initiating peace processes as well as researchers will also find it valuable. In early 2020, Conciliation Resources will produce a long-format *Accord* publication on this theme, providing an opportunity to explore concerns and good practice in more detail.

PART 1: Status of early peace practice

“Peace processes are now like giving hope to someone with a terminal illness because they rarely address structural issues.”

The 2019 discussion organised by Conciliation Resources focused on how early, opaque phases of building peace are framed and supported, and how belligerents and war-affected communities engage with them.

Efforts in the early phases include a mix of formal and informal contact and explorations, designed to take the temperature of the warring parties' motivations, test out ideas and options, and create spaces and pathways that previously may have seemed impossible. These pathways can arise from situational relationships – such as from respected and well-connected individuals from the conflict context, who may have some level of partiality; or from more deliberate outreach by third party mediation and facilitation actors.¹ Vicenç Fisas (2015) has offered a cascading typology to describe these elements:

- Informal indirect contact/formal indirect contact
- Informal direct contact/formal direct contact
- Informal explorations/formal explorations
- Informal dialogue/formal dialogue
- Formal negotiations (formal process)

The focus of this *Spotlight* is on the *informal* elements as they progress into a formal process – while recognising that the distinction between formal and informal dialogue and the different phases of peace processes is not always clear.

The promotion of dialogue and negotiated solutions to prevent and end violent conflict hinges on nurturing a certain level of mutual trust. This takes time and is not necessarily suited to standard funding timeframes or instruments.

Efforts to support movement towards dialogue are often marked by ongoing violence or the threat of its recurrence. This creates a paradoxical situation that simultaneously erodes trust and increases fear but can also catalyse action towards peace. Typically, communication back channels exist in some form or another, even in the most intractable violent conflicts. Throughout the war in Northern Ireland and at the height of the apartheid era in South Africa, for example, relationships were tested and forged, leading to more established contact and discussions. Third parties are in the business of being proximate and present for conflict actors, supporting their willingness to 'test the water' on dialogue [see box on page 8].

Participants had mixed feelings about the state of peacemaking today. They acknowledged the relevance of formal, 'Track 1' processes, but also that these are increasingly captured by power politics and constrained by weak global cooperation in forums such as the UN Security Council, while normative standards on gender equality and human rights are increasingly contested.

Participants identified hope and inspiration 'below' Track 1, and a 'new energy' at the local and sub-national level for building alternative paths to peace and finding innovative solutions to intractable situations. Disillusion is inspiring greater clarity of purpose in some quarters, such as fresh thinking about women's leadership – despite the feeling that the industry that has built up around the Women Peace and Security agenda has veered far from its transformative origins.² Intersectionality, youth inclusion and rethinking democracy were also identified as invigorated areas of thought and practice, while recent 'successes' in the Philippines, Ethiopia (Ogaden) and Colombia provided hope and optimism about what is possible through persistence and proactive presence.

1. Haspeslagh, Sophie and Zahbia Yousuf. *Local engagement with armed groups: in the midst of violence* [London: Conciliation Resources, May 2015]

2. For an overview of these debates and challenges see: UN Women. *Women's meaningful participation in negotiating peace and the implementation of peace agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting* [New York: 2018]

Core elements of early peace practice

Accompaniment – This entails support to actors involved in or affected by violent conflict including staying connected over long periods of time. As one participant reflected, it ‘involves showing up, checking in your ego, and relentless optimism’. This can comprise brokering and facilitating dialogue opportunities, being a ‘critical friend’ and not shying away from posing difficult questions or propositions, providing access to knowledge and skills development, or thinking through problems and dilemmas with comparative insights from other peace processes.

Accompaniment inherently involves ‘navigating political roundabouts’, as articulated by another practitioner, and identifying the points where paths can and need to converge. ‘Paths’ might include first steps by and between conflict parties to ‘recognise’ each other, or setting up discreet communication channels or funding streams to enable rapid response to engagement opportunities. A key challenge noted was maintaining both integrity and dynamism across the paths. Increasingly, long-term accompaniment is a ‘hard sell’ to donors because it is not amenable to typical project cycles or parameters.

Practice Example 1: Perspectives from former armed group members

A participant associated with a former armed group reflected on the group’s decision to change the focus of their dialogue with government counterparts to the *consequences* of conflict instead of the *causes*, following advice from a third party. The objective was to move beyond position statements. Third party support was not intended to change the positions of the armed group, but rather to introduce alternative approaches to thinking about ways goals could be achieved.

Building relationships – The promotion of dialogue and negotiation-based approaches hinges on nurturing at least working levels of mutual trust and respect. This takes time and represents a major feature of the work of third parties. Joint or collective problem-solving workshops, exposure tours and visits, and proximity encounters (such as meals and discussions) on the margins of larger events and conferences can foster such connections.

Finding and expanding windows of opportunity – Violence, and the willingness to renounce it, can shift quickly, turning on unexpected events such as disasters – for example the catalytic effect of the 2004 tsunami in restarting the Aceh peace process – or seismic political events such as a change in government. Third parties need to be ready to seize these moments and work with belligerents to take the next step towards negotiated solutions, as events can also be used to close space for peaceful change. The ability to seize opportunities positively is often contingent on previous efforts to engage conflict parties and affected communities to create conditions for peace and cooperation across conflict lines.

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Navigating asymmetry – Third party organisations contend with asymmetry between negotiating parties such as armed groups, non-violent movements, militaries and governments. As it is impossible to ‘level the playing field’, in preparing for formal dialogue many organisations work instead to create fairer and more effective, representative and, where possible, inclusive processes.

This type of work is frequently weighted towards armed groups who lack the resources of states. But, as mentioned above, unarmed civil society actors also need assistance to prepare for dialogue. This particularly includes women, who face additional serious hurdles to their ability to meaningfully participate including sexism, restrictions on movement, logistical challenges and responsibilities such as childcare. In practical terms, this entails providing support to better understand negotiating styles, strategies and techniques, as well as policy topics, such as resource and power-sharing, constitutions, security reform and inclusion.

Practice Example 2: Ogaden National Liberation Front

For six years, Conciliation Resources, through the invitation of the Kenyan government’s facilitation team, accompanied the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) through a nascent peace dialogue with the Ethiopian government. As the dialogue evolved gradually from 2012, the process of being present, listening and developing relationships meant that Conciliation Resources could provide ‘space’ and technical support for critical reflection on contentious issues such as the constitution and self-determination.

When the window of opportunity for rapid change appeared alongside new leadership in Ethiopia in April-May 2018, the ONLF and other parties were better prepared to seize it positively, leading to a peace declaration that October. The investment of time, technical assistance and building capital in relationships meant that the ONLF were more open to questions and counterviews, which were essential for more constructive engagement in the process. The Ogaden case study on pages 11-12 provides more detail.

Promoting dialogue – This entails calculating the pros and cons of engaging in dialogue, and critically thinking with state and non-state belligerents and communities about the risks and opportunities involved. Risks include sanctions in relation to proscribed armed groups; removal of tacit approval to engage with armed groups through changes of government; protracted ceasefires and conflict management instead of addressing core grievances; and encroachment by the state or other armed actors in contested areas during peace talks.

Opportunities include breaking free of binary conflict-related dynamics and misperceptions; an end to or reduction of violence and insecurity; access to development assistance; and engagement in formal politics. Designing, facilitating and organising dialogue often pivots on years of work to help reframe perceptions of the ‘other’, determine underlying grievances, move beyond position statements to find common ground, and gauge the most opportune times (and places) to talk.

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Practice Example 3: Knowledge transfer between peace initiatives

Sharing experiences between individuals from Northern Ireland and the African National Congress in South Africa led to awareness of the concept of 'parity of esteem'. This notion aims to promote a level of respect and equality in negotiations without formal declarations of status equality. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement essentially declared that there could be no differential treatment among the communities of Northern Ireland.³ The Philippines peace process between the Moro movement and the Philippines government subsequently drew on this concept over successive decades.

Promoting inclusion – It is increasingly understood that getting beyond the 'men-with-guns are the men-at-the-table' logic to ensure consideration of a broader pool of ideas, lived experiences and perspectives improves the quality of peace processes. This is discussed in more detail in Part 3, because it is now such a significant focus of third party efforts.

Improving communications, documentation and analysis – Third parties can help with documentation to promote better internal and external communication and coherence in a dialogue process, including translating materials into relevant languages. Some armed groups rely on verbal transmission of knowledge and ideas because either they do not have written traditions, or they have experienced repression or censorship from state authorities. Third parties can also advise on strategic communications by armed groups with – and to – communities they represent. These are two different processes which can require considerable support if armed groups are not used to engaging with communities or regularly communicating to them about their actions.

Communications support can also be required from armed groups to navigate ways to publicly communicate with negotiating counterparts and the media. Much more is required to encourage popular support for peace talks. Many conflict parties have persistent internal communication challenges. Advances in technology can enable innovations such as 'virtual good offices' building on the tradition of credible, trusted or impartial interlocutors convening conflict parties.

Supplying logistical support – Getting people from A to B in order to talk is a vital – and often highly challenging – task in the early phases of peace processes, when armed groups may be under proscription regimes or otherwise limited in their movements. It requires effort and diplomacy to convene dialogue, which has become an art in and of itself in the era of proscription, tightening of borders, Interpol, terrorist and sanctions lists, and visa controls.

3. For lived experience of 'parity of esteem', see this perspective from Emma DeSouza. *The Citizenship Rights of the Good Friday Agreement – Real or Imagined?* Slugger O'Toole Blog. Accessed 20 March 2019: <https://sluggerotoole.com/2019/03/19/the-citizenship-rights-of-the-good-friday-agreement-real-or-imagined/>

CASE STUDY Accompaniment in the Ogaden peace process

In early 2012 Conciliation Resources was invited by the Kenyan government to provide technical support to the peace talks process between the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, had asked the then Kenyan President, Mwai Kibaki, to facilitate peace negotiations with the leadership of the ONLF in 2011. Both the ONLF and the Ethiopians saw Kenya as a neutral interlocutor: it has a defence pact with Ethiopia and hosts a large number of Somali/Ogaden refugees from the Ogaden region, including ONLF leaders. President Kibaki appointed a four-member facilitation team led by the then Defence Minister, Mohamed Yusuf Haji.

Formal talks began in September 2012. In an initial round of dialogue, the two parties were able to settle on a framework agreement (declaration of principles) and a four-point agenda to guide the formal talks process: political; security; human rights and humanitarian concerns; and wealth sharing and economic issues.

The talks have suffered from a lack of trust and have faced many hurdles, delays and misunderstandings, including the death of its architect, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, in August 2012, an impasse over modalities, the kidnapping of ONLF senior officials (one of whom was a member of the negotiation team), and elections in Kenya that affected the facilitation team. In addition, the contrasting composition of the two delegations set the stage for a clash of negotiation styles between: the exclusively military/security Ethiopian government delegation, headed by the then Defence Minister – a civilian, Siraj Fegessa; and the ONLF delegation, which, with the exception of one delegate, was drawn completely from the diaspora. In August 2018, following a significant change of leadership in Ethiopia which oversaw a raft of reforms including delisting of the ONLF and other armed groups, the ONLF declared a unilateral ceasefire and both sides agreed to further dialogue to resolve core grievances. The two parties subsequently signed a peace declaration in Asmara, Eritrea in October 2018. ONLF leaders have since returned to the Somali Regional State (Ogaden) in Ethiopia and are currently in the process of transforming the group into a political party ahead of 2020 elections.

Conciliation Resources drew on lessons from experience in the Philippines (Mindanao) and other peace processes to inform its support for the Ogaden peace talks, such as on the value of inclusive peace and dialogue promotion, including wider community engagement. Conciliation Resources' efforts to facilitate a negotiated outcome followed several pathways. Examples include:

Support to the Kenyan facilitators: At the request of the Kenyan facilitation team, Conciliation Resources and the Swiss and UK governments provided training and advice and helped put in place a secretariat to support the peace process, including a dedicated stand-by team of technical specialists. Conciliation Resources assembled a team of national and international experts to coach and advise the Kenyan team with mediation skills, and knowledge and experience of Ogaden, Ethiopia and wider Horn of Africa. A separate team of experts were engaged to support the ONLF in order to avoid potential conflict of interest. The sensitivity of the Ethiopian government to internationalisation of what they saw as an internal conflict meant that the Kenyan team had to sit outside the government of Kenya's institutional framework. A team of Kenyan officials from key line ministries – foreign affairs, defence, interior and office of the president – attended the talks as observers. The Kenyan team were sometimes unable to give their full and undivided attention to their facilitation roles as their 'day jobs' as members of parliament and senior government officials were equally demanding.

Accompaniment of the ONLF: Conciliation Resources organised various events to share knowledge and experience. Workshops were convened with the ONLF leadership on negotiating security arrangements and exploring options for ceasefire and cessation of hostilities, which helped the group to refine key issues as part of their negotiation strategy on security. Negotiation training was also provided. The ONLF team were exposed to the 'vocabulary' of negotiation including how to articulate interests and reframe firm positions. With technical support and encouragement from Conciliation Resources and the Swiss government, the ONLF leadership were able to articulate a constructive position in response to the demand from the Ethiopian government to accept that the negotiations occur within the framework of the 1994 constitution.

Although the Ethiopian constitution in theory includes the right to secession, refusal to negotiate within the parameters of the constitution had been a long-standing red line for the ONLF. Two years were spent trying to resolve the impasse over this symbolic issue. During this time Conciliation Resources explored many paths to try to break the deadlock. Based on the request of the ONLF, Conciliation Resources commissioned an expert legal opinion, which guided the ONLF leadership in their deliberations on the constitution, resulting in a breakthrough on this issue and enabling the talks to press ahead.

Engaging Ogaden communities and diaspora:

Conciliation Resources supported outreach to diaspora communities from the Somali region of Ethiopia in the US, UK and Kenya, convening dedicated meetings in cities with large diaspora and refugee communities to enable discussions between ONLF leaders and diaspora, and so supporting a two-way flow of views and perspectives and promoting inclusion. Conciliation Resources reached out to communities where the ONLF negotiation team could not due to security concerns, such as the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. The community

outreach work helped in building some degree of collective interest and confidence in supporting the peace talks, evidenced by positive media reports in relevant diaspora and Horn of Africa news outlets. The ONLF also organised consultation meetings following this in various locations (in Nairobi, Berlin, San Diego and Johannesburg).

Logistics and diplomatic support: Conciliation Resources provided logistical support to help get the ONLF delegation to and from talks in Nairobi. The ONLF was a proscribed group in Ethiopia until August 2018, when the ban was lifted as part of a raft of reforms initiated by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, which presented complications in Conciliation Resources supporting ONLF engagement in peace dialogue. Diplomatic support was also mobilised for this long-running conflict, which was not at the forefront of attention internationally or even within the region. Along with the Kenyan facilitation team, Conciliation Resources also met with the representatives of Norway, the US, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and South Africa to raise diplomatic and financial support for the peace process.



Delegations from the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front celebrate the signature of a peace agreement between the parties in Asmara, Eritrea, October 2018. © Conciliation Resources

PART 2: Trends and challenges

Participants identified some key contemporary trends and challenges affecting early peacemaking efforts. Increasing intensity, complexity and the protracted nature of violent conflict, combined with powerful shifts in international relations and the policy outlook of major powers, are making peace processes messier and more volatile. More established mediation actors are witnessing the entry of new actors in the global peacemaking space, such as China and Qatar.

The funding landscape to provide support for early dialogue efforts is becoming more challenging due to a combination of factors: short and predetermined project cycles; lack of understanding of the specific demands of early peace dialogue; failure to develop appropriate ways to measure progress; and blurring of roles between funders and implementers of peace support interventions. Overburdening national and local organisations with ‘stepping stone’ projects designed to give donors and INGOs entrée into the context while relegating local organisations into secondary support roles is a related problem. Further, those engaging with armed groups face increasing restrictions, deriving from demonisation of armed groups and counter-terrorism laws and policies, as well as increased preparedness to pursue military victory.

At the same time there has been growth in the peace industry in relation both to the amount of evidence, analysis and data on effective peace process support, and to the number of peacebuilding organisations. While such expansion is broadly positive, it also necessitates a reassessment of the values guiding the peace community and the objectives of peace practice more broadly – to develop a common vision for ‘transformative peace’.

Participants identified shifts in the funding landscape along with the increasing numbers of external actors as exacerbating territorial rather than joined-up approaches. Such territorialism is characterised by poor information sharing, discordant understandings of conflict dynamics, and a failure to strategically divide work according to core competencies and leverage.

“*Third parties can play a vital role in enabling pathways to peacebuilding processes. They can include religious organisations or leaders, civil society organisations, INGOs, former diplomats and government officials.*”

Coordination and coherence

Third parties can play a vital role in enabling pathways to peacebuilding processes. They can include religious organisations or leaders, civil society organisations, INGOs, former diplomats and government officials. They can also include states such as Norway or Switzerland with mediation support teams, which can be more acceptable as brokers than ‘stronger’ states attempting ‘power mediation’ as they do not look to exert significant political leverage and so can be perceived as more impartial. The UN and many regional organisations also have mediation support units which play important roles in supporting dialogue and conflict prevention particularly – but not limited to – between states.

In the past 10-15 years, actors operating in mediation and facilitation spaces have proliferated. This surge has many positive elements – more ideas and energy for nonviolent conflict resolution and interest in analysis and guidance. Conversely, it has contributed to duplication and poor coordination that sometimes results in mediator ‘shopping’ by conflict parties, confusion about process options and – perhaps worst of all – significant accountability failures to the most important but least-empowered stakeholders: the civilian victims of armed conflict.

There has been a concomitant upsurge in efforts to professionalise mediation. A plethora of training opportunities now exist alongside an emphasis on teamwork, subject specialists and greater diversity in mediation and facilitation support teams. This has challenged the conventional ‘smoky-rooms’ approach favoured

by, and beneficial to, a predominantly male and middle-aged class of mediators who are often poorly attuned to gendered power dynamics between women and men and their own role in perpetuating these. This approach carries over from early phases into more established negotiations and processes, setting up negative or exclusive path dependencies.

Other trends include the entry of new mediation actors into peacemaking. For example, participants agreed that China's role is a 'blind spot' for the predominantly Western-oriented peacemaking community, which is poorly equipped with language skills, knowledge and networks to engage with Chinese interests. China's realist approach and influence are pervasive and entwined with major nation-building exercises, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, infrastructure projects and development loans. These interventions often occur in contexts with fragmented and exclusionary governance arrangements. China has a range of envoys (all male) whom they deploy to regions and continents (eg Asia, the Middle East

and Africa) and conflicts (eg Venezuela, Syria and Myanmar).⁴ Other actors, such as Qatar, are becoming more prominent. Qatar, whose vision is of becoming the 'Switzerland of the Middle East', is currently hosting one of the Taliban offices; this could contribute an influential and supportive role to the Afghanistan 2019+ negotiation process.⁵

Analysis

Participants highlighted the importance of context or political analysis of peace and conflict drivers to support effective early dialogue. Quality of analysis suffers from homogeneity of both analysts and perspectives. Third parties can help to improve the quality, frequency, methods and purpose of analysis. Who is involved in generating such analysis is evolving, with one participant remarking that 'for a long time, analysis was conducted from the outside [and] that is changing; there is more indigenous conflict analysis'. There is a challenge to better connect local, national and international political analysis.

Practice Example 4: International Contact Group, Bangsamoro, Southern Philippines

Support to peacemaking processes is often strengthened by contact or 'friends' groups. The International Contact Group (ICG) for the Bangsamoro peace process in the Southern Philippines provides an example of a collective process support effort that has relevance for informal phases as well. The ICG comprises the governments of Japan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Kingdom; and non-governmental entities – the Muhammadiyah, The Asia Foundation, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and Conciliation Resources.

This hybrid group was formed in 2009 and was the first of its kind to include state and non-state actors. In the early phases of the process, one of the armed groups was wary of being a non-state group in a process dominated by states, and so supported the hybrid arrangement. In addition to promoting coordination among key peace process support actors, the ICG observed the negotiations and was occasionally called on to provide input to the talks. Furthermore, members of the ICG individually and collectively helped bridge a link between the Malaysian facilitator and the parties by occasionally undertaking shuttle diplomacy to address deadlocks. The ICG provides a good example of the types of synergies among international, national and local actors urged in the Sustaining Peace agenda spearheaded by Security Council Resolution 2282 in 2016.⁶

4. China now has envoys for the Middle East (Wang Shijie), Africa (Xu Jinghu), Korean Peninsula (Wu Dawei), Asia (Sun Guoxiang), Syria (Xie Xiaoyan), Afghanistan (Deng Xijun), Venezuela (Xi Jinping), and to the G20 (Wang Xiaolong). For the first time the UN has appointed a Chinese official to an envoy role (Xia Huang, Special Envoy for the Great Lakes) in early 2019. Source: Jason Tower, Myanmar Country Director, PeaceNexus, March 2019, email correspondence with Cate Buchanan.
5. For further detail, see: Semple, Michael. 'Internationalisation and inclusiveness in Afghan peace processes', in *Navigating inclusion in peace processes*, Accord No. 28 [London: Conciliation Resources: 2019]
6. Ponzio, Richard. 'The UN's new "Sustaining Peace" Agenda: A Policy Breakthrough in the Making', in *Stimson Center Spotlight* [23 February 2018]: <https://www.stimson.org/content/un-new-sustaining-peace-agenda-policy-breakthrough-making>

It was noted that conflict analysis tends to focus more on conflict drivers than on peace drivers, factors and actors, whereas equal weight needs to be given to both. Third parties undertake analysis both to meet the requirements of funding proposals and to inform mediation and facilitation strategies. However, common struggles include: accessing good quality participatory analysis in the early phases of peace processes to bring local insights and perspectives into designing and planning peace interventions; and maintaining

the analysis and diversifying methodologies to be more inclusive, as the day-to-day realities of programming frequently preclude capacity to update or reassess analysis. Conflict and risk analysis have also become conflated in some quarters, especially in today's increasingly risk-averse climate. Diversification of methods to generate more participatory and multi-stakeholder analysis are being experimented with. [See Practice Example 5 on collective conflict analysis in Somalia below.]

Practice Example 5: Collective conflict analysis in Somalia

In early 2016 the then UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Somalia, Michael Keating, sought to find ways to tackle the conflict using an innovative conflict analysis methodology. Using the convening power of the UN, Keating and colleagues developed an initiative hosted by the UN designed to tap into the expertise and insights of Somali actors from within the country and diaspora, alongside contributions from international practitioners, analysts and experts.

The initiative aimed for analytical rigour and policy impact, including feeding into the development of a national framework for reconciliation through the provision of an evidence-informed edited collection, *War and Peace in Somalia: National grievances, local conflict and Al-Shabaab*. Among the consequences of this initiative are the many interactions made by Somalis across insider/outsider-diaspora dynamics, leading to a blossoming of connections and synergies, including with international actors.



The skyline beyond the northern suburbs of Mogadishu is seen through a bullet hole in the window of a hotel in Yaaqshiid District after African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces pushed Al Shabaab militants beyond the city's northern fringes in 2014. UN Photo/Stuart Price CC BY-NC-ND

The book comprises 44 chapters produced by practitioners and analysts exploring impunity, illegitimacy, exclusion, types and forms of national dialogue, approaches to peacemaking and reconciliation, gender dynamics and relations, Al-Shabaab formation and evolution, and more. Funded by the Norwegian government, the book is available in English, with each chapter translated into Somali and available on request from the UN Mission in Somalia.⁷

Security and logistics inhibited frequent face-to-face meetings. Hence there was a reliance on virtual discussions and convening of those based in Mogadishu. All authors were brought together in late 2017 to Mogadishu for several days to discuss and debate perspectives. They were tasked with coming prepared with policy recommendations and readiness to argue their relevance as part of ensuring suggestions were targeted and feasible.

Continuity between SRSGs was secured when the next SRSG, Nicholas (Fink) Haysom, who took up the post in October 2018, signalled his willingness to continue the initiative and extend the process. His tenure was swiftly cut short, however, when he was declared *persona non grata* by the government regarding an unrelated matter.⁸ Lessons learned include: the value of dedicated capacity to get the initiative off the ground and importance of maintaining momentum through curated 'communities of practice' for such initiatives to reach their potential; as well as the need to manage the balance between engaging national authorities as partners so as to be of maximum value to them, while retaining the independence and integrity of the initiative. Continuity between senior leadership is also vital, specifically between SRSGs, as is moving at the pace of local actors to ensure their perspectives are front and centre. This may require adjustments to Western timeframes and imperatives.

This collective initiative holds great promise for similar undertakings in war-affected contexts, bringing in practitioners and analysts from various levels of society and politics in iterative and purposeful exchange and generation of shared analysis.

Communications

Social media and communications in peace processes were a recurring theme throughout the meeting. Participants observed how technology can concurrently undermine and enhance faith in peace processes, and peace support actors are increasingly focusing on this. More guidance will be available on this issue in 2019–20.⁹ The group noted that the power of traditional media (television and radio) is still highly relevant in many parts of the world in addition to online content.

Confidence-building measures

Third parties spend considerable time finding ways to build trust between conflict parties and between communities and to develop their commitment to engage in negotiated settlements. Confidence-building measures (CBMs) are often formally incorporated in ceasefires or preliminary agreements, designed to inspire preparedness to tackle more complex concerns. Primarily they are aimed at defusing tensions, building rapport and encouraging perseverance. Participants commented on the need for clarity about whose confidence is being built, why and about what, while warning the term can be patronising for conflict parties.

7. Keating, Michael and Matt Waldman. *War and Peace in Somalia: National Grievances, Local Conflict and Al-Shabaab* [London: Hurst Publishers, 2018]

8. Sengupta, Kim 'Somalia embroiled in diplomatic row after expelling UN envoy over accusations of interference', *The Independent* [10 January 2019]: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/somalia-un-envoy-nicholas-haysom-expelled-al-shabaab-mogadishu-a8719941.html>

9. In 2018 the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, swisspeace, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and Diplo Foundation launched the Cyber Mediation Initiative. See also: Lanz, David and Ahmed Eleiba. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Social Media and Peace Mediation* [Bern: swisspeace, 2018]



Houthi fighters following their release as part of a prisoner swap with the Saudi-backed Yemeni government on 26 May 2019. A larger-scale prisoner swap, intended as a confidence-building measure, is currently being considered by the conflict parties.
© Xinhua / Alamy Stock Photo

CBMs are most commonly associated with short-term gains, for example humanitarian aid corridors. But they can also support longer-term change when applied carefully, such as police reform to build trust between conflict parties, but also with war-weary populations.¹⁰ CBMs can have symbolic effects, such as in Northern Ireland where the granting of US visas to members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) sent a powerful, positive signal about the viability of the peace process, or when during the 1994 ceasefire British soldiers exchanged helmets for soft caps alongside the dismantling of British Army watchtowers at the Irish border.

The inherent relevance and impact of CBMs was challenged, however, with some participants stressing that poorly designed CBMs can eclipse the process they are designed to support. Some participants described CBMs as superficial; others referred to them as ‘confidence reducing measures’ that can damage bargaining processes, or as being ‘so context-specific they cannot be generalised’. Notwithstanding the risks, there was consensus that precisely framed CBMs can help support conflict transformation.

10. For examples see: International Peace Institute. *From Confidence Tricks to Confidence Building: Resolving Conflict in the OSCE Area* [New York: 2011]; Maiese, Michelle. ‘Confidence Building Measures’, in Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess [eds.] *Beyond Intractability* [Boulder: Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, September 2003]

Emotive issues are hard to deal with in peace processes and subtle gestures can be powerful, such as handshakes, shared meals, recognition of cultural values, and random acts of kindness. CBMs can also help parties to signal gains to their constituencies. The group stressed the fine balance that needs to be met when crafting CBMs because they can rapidly foster a 'divisive culture' between parties. Armed groups can be pressed to come up with concessions on an equal basis with governments and militaries but lack comparable resources to provide them. Governments can manipulate CBMs and act too quickly, depriving armed groups of 'delivering' on measures benefitting their communities.¹¹ One participant noted that CBMs can very quickly become another form of elite bargaining, setting the tone for later phases.

Peace support organisations can offer a role in probing and distilling the concept and practice, unpacking the differences between measures and gestures, and sharing examples of good practice in the early phases of peace processes.

Shifts in the funding landscape

“ Our work is driven by political cycles, not funding or diplomatic cycles.

It could well be argued there are vested interests when third party non-governmental organisations (NGOs) gather in a room and lament the funding landscape. However, participants at the February workshop reflected on the effect of recent trends in the funding landscape in the context of the *quality of peace process support*.¹² The opportunity costs associated with some funding trends include diminution in third party presence and accompaniment along with the ability to seize windows of opportunity. Concerns raised included the following:

Results – Participants stressed that the standardisation of results-based programming for peace support is drawn from an approach best suited to more predictable development work. Both donors and practitioners need to find better ways to assess progress in peace programming in the complex and volatile environments of early dialogue.

Accompaniment – The accompaniment model has been increasingly compromised by 'projectisation' of funding, which demands rapid, numerically quantifiable results. Painstaking accompaniment takes time, but this is increasingly difficult to convey to many donors. Unearmarked or core funding enables third party organisations to build more effective and qualitative relationships beyond the standard project cycle: *'We can say the things people don't like because we are not bound by project funding; we can also work more in complementarity with local actors.'* Contributing to this trend are donors with less experience of the complexities of early dialogue, and increasingly strong institutional pressure for recognition and attribution of donor contributions in more rapid and visible terms.

Risk – Donor priorities are often reactive of 24-hour news cycles and from populist press that sensationalise aid malpractice, including in the peace sector. Some donors are demonstrating increasing risk aversity, which translates into unwillingness to fund sensitive early peace work. Participants referred to the continuous need to engage donors to take calculated risks and back controversial or less predictable interventions, as well as initiatives with longer timeframes designed as vehicles to build relations and change perceptions. Preparedness to fund efforts over longer timeframes was seen as crucial. [See Practice Example 6 below on the Northern Ireland grant-making committee, which relates to a formal peace process but illustrates the possibilities for funding initiatives designed to encourage opposing combatants to collaborate with each other and with community members.]

11. See for example former UN SRSG Jean Arnault's reflection on the positive impact of CBMs in the Guatemala process: 'International norms and realities', in *Legitimacy and peace processes: from coercion to consent*, Accord No 25 [London: Conciliation Resources, 2014], 21-25: https://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord25_LegitimacyAndPeaceProcesses.pdf. Jean Arnault was SRSG in Georgia from 2006 to 2008, in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2006, in Burundi from 2000 to 2001, and in Guatemala from 1997 to 2000. He was a mediator in the Guatemala peace negotiations from 1992 to 1996.

12. Conciliation Resources did invite donors to participate in the meeting, but they were unable to attend due to timing issues.

Scale – There is an increasing preference for larger, multi-donor trust funds, which favours international NGOs or consortia most able to process major grants quickly as compared to smaller local organisations.

Discussions considered possible responses to these challenges: Do we need more interaction and stronger relationships between donors and practitioners to increase understanding? Or more sophisticated and adaptive monitoring and evaluation to assess peace interventions more appropriately and over longer periods? These areas were deemed to need more investigation.

As a starting point for building deeper and more consistent awareness and better relationships with donor institutions, a body like the Mediation Support Network could dedicate an annual seminar on early phase work as a forum for donors, including those involved in secondary funding such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund, to interact with conflict parties and third party organisations.¹³ Exchanging information on conflict-sensitive approaches and flexible funding can help achieve the objective of higher-impact peace support in terms of both advocating for and providing effective support for emergent peace processes.

Practice Example 6: Northern Ireland grant-making committee

A grant-making committee was organised by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland when it was invited to act as a funding mechanism. This was in relation to European Union support to measures in Northern Ireland aimed at the reintegration of politically motivated ex-prisoners. Five ex-combatant organisations (republican and loyalist) were invited to nominate two representatives to the grant-making committee. The committee also had an additional four representatives from NGOs with a track record of prisoner support work and was chaired by a member of the Community Foundation Board of Trustees.

This inclusive approach not only validated the stakeholder status of the political ex-prisoner representatives, but also offered a basis for them to communicate with each other (often informally) about ongoing political and peace process developments, even during the periodic breakdown of various ceasefire arrangements. This also proved to be a long-term vehicle for ex-prisoners to be in contact with people outside their milieu – clergy, government officials, civil society – through a series of conferences and seminars. The grant-making committee considered applications for initiatives that were designed to facilitate the reintegration of political ex-prisoners, but that also enabled ex-prisoners to play a positive role in the on-going peace process.

A number of these initiatives were delivered on a cross-constituency basis, with both republican and loyalist involvement. The work undertaken was evaluated and documented, providing evidence that could be used to advocate for more inclusive government policies on the reintegration of ex-prisoners.

13. The Mediation Support Network (MSN) is a small, global network of primarily non-governmental organisations that support mediation in peace negotiations: <https://mediationsupportnet.ethz.ch/>

Terrorism and counter-terrorism

“ *Proscription of armed groups is like depleted uranium; it seeps into the system for years to come.* ”

Participants were concerned about the trajectory of counter-terrorism policies and laws and how they affect the ability to work with armed groups and movements. Proscription of armed groups has resulted in major opportunity costs for peace. It has made pre-negotiations harder, longer and more convoluted, with third parties more vulnerable and exposed to accusations of bias and proximity to armed groups because of the time spent and work done with them. One participant stressed the enduring legacy of regimes to list armed groups, not least as removing armed groups from proscription lists for peace purposes is extremely complex and multifaceted.

Perceptions that third party peace organisations are close to armed groups was seen as a difficult by-product of efforts to promote dialogue and manage asymmetry [see page 9 for more detail]. This poses significant challenges for those working on the early phases of peace processes. Some participants felt that fewer peacemaking entities are willing and able to engage with armed groups, including the UN and many states. One participant described the UN as having ‘lost all credibility post 9/11; it took sides and has not recovered’.

Over the past decades an extensive surveillance regime has built up in countries that could host peace processes or are important transit countries, posing logistical challenges as well as lost political opportunities. Some participants felt that even traditionally well-disposed countries such as Norway and Switzerland have found this environment more and more challenging and that the peacebuilding community is ‘increasingly short of safe spaces for dialogue at a time when they are needed more than ever.’ The limitations of international ‘good offices’ was referred to, with the UN and international organisations highly risk-averse in this area. Furthermore, the collective understanding of armed groups is adversely affected by the restrictions on engaging with them.

One participant reflected that a global position has emerged since 9/11, that ‘it is legitimate to talk to groups with clear political ambition but there are huge areas where dialogue is a no go’. Another participant explained that ‘anti-terrorist legislation has made our work phenomenally difficult. We need to expend resources and time on extensive due diligence’. Someone pointed out that the use of charity regulators to question donors who seek to fund early peace process work has led to a decisive chill effect on support for early dialogue.

More positively, it was noted that attitudes do change. Talking to the Taliban was unthinkable 20 years ago, yet today it is the only logical thing to do. In the same way, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was demonised and excluded for decades before eventually being recognised as a negotiating partner.

Practice Example 7: Counter-terrorism impact on peacemaking

In Spain, the government's legally rigid anti-terrorist approach complicated the work of the Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG) with Basque armed group *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA). DAG's work in the Basque Country started in 2010 with the setting up of a separate body – the International Verification Commission (IVC) – tasked with the monitoring of ETA's self-declared and unilateral ceasefire.

Initially, the socialist government accepted the work of the IVC. With the conservative *Partido Popular* coming to power in 2011, however, the Spanish government rejected the need for international verifiers, maintaining that 'the only credible verification of the ceasefire is that done by Spanish police'. It was hostile to any dialogue with ETA and publicly opposed those engaging in such dialogue. A proactive security-oriented approach made it difficult for DAG to meet with ETA leaders, who were being pursued by the security agencies in France and Spain. This posed a significant practical challenge to the intense dialogue needed to move towards disarmament.

Aside from practical considerations, it was also controversial to publicly admit to direct talks with ETA, which was listed as a terrorist organisation. DAG also encountered some legal complications during its work in the Basque Country related to anti-terrorism policies. Following the sealing of a small amount of ETA's weapons in 2014 – a step which DAG saw as key in moving towards disarmament – members of the IVC were called to testify as witnesses before the Spanish National Court. While not resulting in any further legal action, these events did affect DAG's further efforts. Despite these obstacles however, DAG successfully supervised the disarming of the separatist group in April 2017.



'Peace Artisans' secure one of the eight ETA weapons dumps handed over to the International Verification Commission to ensure ETA's full disarmament, 8 April 2017. Photo: Artisans de la Paix CC BY-SA 3.0

PART 3: Exclusion and inclusion

Formal peace talks and negotiations dominate attention, with a focus on who gets to sit at the 'table' – as well as how, when and why. This reality has helped underpin a groundswell of support for more diverse representation, quality participation and the inclusion of a greater cross-section of society in formal processes. Policy agendas in this area are backed by a plethora of normative commitments such as the Women Peace and Security agenda,¹⁴ the Youth Peace and Security agenda,¹⁵ and the Sustaining Peace agenda,¹⁶ while recent decades have also seen an explosion of research and analysis on inclusion in peace processes. Early phases of peace processes present particular challenges to promoting inclusion in practice which are comparatively under-explored.

Armed versus unarmed actors

Pathways to peace processes are still almost entirely dominated by 'men with guns' figuring out ways to bargain with each other. Negotiating agendas are shaped in these early stages, when contacts among actors are being developed, dialogues may be conducted, and priorities begin to emerge and be framed in particular ways by the (predominantly male) representatives of military and political elites. *Bona fide* participants are effectively agreed along with the formal and informal modalities for moving forward.

In order to challenge patterns of gendered and elitist path dependency in peace processes, central questions for third parties engaging in early phases should include: how to best understand the power dynamics and variables involved, including patriarchal power structures; what and where the tangible entry points for other voices and civilian perspectives are; how to expand narrow technical conceptions of inclusion; and how to 'do no harm' to women's rights and agency.

In situations involving high costs to civilians – including deaths, injuries, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and forced displacement – pragmatism and tensions between reducing violence (conflict management) and addressing core grievances (conflict resolution) are prominent. Additionally, windows of opportunity are closed by the established (mis)perception from conflict parties, some mediators and third parties that civil society, women and young people will complicate matters and derail tenuous early efforts to establish dialogue further.

“ *Rarely is inclusion understood by the formal negotiating parties to be about the society in whose name peace is apparently being negotiated.* ”

Armed actors often still understand inclusion in terms of which of them will be involved in talks, rather than a broader understanding of societal representation. One aspect of the inclusion challenge is illustrated by the prevailing stasis in the Myanmar peace process which relates in part to a disagreement about inclusion of all armed groups in the formal negotiations. This contrasts with the Mindanao peace process between Moro and the Philippines government, where a more expansive conception of inclusion emerged as a result of intense mobilisation by civil society, spearheaded by women's organisations. This evolved into a tapestry of policy and practice, including an all-women's ceasefire monitoring contingent; gendered provisions in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro;¹⁷ a leading feminist intellectual acting as presidential adviser on the peace process; women being consistently included in the government-negotiating teams; and (eventually) women being included as advisers on the Moro negotiating team towards the latter phases of the talks.

14. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/women-peace-and-security/>

15. https://www.youth4peace.info/About_YPS_Agenda

16. UN Peacebuilding Support Office. *What does Sustaining Peace mean?* [January 2017]: https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Guidance-on-Sustaining-Peace.170117.final_.pdf

17. Agreed in 2014, see: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/PH_140327_ComprehensiveAgreementBangsamoro.pdf



The Mindanao peace process was notable for its expansive conception of inclusion. At a Women's Summit participants review a declaration to influence the work of the Bangsamoro Transitional Commission, March 2014. © Conciliation Resources

Inclusive or exclusive path dependencies

The focus on inclusion matters greatly for formative phases of peace processes because of the early establishment of negative and positive 'peace path dependencies'. Understanding and practice of inclusion set at this stage can be hard to change as the pathways to peace evolve and become more formalised. Adding women, youth or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities not party to the conflict to well-established processes can be extremely challenging, while some of the key issues that they bring are not heard or understood as important by the dominant conflict parties.

One participant observed that negotiation skills are honed during years of meetings and tactical strategising in early phases. Since men dominate early dialogue, they learn about negotiating and bargaining as well as the concerns and modalities of the other conflict parties, and so gain further advantage over women and other excluded groups who, as a result, are less able to influence issues for formal talks or integrate their needs, concerns

and rights. A first step for peace process support actors to elevate good practice in this area is by naming this as a key point of exclusion.

Practice Example 8: Norwegian Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plan 2019–22

This plan has clearly framed the objective of elevating women's participation in pre-negotiation talks: 'The room for manoeuvre is different in dialogue initiatives and informal preliminary negotiations. It is difficult to involve several actors in processes that the parties themselves have not yet formally committed to. However, a facilitator can contribute to raising awareness and boosting knowledge among those involved and to increasing civil society's capacity. If the ground is not prepared already in the preliminary stages, civil society and local women will often lag when a formal process starts.'¹⁸

18. Norwegian Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan, 2019–2022, Fourth plan, March 2019, p. 16.

Practical challenges of early inclusion

Participants identified key challenges and dilemmas in operationalising meaningful early inclusion in peace processes. Some of the most typical ones include:¹⁹

Shallow inclusion – Individuals selected to participate in early dialogue as legitimate representatives of a worldview, community or identity group often do not have the relevant skills, leverage or motivation to perform this role effectively. Ineffective participation of excluded or marginalised actors – women, young women and men, people with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities – might result from inexperience with public speaking or group decision-making processes, but also from the failure of a process to engage meaningfully with constituencies, or from a tendency to look to elite, ‘professionalised representatives’ – who speak English as well as ‘UN-ese’ and are relatively internationally oriented.

Participation versus influence – This dilemma refers to situations where marginalised actors are included in processes and are visible and present. But while they are arguably ‘participating’, they are unable to influence outcomes as the power dynamics remain largely unchanged. Hence, the status quo remains, and they are marginalised and unable to exert influence.

Beyond ‘adding women and stirring’ – Increasingly, the call for transformative feminist principles in peace processes urges deeper emphasis on more dynamic and effective operationalisation of women’s ‘meaningful participation’.²⁰ But how does this apply to early dialogue work? In 2018 UN Women led a process to explore meaningful participation. Following wide consultation four critical elements were identified: the ability to deploy one’s agency; self-efficacy; being present to seize opportunities; and the capacity to exert one’s influence.²¹ [See Diagram 1: Elements of women’s meaningful participation on the next page].

Dilemmas of ‘simple’ versus ‘complex’ inclusion

– The number of actors and the number of issues to be covered shape the dynamics of a peace process. In highly exclusionary processes, there is frequently pressure to include as many marginalised and excluded actors as possible. However, such an approach can lead to large, often unwieldy processes with limited impact. As a result, difficult but carefully considered decisions are often required to limit the numbers of groups and people involved to ensure quality processes and outcomes.

Balancing between process and outcomes

Promoting social cohesion, reconciliation and peacebuilding demands attention and commitment to process and outcomes in equal measure. However, in practice, it is frequently highly challenging to ‘do’ both elements well due to pressures of time, funding, actors, and other factors. Being clear and intentional in making design choices that initiatives, dialogues or projects have a stronger focus on process versus outcomes (or vice versa) can help manage expectations, clarify roles and inputs.

Front-loading inclusion modalities versus more incremental approaches

– This dilemma relates to the degree to which inclusion is pursued from the beginning. The start of a process or a project can be an opportunity for ‘frontloading’, but such an approach may also be inappropriate and backfire. Thinking through the number and sequencing of inclusion modalities is important from a process design perspective.

Engaging with religious traditionalists and conservative elements

– Religious communities have long led and been involved in peacemaking efforts. While the Western peacemaking community may be familiar with approaches and processes of world religions such as Christianity and Buddhism, less is known about different Islamic approaches such as *hudna*, which is sometimes used to mediate conflicts between tribes and clans in parts of the Arab-speaking world.

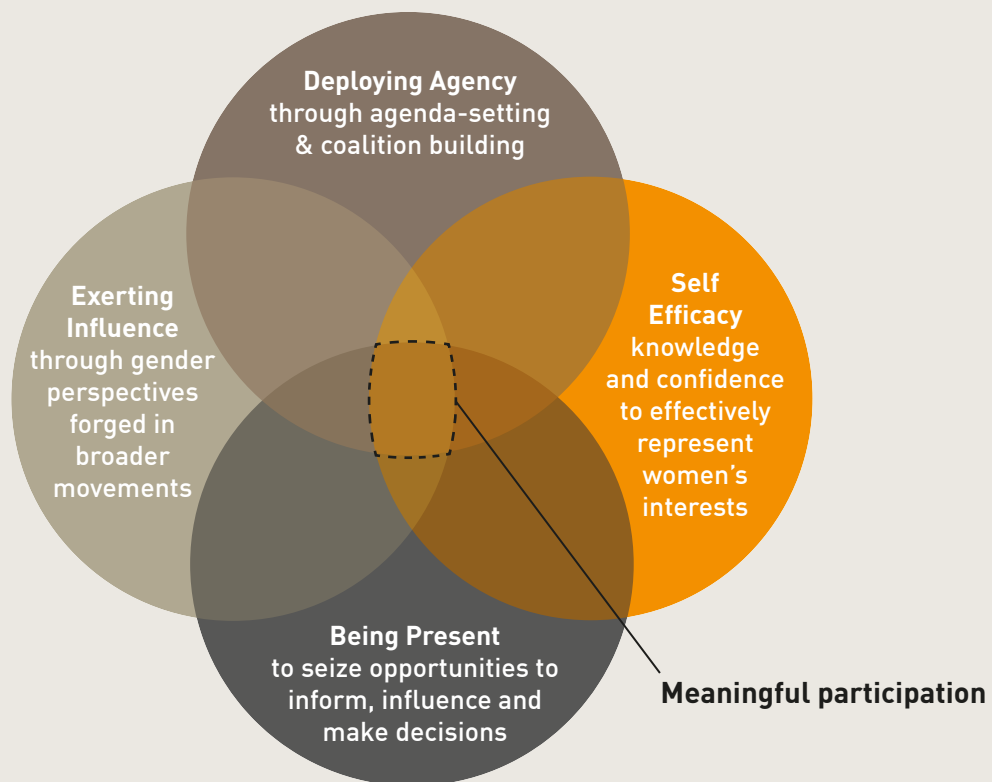
19. Combination of ideas from the meeting, additions from Cate Buchanan, further informed by inputs and conversations with Laura Mitchell, NOREF Senior Gender Adviser and Sophia Close from Conciliation Resources, available in part by reading: Close, Sophia and Zahbia Yousuf. ‘Gendered political settlements: mapping inclusion in practice’, *feminists@law*, Vol 9, No 1 [2019]; O’Rourke, Catherine. ‘Editorial: Gender, conflict and political settlements: What do we know?’, *feminists@law*, Vol 9, No 1 [2019]; and Lanz, David. ‘Who gets a seat at the table? A framework for understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in peace negotiations’, *International Negotiation*, Vol 16, [2011]: 275–295.

20. Close, Sophia and Zahbia Yousuf. *Ibid.*; UN Women. *op.cit.*

21. UN Women. *op.cit.*

Diagram 1

Elements of women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes



Reproduced from *Women's meaningful participation in negotiating peace and the implementation of peace agreements*, UN Women, May 2018

Additionally, participants noted that the peacemaking community tends to avoid actors with views and approaches regarded as conservative or extremist and that a wider spectrum of engagement is necessary to be truly inclusive – and effective.

Changing the discourse about value systems – Participants discussed the power of reconstructing stakeholders' value systems away from dominance and control to mutual respect. A participant remarked that 'complexity is the first victim of violent conflict' leading to polarisation and further entrenchment of positions.

Intersectionality – This is a powerful framework to draw on, especially in ethno-religious conflicts in which identity is presented as fixed and immutable. Recognising that people are affected by multiple interconnected identity factors can help identify patterns of multidimensional and persistent gender discrimination.²² It also facilitates reflection on overlooked markers such as class, which has been almost entirely lost as a fundamental determinant of who gets to engage in peace processes.

22. Close, Sophia. *Using gender to promote inclusion in peace transitions: guidance from practice* [London: Conciliation Resources, 2018]

Investing in non-violent movements – Privileging armed actors in early dialogue helps to legitimise violence. Valuing and supporting non-violent movements in early phases of peace processes can help shift the peacemaking paradigm, contributing to the Sustaining Peace Agenda's call to raise the profile of those working for peaceful resolution of conflict. First practical steps in this regard can include increased focus on non-violent movements as 'peace drivers' in conflict analysis, and increased advocacy to engage them in dialogue processes.

Caution about mechanisms for women's indirect inclusion in UN processes –

Participants raised concerns about a recent trend in UN-led peace processes of indirect women's participation mechanisms through advisory boards, which have been replicated in Syria, Yemen and Iraq.²³ The concern relates to these mechanisms' reliance on the UN envoy to seek and act upon women's advice. However, these structures are not rigid and can evolve over time to take on additional roles such as conducting consultations and providing gendered review of proposed agreements.

Persistent lack of diversity of international envoys – Participants noted that, despite annual exhortations every October since 2000 on the anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the talent pool for UN envoys remains small and exclusive, dominated by older, male Anglo-European former government or UN officials. This lack of diversity is prevalent in all phases of peace processes and in Track 1.5 or Track 2 processes, as well as across the peacemaking sector, including among mediators and envoys appointed by states and regional organisations.

23. Syria – Women's Advisory Board; Yemen – Technical Advisory Group; Iraq – Women's Advisory Group on Reconciliation and Politics.

Conclusion

Conciliation Resources has started a process to dig deeper into the early phases of peace processes. This opaque area is in some ways an ‘uncharted frontier’ in peacebuilding given how little documentation exists compared to other phases of peace processes. This gap derives from secrecy, discretion, security, safety and related concerns regarding early dialogue. Indeed, some of the most effective back-channel processes have been conducted by third parties who have kept quiet about their role – often for good reasons.

Path dependencies are often determined in this unpredictable – and frequently prolonged – period, setting the conditions by which decisions are shaped and made, who makes them and how policy issues are framed. The February discussions highlighted the extent of interest in – and commitment to – this phase of peace processes in an era where peacemaking is beset with complexity and volatile global and regional politics. They also exposed the challenges and dilemmas involved in early peace work – from what inclusion means in formative and secretive early dialogue and how to balance the priorities of reducing violence and tackling grievances, to how to coax armed groups out of violent politics in an era of counter-terrorism.

In 2020 Conciliation Resources will expand its focus on early phases of peace processes with a long-format *Accord* publication. This will include expert research and first-hand experience of efforts to initiate peace processes. The purpose remains to support practitioners and policymakers, as well as activists and opposition movements, with evidence, analysis and ideas for action.

Pathways to peace talks: supporting early dialogue

How to get peace processes off the ground sustainably and inclusively is a vital but comparatively uncharted challenge for peace support. This *Accord Spotlight* explores priorities for more effective policy and practice in the following areas:

- Improving the quality of 'early inclusion'
- Committing to consistent coordination of peace support
- Supporting armed groups to engage in dialogue
- Engaging with conservative movements
- Recognising the peace potential of technology
- Awareness of new mediation actors and their approaches
- Flexible and reliable funding and support
- Reviewing counter-terrorism policies that impede dialogue

Conciliation Resources is an independent international organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence, resolve conflicts and promote peaceful societies.

Accord spotlight presents focused analysis of key themes for peace and transition practice.



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