

## Pioneering peace pathways

### Three ways to initiate inclusive and sustainable peace processes

#### 1. Elevate inclusion

**What?** Support diverse pathways for dialogue and conflict resolution among different configurations of armed and unarmed groups early on in a peace process, as well as supporting engagement between primary conflict parties (such as recognition or 'talks about talks').

**Why?** Conventional peace process design prioritises the interests of the primary conflict parties from the start. Parties' central leaderships often set the direction, pace, and agenda – from secretive 'pre-talks', through single-track peace negotiations and into implementation. This model narrows opportunities for broader inclusion and effective representation of diverse views and interests across society.

**How?** Map competing interests and claims of different groups and constituencies within them as the basis for navigating tensions and identifying entry points and pathways for peaceful change. Scale up gender-sensitive conflict analysis to map different forms of violent exclusion and identify pro-peace agents among diverse population and identity groups inclusive of women and young people. Use information technology to engage excluded or remote communities in dialogue. Support local peace networks to cultivate 'bottom-up' diplomacy and dialogue within and outside conflict parties.

#### 2. Prepare conflict parties for inclusive dialogue

**What?** Provide consistent support and accompaniment to help conflict parties make the 'quantum leap' into peace dialogue in ways that open the door for inclusion and contribute to more credible and sustainable political change.

**Why?** State and non-state conflict parties alike are often ill-prepared for, or ill-disposed to, dialogue. Conflict parties become invested in polarised politics within narrow constituencies, and with maximal and inflexible goals. Media, and particularly social media, is increasingly misused with the effect of exacerbating conflict divides. This impedes trust-building including

by demonising the opposition as terrorists who cannot be negotiated with, and the sowing of disruptive and often incendiary 'fake news'. Such polarisation can impede the readiness of conflict parties to engage in dialogue and can derail a process once started.

**How?** Reframe victory as reaching a dignified negotiated – rather than military – solution. Expand pro-peace elements within conflict parties and their wider constituencies and help maintain cohesion through the process of transitioning to dialogue – for example, by engaging with nonviolent movements and diaspora to build pro-dialogue momentum. Through enhancing engagement skills and techniques, third parties can support conflict parties to reach out beyond their core support base and to broaden their political vision from a warfighting agenda. Anticipate legal or regulatory factors, including proscription regimes and sanctions, that may inhibit emerging dialogue and build changes into accompaniment strategies.

#### 3. Support nonviolent mobilisation and local mediators

**What?** Bolster the involvement in early peacemaking of nonviolent movements and pro-peace civil society and local mediators.

**Why?** Nonviolent mobilisation can help to stimulate dialogue and more inclusive peace processes that are responsive to populations' interests, and to facilitate alternative channels for political engagement and influence. But political and legal space for civil society mobilisation is shrinking and ways to stymie nonviolent dissent are growing, increasingly under the cover of Covid-19 restrictions.

**How?** Work with nonviolent movements to identify their skills and knowledge gaps, including in strategic planning, and provide tailored support factoring in informal and loose structures. Elevate women's roles and leadership, building on clear evidence that greater women's participation is more likely to achieve peaceful aims and resist resort to violence. Mitigate risks in engaging with nonviolent movements, such as where mobilisation contributes to instability or exacerbates exclusion, by thoroughly mapping their objectives and networks and applying Do No Harm principles.



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Initiating peace is hard. Nascent peace processes falter, collapse, restart, and relapse repeatedly. During warfighting, state and non-state conflict parties are often tied to unilateral, coercive approaches to political contestation that prove difficult to shake off. Preparatory and pre-formal peacemaking is nebulous and difficult to pinpoint due to secrecy, denial, and discretion. Early peace initiatives are invariably not early enough for people suffering violence, displacement, and economic and social impacts of conflict.

Encouraging conflict parties to engage in dialogue is core to peace promotion. Conflict parties need to be convinced that dialogue is worthwhile and are expected to possess – and indeed greatly benefit from – different skills to engage in nonviolent political bargaining such as policy analysis or finding common ground. Transitions from fighting to talking rarely happen spontaneously. They require courage to start and creativity to sustain.

But conflict parties too often assume the driver's seat in peace processes. This places restrictions on how a process can progress and often narrows opportunities for broader inclusion. Patterns of conflict party predominance are established early on during secretive 'pre-talks' that are typically the exclusive preserve of armed actors and which set the direction, pace, and substance for later phases. Single-track peace negotiations between conflict parties eclipse other potential avenues for change. Capacity to deploy violence thereby becomes fixed as the primary political capital of peacemaking. The fact that the senior leadership of conflict parties are almost always male adds another dimension of exclusion.

It is hard to change tack once a peace process is set in motion, for example to try to 'inject inclusion' later in a process in ways that have real influence. Inclusion is not only a matter of principle but is essential for durable peace. Exclusive path dependence aligned to conflict parties' capacity to deploy violence is a major reason why many peace processes consistently fail to deliver inclusive and sustainable change in practice.

A starting point to make more inclusive peace processes a reality is to try to limit the leverage of violence in peacemaking. Drawing down violence is critically important, but the vision should be to go beyond this to proactive, sustained conflict prevention and resolution. This requires a process reboot, away from a single series of negotiations between armed conflict parties, and towards a more diversified and vibrant 'ecosystem' of parallel spaces for dialogue and representation, in which different configurations of armed *and* unarmed actors negotiate priorities for change.

## Three ways to initiate inclusive and sustainable peace processes

### 1. Elevate inclusion

**What this can achieve.** Peace processes can benefit from multiple approaches to inclusion by encouraging different peace pathways from the start. Convening combinations of armed and unarmed actors in dialogue to find mutual solutions to various conflict problems is a fraught but necessary endeavour. A priority is to strategise complementarity across and between these dialogue spaces so that they add up to more than the sum of their parts and do not counteract or contradict each other.

**Why this is needed.** Most peace processes are based around a single series of negotiations among the conflict parties that aim to expand inclusion outwards from there. Placing the conflict parties at the heart of the process helps to ensure their buy-in, but it also gives them, and more specifically their central leaderships, control of the process. This narrows the space for other groups and interests. It is why peace processes have been comparatively successful in stopping armed political violence between organised conflict parties but have struggled to achieve more inclusive outcomes to prevent or resolve other types of violence, such as localised or criminal violence, or structural inequality.

Policymakers and peace practitioners still struggle with operationalising inclusion in practice. While peace process supporters and mediators are increasingly concerned to act on women's participation and other forms of inclusion, they remain in need of effective methods to achieve this in practice. Inclusion in peace processes means different things to different people. It is best understood as a 'rising' rather than a 'settled' norm, which has both *tactical* dimensions, relating to the breadth of armed actors in a peace process and the need to address their diverse interests and claims to secure their buy-in, and *progressive* dimensions, associated with representation and full participation of women and young people – both as a matter of principle and recognising their contribution to building more sustainable peace. Exclusion of identity groups such as religious and ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples who are unarmed or are not among the main conflict parties also stores up problems for the future where grievances are left unaddressed or new ones created.



# PATHWAYS FROM FIGHTING TO TALKING: BARRIERS AND GATEWAYS

▲ Enabling factors  
▼ Inhibiting factors

## Conflict transformation



## Conflict protraction



**How this can be realised in practice.** Inclusion advocates have established the case for 'why' it is important in peace processes. It is time to shift to the 'how' it can be achieved in practice. Policymakers and practitioners can stimulate inclusion early on in a peace process through more inclusive approaches to political and conflict analysis by:

- Underpinning all dialogue promotion with rigorous and inclusive analysis from the start. This is doable, affordable, and beneficial. It needs to be prioritised and resourced to become standard practice. Cogent understanding of relationships among institutions and actors – powerful and less powerful – is pivotal to strategising where peace promotion efforts are best directed. Using gender sensitive political and conflict analysis aids understanding of how different types of violence are used to maintain power, and identification of peace levers, visions and influences. An intersectional approach reveals how different power systems – such as those related to ethnicity, age, or socio-economic status – interact with gender to include or exclude groups.
- Promoting online adaptations in peace support. Covid-19 has accelerated online peace support. This has many benefits, and this can certainly contribute to reducing forms of exclusion. However, it can also reinforce existing hierarchies and result in new exclusions due to the changing nature of dialogue spaces, relationships, technology, and internet access. Being aware of the need to curate inclusive online spaces is a must-do in peace support. Partnerships with technology companies and innovators to expand digital access can be explored.
- Understanding advances in digital analysis to process large swathes of data and expand inclusion by enabling input of a wider range of insights, including from overlooked constituencies (and different groups within them) such as women, rural and remote communities, the private sector, and young people.
- Embracing social media as a tool for new forms of communications. It can also be a vehicle for different groups to share perspectives and priorities, especially in the early stages of dialogue and mediation when conventional diplomatic communication channels are closed or much more exclusive. Social media can help mediators engage directly with a wide range of audiences to gather a more comprehensive awareness of diverse conflict narratives and potential entry points for peacemaking, including in remote or hard-to-reach areas. Managing the risks is critical and can be helped by skilling up on technology and social media tools for analysis and engagement.

## 2. Prepare conflict parties for inclusive dialogue

**What this can achieve.** Conflict parties' transition from fighting to talking is an essential early step to initiate a peace process. It involves risks, takes time, and can be highly divisive. Consistent third-party support can help conflict parties to make the 'quantum leap' in ways that manage tensions and embrace inclusion.

**Why this is needed.** State and non-state conflict parties alike are often ill-prepared for dialogue, or ill-disposed to engage in it. They need encouragement and assistance to transition out of violence. Transitions demand root-and-branch change to instil cultures of compromise – from leadership, through political and military wings, and into wider constituencies. Such comprehensive transition is essential, but also risky and challenging, and needs to be carefully managed.

Conflict parties have built-in barriers to engaging in dialogue. Social media, misinformation campaigns and fake news provide increasingly potent channels for propaganda through which to deter or derail dialogue initiatives, demonising the opposition and framing them as terrorists who cannot be negotiated with. Sanctions, counter-terrorism legal frameworks and proscription regimes may explicitly, and indirectly, prohibit and inhibit the potential for dialogue between conflict parties and third-party support for them. Conflict parties are inclined to antagonistic and polarised politics, with maximal and inflexible political ambitions. They often lack certain negotiation skills, while state conflict parties may be resistant to outside mediation support.

**How this can be realised in practice.** Effective support is predicated on trust and relationships with conflict parties and their wider constituencies built up over time, and an ability to seize windows of opportunity when they appear. Local and international third parties can contribute to conflict party preparation for dialogue in the following ways:

- Reframing victory as reaching a dignified negotiated – rather than military – solution, and transforming maximal warfighting demands into achievable negotiable goals.
- Enhancing negotiating capabilities, strategies, and tactics – such as those needed to articulate interests, use evidence rather than rhetoric, or navigate the pros and cons of different peace support options, from mediation to facilitation.
- Nurturing the growth of pro-peace constituencies within conflict parties, through facilitating engagement with nonviolent movements and diaspora.



- Providing funding in ways to stimulate adaption to shifting circumstances. Donors and policymakers should take decisive action to reorient and, where needed, redesign funding instruments to facilitate flexible and long-term funding for peace and dialogue promotion.
- Drawing on available evidence to anticipate potentially inhibiting effects of legal or regulatory instruments, including proscription regimes and sanctions, on dialogue and peace promotion. Analysis of such instruments' impacts, including careful review of what is permissible and what is not, should inform strategies for engagement with proscribed groups.
- Facilitating local peace and other economic, political, and social initiatives that can help reduce violence and stimulate interaction across conflict divides.

### **BOX 1: Supporting the ONLF to prepare for peace talks**

Since 1984 the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has struggled for self-determination in the Somali Regional State (SRS) in Ethiopia. Peace talks between the Government of Ethiopia and ONLF began in 2012 led by a facilitation team from the Kenyan Government at the request of Ethiopia's then Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi.

The ONLF, who had always been open to dialogue, chose to engage at this point for various reasons. The peace talks held in Nairobi met their conditions for negotiations – namely, talks in the presence of a third party and a neutral venue. An increasingly obvious military imbalance was also a factor, as arms supplies to the ONLF from Eritrea and Somalia were cut off and the local 'Liyu' paramilitary unit proved increasingly effective in the fight against the ONLF.

Conciliation Resources supported the talks from 2012, providing technical advice and logistical support to the Kenyan facilitation team and the conflict parties throughout six years of negotiations. This included preparing for negotiations, advising on the wider peace process, and helping to draft the final peace deal. Conciliation Resources also helped mobilise financial and diplomatic support for peace efforts at a time when this was not an international priority.

Assistance to the ONLF included accompaniment of the senior leadership to equip them with the means and methods to develop a vision and negotiation strategy, refine positions on key issues, reframe maximalist demands, and argue their case effectively at the negotiating table. Sharing knowledge and comparative experience, for example on security and constitutional issues, helped the ONLF to develop their strategy and enabled both parties to overcome sticking points at times when the process had stalled.

Research commissioned by Conciliation Resources also helped shift positions. Analysis of evolving centre-regional dynamics contributed to the ONLF reconsidering their reluctance to speak to the regional government in SRS in case it diminished their claims to self-determination with the federal government.

One of Conciliation Resources' most important roles was to facilitate internal debate within the ONLF and their constituencies as they sought to consolidate pro-peace strategies and build consensus for dialogue. Including wider society in the peace process is vital for ensuring that it an agreement sticks. Conciliation Resources facilitated consultation meetings with young people, women, and elders to ensure that their views were included in the formal talks. Access to the region was severely restricted at the time, and so efforts to broaden participation focused on diaspora and refugee communities. Consultations helped identify agenda priorities for talks and potential solutions to problems, and to maintain internal cohesion. Conciliation Resources' ability to support the ONLF and the Kenyan facilitation team relied on trust built on open, honest, and consistent engagement sustained over time.

At the time of the talks, the ONLF was designated as a terrorist group by the Ethiopian Government. Conciliation Resources' staff experienced significant risks travelling to Ethiopia and limitations on support for some activities with the ONLF. A breakthrough came when the new Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, de-listed the ONLF as a terrorist group and opened talks with the ONLF leadership in Asmara, leading to the signing of a peace deal in October 2018.

The parties are now working to implement the deal, with Conciliation Resources' support, and to begin the process of reconciliation and addressing the root causes of the conflict in the region.



### 3. Support nonviolent mobilisation and local mediators

**What this can achieve.** Nonviolent movements, civil society and local 'insider' mediators are involved in diverse ways to stimulate dialogue and steer peace processes to be more inclusive and responsive to populations. Insider mediators are often individuals with unique standing, credibility and connections who play potent – though typically understated – roles in promoting dialogue. They contribute to nonviolent political change in subtle and significant ways.

Nonviolent mobilisation can provide alternative channels for political engagement, influence, and representation and has been spearheading political change in Sudan, Tunisia, Lebanon and elsewhere. Insider mediators play unsung roles in 'brokering' or conveying the demands of nonviolent mobilisation to formal powerholders. Movements and insider mediators gain from support and solidarity, particularly early on in a process when political space tends to be both restricted and dominated by armed actors.

**Why this is needed.** Despite the well-established role that civil society plays in starting and sustaining peace, space for civil society mobilisation is shrinking and ways to stymie nonviolent dissent are growing, increasingly aided by the cover of Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

Local civil society and 'insider mediators' are often courageous peacemakers, engaging with conflict parties and wider society on the frontline of violence long before government officials, politicians or international actors. Nonviolent civil society have connections with key constituencies, social and mainstream media and influencers that can be used to pressure armed actors to engage in – and stick with – peace dialogue, to encourage popular buy-in, and raise issues of public concern.

Locally led dialogue initiatives can promote social cohesion and connection – essential 'ingredients' for peacemaking and reconciliation in line with the United Nations' 'Sustaining Peace' agenda. Sub-national peacemaking can help reduce violence, empower, and engage local communities and governance institutions, widen political commitment for reconciliation, and build popular appetite to negotiate a revised and more inclusive social contract. Progress in reaching local ceasefires and peace deals can demonstrate what is possible through cooperation.

**How this can be realised in practice.** Policymakers and practitioners can assist nonviolent mobilisation and local mediators in the following ways:

- Carefully mapping nonviolent movements' objectives and networks and diligently applying Do No Harm principles to all interventions. Using conflict-sensitive approaches helps to 'see' local peace promotion more clearly and provide more targeted support to nascent initiatives.
- Using mapping and analysis to identify and mitigate the risks of engagement. Nonviolent movements can be difficult to define. Supporting them brings risks and

can be challenging for international actors including many donors and conventional funding mechanisms. Understanding them helps mitigate risks, especially with nonviolent movements that work closely with armed groups, or where mobilisation contributes to instability, encourages new forms of exclusion, creates new networks that may fuel funding competition and negative power dynamics, or jeopardises the security of the movements themselves.

- Working with nonviolent movements to identify areas of technical, advisory, and material support to strengthen movements' strategic planning, tactical sequencing, and political impact.
- Supporting the diverse involvement of women in nonviolent movements and local peace promotion. This builds on clear evidence showing that movements with greater women's participation are more likely to achieve their aims and resist resorting to violence.
- Bolstering nonviolent movements' meaningful involvement in negotiation and dialogue processes. Backing nonviolent mobilisation is important in the pre-formal phases of peace processes when access to dialogue is challenging due to concerns over secrecy. Some mediators are reluctant to 'over-complicate' the negotiation process or to expend political capital on inclusion when different armed and unarmed movements are vying for attention internally and internationally.



A mural by Sudanese illustrator Alaa Satir, titled 'A woman's place is in the resistance'. Women have been central to Sudan's ongoing revolution, which began in late 2018 and has led to the removal of President Omer al-Bashir after thirty years in power. © Alaa Satir



## BOX 2: Insider mediator perspectives from Myanmar

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In the Myanmar peace process, I wear various hats: technical adviser for the ethnic armed groups or organisations (referred to as EAOs); co-facilitator of the main committee of the formal political dialogue between these EAOs, the government and the Tatmadaw (the Myanmar army); leader of a peacebuilding NGO; and member of an ethnic minority group with a stake in a more inclusive country.

The Myanmar process is a hybrid: the ceasefire agreement and implementation apparatus are linked to broader peace negotiations occurring within the formal Framework for Political Dialogue (FPD). The formal protagonists – the military, EAOs and successive governments – have developed a complex architecture to reach a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) and formal political dialogue. By the end of 2019, the agreement was signed by 10 EAOs. Political parties became involved after the NCA was signed and as part of the negotiations to develop the architecture for the formal political dialogue. The State Counsellor (de facto President), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is the Chair of this process and there are three co-facilitators representing the EAOs, political parties and the government. I am the EAO-designated facilitator.

The role of insider mediators is increasingly important. Yet it can be a lonely position and we can be perceived as disloyal to our 'own'. We also face challenges around language, ethnicity, and gender. We work discreetly, and frequently deny our efforts in creating and nurturing pathways to peace. A key challenge as an insider mediator is maintaining trust

with both sides. Insider mediators must maintain good personal relationships with all parties. In tense situations, as a woman I can say things that are perceived as less threatening. From time to time my male co-facilitators ask me to manage tricky issues because of my style and perhaps because I am female.

Initial expectations of me were probably to be a master of ceremonies – a gender-appropriate role for women in Myanmar. However, I was interested in doing more than this and saw opportunities to build links between people. Not everyone liked or wanted this facilitation style. Some government officials refused facilitation because this did not suit their interests or their ability to manipulate outcomes. But after several meetings, another general commented on how useful this new style was. I can probe deeper informally, but the willingness to shift to the resolution rather than the management of conflicts is slow and dependent on individual will and capacities. There are some who are willing to go deeper on the issues and want to understand the concerns of their counterparts. We need more people with this frame of mind for more effective pathways to peace.

The process began to stall from late 2018 and through 2019 for multifaceted reasons. Over 2019, the government, Tatmadaw and EAOs engaged in informal meetings. I have facilitated and coordinated informal meetings between the NCA signatory and non-signatory EAOs on developing principles for a federal state. Building on some good relations with members of the government delegation and leaders from the Kachin Independence Organisation, I facilitated informal meetings between them. Flexible funding is needed to provide this type of support, when processes are unpredictable and informal. There are some good examples of rapid and flexible response from donors, which is vital as there are so many factors that disrupt activities and projects far beyond our control. A pool of unearmarked funding is critical for responding proactively to opportunities to forge dialogue, without losing momentum owing to the need to fundraise.





**Conciliation Resources** is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. We work with people impacted by war and violence, bringing diverse voices together to make change that lasts. Conciliation Resources' *Accord* publication series informs and strengthens peace processes by documenting and analysing the lessons of peacebuilding.

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Cover image: The 'Camel Caravan', an annual trek to promote peaceful coexistence between communities in Northern Kenya, moves between Gotu and Bojidara in Isiolo County, Kenya, August 2018. © Weltfriedensdienst

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