

# RECONCILIATION IN FOCUS

## APPROACHING RECONCILIATION IN PEACEBUILDING PRACTICE

Briefing paper



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MARCH 2021

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This briefing paper serves as an explanatory tool for policymakers and others working on reconciliation in conflict-affected contexts or considering such work. It provides a working definition of reconciliation; notes key characteristics; explains how it matters for peace and stability and when and where to engage in reconciliation efforts; and provides pointers, visual illustrations and short examples of what to do in practice, along with principles and guiding questions for how to approach work in this area.

It does not seek to be comprehensive. It distils conceptual and practice-oriented learning from the extensive available research and practice on the complex subject of reconciliation and coming to terms with the legacies of past violence. It includes short examples that are meant to be illustrative rather than representative, reflecting the variety in reconciliation practice. Please note: work of this nature is necessarily highly context specific. As such, the key messages in this report do not necessarily apply to all contexts at all times.

## 2. HOW DO WE DEFINE RECONCILIATION?

No formal or widely-accepted definition of reconciliation exists. For the purposes of this paper, we use the following working definition:

***Reconciliation involves (re)building and/or transforming relationships damaged by violent conflict and oppression. It focuses on improving horizontal relationships between people and groups in society and vertical relationships between people and institutions.***

This generally involves the following:\*

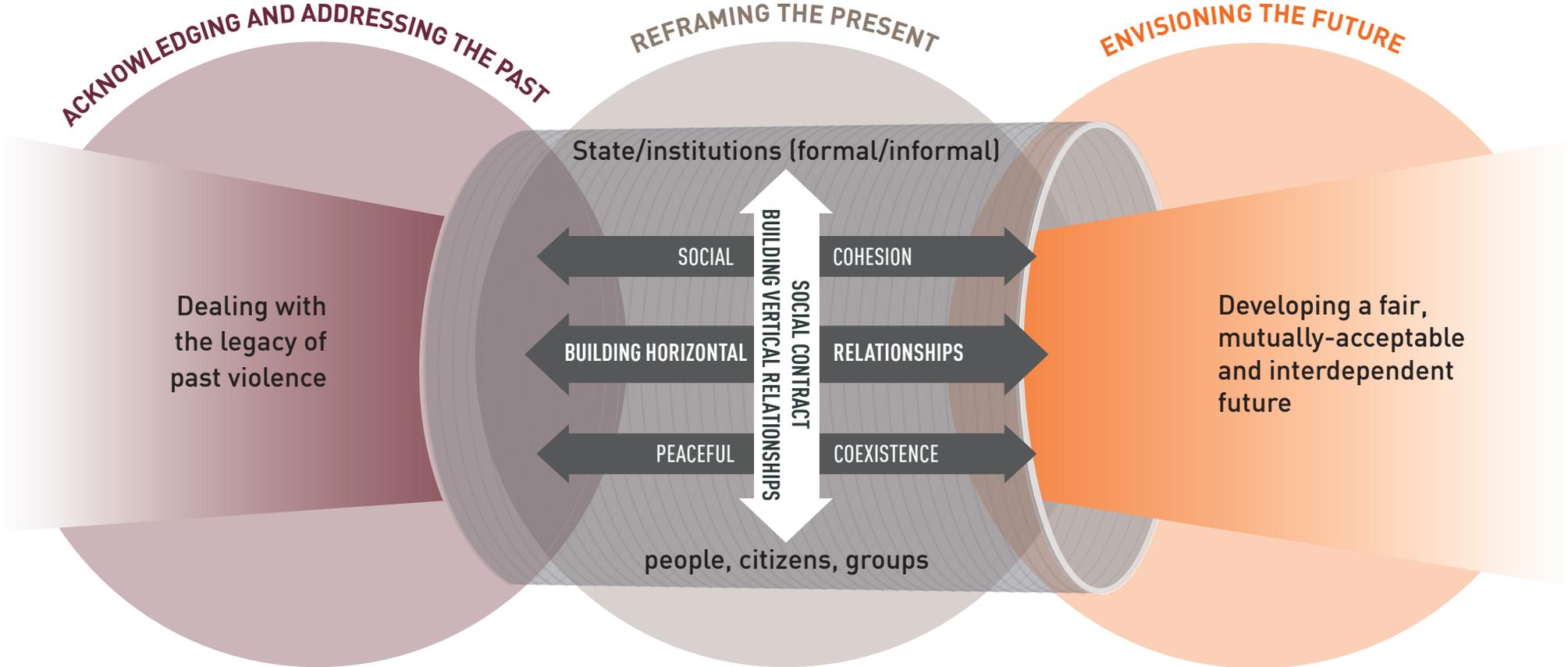
- developing a vision of a fair, mutually-acceptable and interdependent future;
- acknowledging and dealing with the legacy of past violence;
- creating more inclusive institutions and structures based on and enabling transformed relationships and a new social contract;
- fostering significant cultural and attitudinal change, building trust, social cohesion and establishing new norms.

*\*All of the above are important to achieving reconciliation, but specific reconciliation efforts do not necessarily involve all elements at all times.*

There are limitations to any definition of reconciliation. No attempt at definition is finite and multiple definitions of reconciliation may coexist within a context at any given time. The working definition above reflects that reconciliation is close to peacebuilding; drawing a clear distinction between the two is difficult as their boundaries are blurred in both theory and practice. Generally, peacebuilding focuses on addressing the underlying causes of conflict while reconciliation emphasises (re) building and transforming relationships and looking back – and forwards. These endeavours are necessarily overlapping and interdependent. Most importantly, attempts to define and understand reconciliation must be context-sensitive, supplied by – and working for – actors who drive reconciliation work in a given context.



**DIAGRAM 1: WORKING DEFINITION OF RECONCILIATION**



**i Diagram 1** condenses the working definition by reflecting the emphasis on horizontal and vertical relationships and the forward- and backward-looking nature of reconciliation. These constitute four substantive areas of focus for reconciliation work, woven together by reconciliation’s institutional and structural dimensions and its concern with cultural and attitudinal change. *On activities within these areas of focus, see [here](#); on the different time frames at stake in reconciliation, see [here](#) and [here](#).*

# 3. WHAT ARE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF RECONCILIATION?

## Reconciliation requires context-specific understandings and approaches

Reconciliation means different things to different people. It is therefore important to explore, assess and work with the particular understandings and approaches that are present in a context, rather than relying on a fixed interpretation and approach. Experience shows that initiatives work better when they draw on local institutions and creativity or are otherwise rooted in a specific sociocultural context. Taking context as a starting point does not imply blind faith in existing beliefs or values or an uncritical embrace of dominant or customary practices; these may have limitations to be considered, for example in relation to gender and social inclusion. Such limitations can be navigated and do not negate the need to anchor reconciliation work in local realities.

*Initiatives work better when they draw on local institutions and creativity or are otherwise rooted in a specific sociocultural context*

## Reconciliation is multi-faceted and takes place at multiple levels

Reconciliation efforts can cover a wide range of activities to develop confidence between political actors, (re)build the social fabric, and (re)generate civic trust in institutions, governance arrangements and authorities. They may take place at multiple levels, from interpersonal and inter-group initiatives to broader communal, societal and institutional processes. What reconciliation will practically entail depends on what is possible in a context based on thorough analysis of the issues at stake, where a context is situated in the conflict cycle, and on local political and cultural realities. It is important to take into account gender dynamics and perspectives, necessitating careful consideration of power relations and the impacts of violence on different social constituencies and cohorts within them. Reconciliation work does not seek to restore past relationships to how they were before violent conflict erupted, but to transform horizontal and vertical relationships or build new ones where they did not exist. It comprises a spectrum from minimalist to maximalist approaches, ranging from facilitating coexistence between former opponents with little trust or shared values, to transformation of individuals, society and politics, with restoration of dignity and reversal of discrimination, marginalisation and other structural causes.

*Reconciliation efforts have to strike a balance between looking back and looking forward*

## Reconciliation is retrospective and prospective, dynamic and non-linear

Reconciliation refers both to a process or journey and to an end state (which may never be fully achieved). The journey is neither linear nor finite as the social, interpersonal and political conditions continuously change. What is feasible and necessary in terms of reconciliation in a given context will alter over time (see also [section 5](#)).

### Example 1 SHIFTING NEEDS

In South Africa's transition to democracy in the 1990s, 'reconciliation' primarily entailed a national political process allowing former opponents to govern together and devise an interdependent future, supported by public acknowledgement of past wrongs, reparations and some institutional reform. Over time, the prospects for reconciliation have become more and more firmly linked to distributive justice. They now depend on the extent to which the massive income and wealth disparities that greatly affect the vast majority of the population can be overcome. These limit opportunities for most youth, leaving these 'born-frees' shackled by the legacy of the past.

Reconciliation efforts thus have to strike a balance between looking back and looking forward. They look back to acknowledge and where possible repair the harms done to victims of past violence and society at large. They also look forward, anticipating responsibility for those liable to fall victim to violence in future if relationships and structural conditions do not change.

## Reconciliation navigates paradoxes; it is 'the art of the possible' and 'good enough'

Reconciliation does not work in a straightforward and predictable way – there is no 'right' formula or sequence of activities to follow, and reconciliation does not result automatically from efforts undertaken. Instead, reconciliation processes involve complexity, paradoxes

and imperfection. They involve working with past, present and future time frames simultaneously. Acknowledging and dealing with the past and envisioning and working toward a fair and inclusive future together also help with reframing the present and establishing new norms and relationships. Navigating paradoxes and tensions is an integral part of this and requires a pragmatic and creative approach to reconciliation that embraces 'the art of the possible' and that responds to the specific demands and opportunities of local circumstances. These will depend on various factors, including the way in which forms of violence, oppression, conflict and fragility both persist and change.

## Reconciliation is inherently political, not the 'soft option'

A common misperception is that reconciliation is a 'soft option' or 'optional extra', given its focus on relationships. Yet work in this area is highly political, as it focuses on transforming the distribution of power, resources or opportunities in society. Reconciliation relies on structural and institutional change as well on cultural and attitudinal change. It recognises relationships as central to the root causes and the transformation of violent conflict. The conflictual nature of relationships in a given context may originally stem from groups' inequitable access to political power or economic resources, but it is exacerbated by feelings of hostility, mistrust and fear that become entrenched. In some instances these endure for generations. Enemy images, insecurity and a sense of grievance are both a product and a further cause of conflict. These create obstacles to reaching a political settlement and hinder lasting changes beyond negotiations. Making progress on the substantive issues at stake in formal and informal peace processes ultimately requires changing the relationships between the people involved.

## Reconciliation requires conflict-sensitivity

Reconciliation work is political in *substance and purpose*, in terms of *what* is done to (re)build or transform horizontal and vertical relationships and *to what end* this is done. The *process* of working on reconciliation is political too, especially in fragmented societies. Who will lead and take this work forward – and how – can raise tensions between groups and/or be deliberately manipulated for political gain. The fact that reconciliation work may feed into existing divisions is not a reason to avoid it, but a reminder of how important careful context and conflict analysis is. When undertaking or supporting reconciliation activities it is crucial to understand the dynamics at play, anticipate challenges, or tension and resistance that may be triggered, and develop mitigating strategies. Providing technical expertise can help ease tensions around reconciliation processes, provided it is appropriately tailored to the context.

## Reconciliation involves careful consideration of culture, religion and language

Culture, religion and language can provide important vehicles and obstacles to reconciliation. Religion or cultural traditions may offer ideas, symbols and practices that support reconciliation by encouraging engagement with former adversaries or highlighting the need to repair harm done. The notion of 'reconciliation' may also carry religious or cultural connotations that are important to take into account. Linguistically, the local terms and vocabularies associated with and available for reconciliation may carry meanings or baggage from the past that can help or hinder reconciliation work. In some conflicts, the role of religious groups has been pivotal in bringing about change, for example the San Egidio community in Mozambique, or Buddhists in Cambodia. In other settings, the role of faith-based groups as convenors or change agents may be compromised, depending on their stance during conflict. For example, the militant nationalism of Buddhist monks in Myanmar and Sri Lanka – and their role in instigating communal tensions and violence – poses challenges for their involvement in reconciliation, though their significant popular and political influence makes it important to engage with them nonetheless.

***Culture, religion and language can provide important vehicles and obstacles to reconciliation***

### Example 2 ROLE OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Two years before the signing of peace accords in Guatemala, the Human Rights Office of the Catholic Archdiocese started investigating the widespread violence and terror inflicted on the population during successive military dictatorships and civil war. The Recovery of Historical Memory (Recuperacion de la Memoria Historia – REMHI) project collected over 5,000 testimonies from people across the country representing 25,000 victims, and identified over 300 mass graves kept hidden by the army. Due to its local style of operating, REMHI ran into an unfulfilled desire for popular vengeance as survivors lacked institutional mechanisms to pursue retribution. It did not pursue punitive conceptions of justice, but encouraged various processes to deal with the past at local level, including legal investigations, symbolic acts of remembering and exhumations of clandestine cemeteries. REMHI handed over all of its documentation to the UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission set up as part of the peace agreement, effectively functioning as an unofficial precursor to this body.

### Example 3 RELEVANCE OF LOCAL CULTURAL PRACTICES

Restoring the balance in relationships through reconciliation is central to indigenous approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding in communities across the Pacific region, including in [Bougainville](#). Reconciliation practices are diverse in nature, and often involve lengthy processes of planning and negotiation. The process culminates in coming together to enact a feast and ceremony which establishes an agreed 'truth' and 'finishes' the conflict. The process typically involves paying 'compensation' of pigs, traditional shell money and, increasingly, cash. Churches can play a significant role in offering spiritual and trauma healing while understandings of Christian forgiveness have become strongly interwoven into reconciliation processes.

## Reconciliation warrants ongoing dialogue within each context

The language of reconciliation can be contentious in itself, and it is important to consider its political connotations. The term becomes contested when used for political expediency by ruling elites to whitewash the past, dismiss victims' pain or discredit calls for justice in relation to harm suffered, as has been the case in [Sri Lanka](#). In asymmetric or separatist conflict contexts, 'reconciliation' can be perceived as a vehicle for the 'parent state' to impose integration on populations striving for self-determination. Beliefs that 'reconciliation' implies a return to an unjust status quo or imposes expectations on people to reconcile before they are ready to, can fuel mistrust and opposition to state-led reconciliation processes.

Where variable and contested meanings of reconciliation exist in a context, dialogue is needed to clarify what is understood by 'reconciliation', by whom, and to what end – and how the meaning of the concept, and associated vernacular terms, may vary across groups. It is the *meaning* behind the terms, however they are used, that needs to be understood.

## Reconciliation can benefit from tactical use of terminology

In addition to reconciliation, there is a range of terms that can be used when trying to come to terms with a legacy of socio-political violence, such as transitional justice, dealing with the past, and transformative justice. These concepts are interdependent and complementary and their boundaries are not clear-cut. What they entail and how they are interpreted evolves over time, and there is some overlap in meaning and use. In practice, this means that different actors may use the same term while meaning something different, or may mean the same thing while using different terms. Actors often adopt one or other term in an ad hoc and intuitive manner, rather than based on careful consideration or comparative review. In other cases a particular term is deliberately and carefully chosen to navigate political sensitivities in a particular context. The existence of multiple terms and definitional ambiguity helps practitioners to use terms tactically, assessing from case to case which term or framing is most conducive to their efforts.

### Example 4 CONTEXT-SENSITIVE FRAMING

The term reconciliation is invested with contrasting political meaning on either side of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Improving relations in this context, in the absence of a settlement, is perceived as a potential threat to the party that does not want a return to the status quo ante. Changing the name of the Georgian Ministry for Reintegration in 2014 into the State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality was intended to send a positive signal about Georgia's intention to approach conflict from a reconciliation and inclusion angle. Yet this reinforced fears in Abkhazia that 'reconciliation' equates to 'reintegration' and compounded sensitivities that improving relations is more in the interests of one side than the other. Georgian and Abkhaz practitioners have circumvented the [politicisation of the concept](#) of reconciliation by framing their work on addressing the legacy of past violence in terms of '[dealing with the past](#)'.

**i Diagram 2** on the following pages illustrates the evolution of key concepts in relation to addressing a legacy of violence or oppression, as well as their complementary, interdependent, and partially overlapping nature. The spiral shape reflects that these terms are inextricably linked and that new terms emerged partially in response to concepts that came before. The loops signify how each concept's strengths and limitations become more evident with use – feeding into the emergence of a new concept (*forward arrows*). Yet the direction of influence goes both ways: concepts that emerged later also influence the interpretation of concepts that emerged earlier and that continue to evolve and change in the way they are used (*backward arrows*). Of course, a diagram like this is a simplification of a complex and ever-changing reality; the evolution depicted here is not a straightforward chronological progression.

**DIAGRAM 2: KEY TERMINOLOGY: USES AND EVOLUTION**

| TERM          | RECONCILIATION  | TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE   | DEALING WITH THE PAST  | TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE   |
|---------------|---|--|--|--|
| DEFINITION    | Multiple definitions of reconciliation exist. Consistent is an emphasis on (re)building and/or transforming relationships damaged by violent conflict or oppression, horizontally and vertically  | Transitional justice (TJ) is the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation (UN definition)   | Dealing with the past (DwP) is a holistic approach to addressing a legacy of human rights abuses by undertaking efforts in four areas – the right to know, the right to justice, the right to reparation and the guarantee of non-recurrence – as part of a long-term process that seeks to establish a culture of accountability, the rule of law and reconciliation  | Transformative justice (TfJ) stresses local agency and resources; prioritises process and multiple perspectives; addresses continuities between a violent past and the present and future; and challenges unequal, intersecting power relationships and structures of exclusion at various levels (Gready and Robins 2019)   |
| EMERGENCE     | Concept has long existed in religious and philosophical thought. It emerged in relation to past rights human violations in late 1980s/early 1990s in Latin America. Use of the term spread further due to <u>South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1997-2002)</u> and <u>International IDEA's Handbook on Reconciliation (2003)</u> . So many different understandings of the term now exist that it is best understood as an umbrella concept, to be clarified in context   | Concept emerged with reference to transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America and Eastern Europe in late 1980s/early 1990s. Initially framed as 'justice in transition' and referred to legal responses by newly democratic regimes to rights abuses by repressive predecessors. <u>Application and understanding of concept have expanded over time: it now comprises both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms and processes and is also applied to conflict-affected contexts. Increasingly considered in democratic, non-conflict contexts (e.g. TRC in Canada)</u>   | Concept emerged in late 2000s /early 2010s as alternative to 'transitional justice', given its limitations. A <u>conceptual framework for DwP based on the four UN impunity principles</u> , developed by Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and NGO <u>swisspeace (2013)</u> , gave it currency. A 2016 update by <u>swisspeace</u> highlighted its transformative dimension   | In 2006, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour called for <u>TJ to become more transformative by addressing violations of social and economic rights</u> , noting that this would help to prevent conflict. Others took up this call; 2014 <u>publications by academics Gready and Robins</u> gave the TfJ-notion further impetus   |
| CONTRIBUTIONS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses attention on need to (re)build trust and relationships</li> <li>• Often resonates with context-specific norms and community-based practices for rehabilitating offenders through engagement with victims and community at large</li> <li>• Recognises that coming to terms with past violence occurs at different levels (society, institutional, community, interpersonal, individual) and involves cultural, attitudinal and institutional change</li> <li>• Often linked to healing, repair of harm done and restorative justice</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses attention on accountability and acknowledgement of human rights violations</li> <li>• Frames past wrongs in terms of international law, notably states' human rights obligations and victims' rights to redress</li> <li>• Offers broad range of approaches to address past violations with examples from multiple contexts and practical guidance materials</li> <li>• Adjustments over time in policy and practice allow for greater attention to socio-economic concerns, institutional reforms, and non-judicial customary processes</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlights DwP as a long-term process that includes different mechanisms and actors with various perceptions of the past and diverse visions for the future</li> <li>• Stresses importance of building democratic norms of tolerance and power-sharing, and transforming victims and perpetrators into citizens taking part in new social contract</li> <li>• Aims to move away from earlier narrow framings of 'peace vs justice' dichotomy by linking international law with conflict transformation, and rule of law with reconciliation</li> <li>• Highlights prevention through 'guarantee of non-recurrence'</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shifts focus from the legal to social and political domain and from the state and institutions to communities and everyday concerns, prioritising engagement with people's welfare</li> <li>• Foregrounds need to address structural violence and unequal social relations rather than specific acts of violence, so as to prevent future conflict</li> <li>• Emphasises context specificity, local understandings of rights and participation by affected populations</li> <li>• Recognises that patterns of violence and conflict are reshaped during political transition (not ended), underlining the need to tackle ongoing and new forms of violence</li> </ul> |
| LIMITATIONS   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often perceived as 'soft approach' that glosses over abuses due to association with forgiveness and healing and/or use in combination with amnesty. Use of term by elites stressing need to 'move on' and 'look forward' feeds into connotation of 'forgive and forget'</li> <li>• Focus on relationships risks overlooking structural and cultural roots of conflict and power dynamics</li> <li>• Some resist concept's religious connotations; some perceive it as excuse for inaction and impunity; some object to suggestion of rebuilding relationships that were problematic in conflict settings                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept's nebulous and malleable nature means that it can mean everything and nothing</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often narrow focus on accountability of offenders, highlighting tension between (retributive) justice and peace</li> <li>• Stresses state-centred legalistic approaches to 'symptoms' (rights violations), neglecting underlying causes (e.g. structural violence)</li> <li>• Often experienced as externally driven and template-oriented, with little attention for context and community-based processes</li> <li>• Can approach conflict's messy reality in binary terms (victims/perpetrators), overlooking complexity and aspects of justice that complement peacebuilding (e.g. social justice)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The centrality of the impunity principles can appear to put accountability at the heart of DwP</li> <li>• Term leads some to perceive it as having narrow retrospective focus with limited concern with broader processes of change to create a better future</li> <li>• Explicit reference to victims and perpetrators fails to recognise complexity and blurred boundaries of these categories and others complicit in or benefiting from violence. Also fails to recognise that not all on state territory may be formal citizens                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept often used interchangeably with TJ, hence often subject to TJ-related critique</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept is perceived as being vague and broad, very aspirational and difficult to operationalise</li> <li>• Prioritising process over outcomes fails to recognise that participatory processes are not transformative per se and may reinforce exclusion</li> <li>• Ambitious nature of concept may raise expectations that cannot be met and that may overwhelm already stretched TJ mechanisms                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept is hard to grasp without prior knowledge of debates in field and critical perspectives on mainstream TJ</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| USE           | Often used in policy documents on DwP and TJ, as a key objective. Also used by various think tanks and (inter)national NGOs to denote programmatic initiatives and research projects  | Dominant in international policy circles, notably <u>UN, EU, African Union</u> , some bilateral donors. Term of choice for several (I)NGOs in this domain, prominent human rights INGOs, and academic circles  | Increasingly used by some bilateral donors and multi-lateral institutions and various (I)NGOs. The term has gained traction as an alternative to TJ, e.g. in EU context  | To date mostly used in academic circles, informing (applied) research and academic publications  |

## 4. HOW DOES RECONCILIATION MATTER FOR PEACE?

### Reconciliation seeks to repair damage from past violence and prevent new conflict

Peace will remain elusive unless action is taken to address the damage to relationships resulting from sustained violence affecting societies, communities and individuals. Working on reconciliation is critical for peacebuilding and conflict prevention; a reconciled society is the best form of conflict prevention and key to sustaining peace in the long term. While peace agreements help to end violence and guide initial reforms, they do not bring about conditions that automatically overcome the rifts that generated violence. Grievances, injustices and antagonisms left unaddressed can – and often do – form the basis for renewed conflict and violence. This may either be along previous divisions or along new ones that undermine the social and political fabric of a post-conflict society.

*A reconciled society is the best form of conflict prevention and key to sustaining peace in the long term*

#### Example 5 INJUSTICES UNADDRESSED

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission shed much light on gross human rights violations committed during apartheid. It helped to restore victims' dignity by creating space for long-denied experiences to be heard by society at large, in languages previously excluded from the formal public domain. Yet the focus on specific forms of physical violence and limited concern with social and economic patterns of exclusion have meant that inequality and entrenched racism remain a threat to peace, human security, stability and prosperity. Violence and conflict in South Africa nowadays – whether linked to evictions, service delivery, xenophobia, or other issues – is historically informed and linked to ongoing experiences of social marginalisation, political exclusion and economic exploitation.

### Reconciliation involves addressing power relations to build lasting peace

Patterns of violence and social conflict tend to be reconfigured during political transition rather than finished off. Elites who had a hand in past abuses or benefited from conditions of social, political and economic exclusion often retain the networks needed to turn their old power bases into new ones. This can feed into resistance to reconciliation.

*Addressing power relationships is an important component of building and sustaining peace and working towards reconciliation*

#### Example 6 RESISTANCE TO RECONCILIATION

In Tunisia, the Truth and Dignity Commission established in 2014 to investigate state-led abuses under the Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali regime, faced opposition from institutions and powerful actors of the old 'deep state', including politicians, businesspeople, officials and security officers set on holding on to their privilege and powers. The Commission has faced barriers in entrenched government bureaucracy and been vilified in parts of the press – with the president, Sihem Bensedrine, subject to a virulent personal and gendered smear campaign.

Addressing power relationships is therefore an important component of building and sustaining peace and working towards reconciliation. In some contexts, this may entail a fundamental shift in power that prevents elites from reinventing themselves and remaining in influential positions once violence has subsided. Elsewhere, change consists of political elites (re)building the functional relationships they need to govern together or engage in political contestation without resorting to arms. This is a vital stepping stone, but prospects for long-term change and stability may still be affected if there are no meaningful initiatives to address patterns of marginalisation, or if narratives of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples remain excluded from the public sphere and national consciousness. Findings from the Listening Process by the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission for the Bangsamoro, the Philippines, are instructive in this regard.

### Example 7 LIMITS OF RESTORING PRIOR RELATIONSHIPS

In Bougainville, reconciliation has largely aimed to restore prior relationships rather than to transform them. Power and agency have historically resided in family and community life rather than in formal governance structures. Since the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001, hundreds of reconciliation processes have occurred as reconciliation – understood as restoring balance in relationships – has been emphasised as the key mechanism to build post-conflict peace. Monetisation and politicisation of these processes have enabled senior men to capture them, even though women play a significant role as peacemakers and peacebuilders in Bougainville. This has reinforced (gendered) power dynamics: ‘big fighting men’ come together to agree on their version of the truth, while women often remain silent about their experiences, including sexual violence, as their ‘contribution to peace’. Meanwhile youth – about 60% of the population and affected by cycles of trauma and lost educational opportunities – continue to be excluded from most political spaces.

*Institutional reform is both a product of reconciliation and a space where damaged relationships are transformed and reconciliation unfolds in practice*



## Reconciliation connects peacebuilding with statebuilding and nation-building

Reconciliation can provide a bridge between peacebuilding and state- or nation-building, by its emphasis on transforming horizontal and vertical relations. Statebuilding generally seeks to enhance the *capacity* of formal institutions to govern and deliver services effectively throughout the state’s territory, sometimes in cooperation with informal institutions. Reconciliation focuses attention on the *relational* aspects of improving governance and service delivery, reflecting that statebuilding is meant to benefit people and society as a whole. It highlights the need to transform how state institutions engage with individuals, groups, and society – towards greater responsiveness, inclusion, participation and concern with the well-being of all, making them more trustworthy. Institutional reform is both a product of reconciliation and a space where damaged relationships are transformed and reconciliation unfolds in practice.

In building relationships and fostering trust, coexistence and cohesion between diverse groups in society, and creating space for new narratives to emerge – or for multiple narratives to co-exist – reconciliation can also contribute to nation-building. Experiences in Nepal and the Philippines illustrate how exploring grievances and historical injustices raises questions about past approaches to creating a nation state. Surfacing how the conception of an ethnically homogenous ‘national identity’ has traditionally excluded ethnic or religious minorities and facilitated prejudice and violence against them, has made it possible to identify what measures are needed to enable a shared, peaceful future built on a civic model of nationalism. The relationship between reconciliation and state- or nation-building is, however, highly dependent on the type of conflict in question (see box 1, ‘Reconciliation and types of conflict contexts’).

### Example 8 INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Policing reform in Northern Ireland followed the 1998 Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement – including a changed name, badge and uniform, an independent Police Ombudsman and a new focus on accountability, representation, community policing and human rights. This did much to (re)build public trust in an essential state institution, end institutional sectarianism and contribute to the legitimacy and stability of the new dispensation. Deliberate recruitment across Catholic and Protestant communities based on a 50/50 principle, combined with a fundamental change in how policing was conducted (especially in nationalist communities) has resulted in a police service that is more representative of the society it polices and ensures higher confidence in law enforcement amongst the whole population in Northern Ireland.

## BOX 1: RECONCILIATION AND TYPES OF CONFLICT CONTEXTS

What can be done in relation to reconciliation depends in part on the type of the conflict and the nature of the state- or nation-building project in a context. How reconciliation plays into identity debates and where resistance to reconciliation lies will differ.

- In cases of **intra-state or civil conflict**, conflict arises in a single political entity or governance system, however disputed. Here, talk of coexistence and the social contract takes place within a fractured, but common territorial space. Reconciliation work then tends to involve envisioning a *shared* future, while addressing the grievances of the different groups in conflict. It may advance more inclusive civic state- and nation-building. In other contexts, the dominant Western model of an overarching nation state is less relevant or legitimate, as is for example the case in several Pacific contexts.
- In cases of **inter-state conflict**, such as the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or India and Pakistan, there is no singular shared social contract. Identity-based state- or nation-building in this instance is often in opposition to the other state, and involves rigid, mutually-exclusive narratives that are threatened by reconciliation. In these cases, reconciliation work is more aimed at reaching at a *mutually-acceptable and interdependent* future rather than a shared future, and at coexistence as neighbours rather than social cohesion.
- In the context of **asymmetric, secessionist conflict**, such as in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict context, similar dynamics apply. Here, to talk of the 'shared vision' that many understand to be integral to reconciliation is inappropriate. For a group or entity striving for self-determination, 'shared futures' and 'social cohesion' carry connotations of (re)integration or absorption into the dominant state. Current debates about the 'national project' on either side of the conflict have at their core fundamental identity issues. As such, reconciliation remains highly relevant, but the process of state- or nation-building itself is contested and integral to the conflict.
- **Hybrid or proxy conflicts**, such as in Libya or Syria, bring yet another set of challenges to reconciliation work: where external states have vested interests in particular outcomes within a highly complex and fractured conflict context, this raises questions about accountability and the ownership of, and stakeholders in, state- or nation-building, and reconciliation initiatives.

### Reconciliation helps prevent unresolved trauma from generating new violence

High-intensity violence, protracted conflict and oppression inflict deep wounds on individual human beings, communities, and societies beyond political division, economic hardship and the destruction of infrastructure. It lays waste to human connections, trust and belonging, wrecking the social fabric. The resulting fear and fragility undermine individual and collective capacity for recovery and can fuel a cycle of violence instead. Acknowledging trauma and integrating it into reconciliation work is essential to restoring people's day-to-day functioning and breaking cycles of violent conflict. Yet 'healing' – a word often used in this context – can imply a closure or resolution that belies the magnitude of what people have experienced or lost. Individuals respond very differently to trauma and require different forms of support in dealing with it. For many, this will involve learning to live with unresolved trauma.

Building lasting peace requires addressing the emotional and psychological impact of conflict and violence. Reconciliation work, with its focus on relationships, is helpful here by creating space for the difficult conversations that are needed among individuals, groups and societies and providing appropriate and context-sensitive outlets for emotions. In so doing, it can help weave together the collective and societal nature of reconciliation with its more personal and private aspects.

***Reconciliation cannot be based on 'guilty silence' about past violence. It is not an excuse for doing nothing about past wrongs or accepting impunity.***

## Reconciliation helps prevent impunity from undermining peace

Failure to address a legacy of past violence or oppression can generate a culture of impunity which has serious ramifications. Past levels of repression, if not addressed, tend to affect present government behaviour and facilitate abuses by security agencies. When targeted at ethnic or religious minorities long marginalised or harassed, this can trigger violent responses, especially if fair mechanisms for raising grievances and seeking redress are absent. Collective memories of suffering can also easily be manipulated by political elites in societies emerging from war or oppression. They may do this to justify exclusionary and militarist policies and constraints on civic space, shield people allegedly responsible for crimes from accountability efforts or mobilise constituencies for violence. Sri Lanka is arguably a case in point. It shows how impunity can breed further atrocity, amplify anti-democratic tendencies, exacerbate marginalisation of minorities and raise the risk of violent insurgency and terrorist attacks.

## Reconciliation is consistent with justice

Negative views of reconciliation partly stem from how 'reconciliation rhetoric' was combined with amnesties in the 1970s-1990s (e.g. in Argentina, Chile, and South Africa), and may still be used to justify a lack of action on past violence and necessary reform.

### Example 9 ABUSING RECONCILIATION

In February 2020, the nationalist government of Sri Lanka referred to reconciliation when explaining its renegeing on commitments to address the legacy of the country's 26-year civil war. It withdrew from Resolution 30/1 by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), adopted in 2015 and co-sponsored by the previous government, which committed Sri Lanka to creating several mechanisms to promote reconciliation, accountability and human rights in the country. At its withdrawal, the government – led by the politicians and generals who were in office at the end of the war – announced that it would pursue "an inclusive, domestically designed and executed reconciliation and accountability process." Yet one year later, instead of advancing a 'home-grown' process, the government has reversed the limited progress made by the previous administration. The few mechanisms that were created are under threat and no longer independent; respect for the rule of law and human rights has verifiably diminished.

Yet reconciliation cannot be based on 'guilty silence' about past violence. It is not an excuse for doing nothing about past wrongs or accepting impunity. Reconciliation is concerned with justice, recognising that justice has retributive, restorative and distributive dimensions. For many people and groups affected by violent conflict, experiencing 'justice' in relation to past violence and making peace with the past means more than punishing perpetrators. It entails doing justice to their lived experiences of injustice and indignity, ensuring that their future will be different and redressing structural violence through social justice. This implies wider processes of recognition, redistribution and reform that contribute to inclusive, accountable and legitimate institutions, socio-economic transformation, civic trust and social coexistence and cohesion.

*Reconciliation operates at the interface of human rights and peacebuilding, justice and peace*

## Reconciliation recognises perfect justice cannot be achieved

A multidimensional understanding of justice does not negate the value of accountability – the concept of justice that has become dominant in global policy discourse and international law since the late 1990s. Nor does it ignore the reality that pursuing peace and justice after violence or oppression involves a difficult balancing act between law, politics and morality and that painful trade-offs are hard to avoid. Seldom if ever do all victims or survivors get the justice they deserve; their compromise over justice is often offset against the promise of future peace and stability with respect for human dignity. Truly achieving justice for those whose lives or communities have been irrevocably destroyed is impossible; justice is always imperfect.

## Reconciliation links peace and justice

Reconciliation highlights that much goes missing when 'building peace' and 'seeking justice' are reduced to a narrow focus on concluding elite pacts to end violence on the one hand and ensuring individual criminal accountability for past abuses on the other. Both entail much more. Working on and towards reconciliation presents an opportunity to define and promote justice in its multiple dimensions and the full spectrum of human rights – civil, political, social, economic *and* cultural rights – as critical to preventing violent conflict and building sustainable peace. Reconciliation operates at the interface of human rights and peacebuilding, justice and peace.

# 5. WHEN TO DO RECONCILIATION?

## Reconciliation work can happen at any point in time, throughout the conflict cycle

Working on reconciliation is possible and necessary in all phases of conflict. Reconciliation is often thought of in the context of formal negotiations and mediated settlements, and as primarily relevant after periods of crisis. Yet experience shows that it is not an exclusively post-conflict endeavour (see [Section 6.2](#)). Initiatives to transform horizontal and vertical relationships are relevant before, during and beyond a formal peace process, in its immediate aftermath and long after. They can accompany work to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of violent conflict, bringing a relational lens to building and sustaining peace.

*A reconciliation approach can be built into peacebuilding, humanitarian and development work, complementing other priorities, rather than competing with them*

Entry points for reconciliation can be found in the context of peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, stabilisation and long-term development and prevention. For example, attention can be devoted to relationship-building across divides in the context of assistance to displaced populations, psychosocial support, or rebuilding public infrastructure. Reconciliation can be understood as a standalone area of work, but also as an approach or way of doing things – a focus on (re)building relationships – that can be embedded in other initiatives and processes and that spans the conflict cycle.

## Reconciliation work is long-term; needs and priorities change in a given context

Reconciliation needs to be approached as a long-term endeavour, often spanning generations. The evolution of what happens and the passage of time changes the realm of what is possible in a context, what is prioritised, and what is experienced as most needed. Different types of violence, suffering and victimhood may emerge as conflict(s) and reconciliation processes progress and mutate over time.

In addition, the experience of conflict and of the past also changes from generation to generation, and the consequences of violence and oppression often sustain over several generations. This gives rise to the need for [intergenerational dialogue](#). Here the challenge is to interest next generations in the past, while not transmitting the hurt and trauma of the past to them. Inevitably next generations will be affected by the experiences of their parents and grandparents, but the silence that often arises between generations, out of a concern to protect, can present obstacles to reconciliation.

### Example 10 LAYERS OF GRIEVANCES

In Libya, acknowledging and addressing the past involves grappling with its multi-layered nature. Grievances about wrongs of the 40-year Kaddafi regime that came to the fore during and immediately after the revolution lay on top of concerns resulting from long-standing rivalries among various tribes and ethnic groups. The social and political polarisation and fragmentation that have ensued since the 2014 elections added further abuses and grievances, as has the involvement of foreign powers and fighters. This mix of old and new grievances about real and perceived injustices resulting from the transmutation of conflict and violence over time comprise a complex reconciliation agenda.

## Reconciliation requires adaptive and ongoing programming, and awareness of implicit 'sequencing'

Programming on – and for – reconciliation needs to be adaptive and ongoing, to take into account evolving needs and expectations in a given context. It is not a matter of figuring out a strict order in which to undertake a set series of interventions. Thinking of reconciliation in terms of linear or formulaic sequencing is not helpful. The entry points will be distinct in each context and can change in the same context over time. In this regard, reconciliation is less a single 'process', and more a series of initiatives which, over time, add to a cumulative impact.

*A diversity of initiatives (of different scale, scope and focus), may be the most feasible and effective approach*

Actors seeking to contribute to reconciliation from within and outside of a specific context may have different priorities or preferences about which time frames are to be tackled when: whether, for example, to focus first on creating a better future or defer this work and concentrate on addressing the past. For any actor, reflecting on one's own implicit approach to progressing work on reconciliation and continuing to consider whether it fits current needs is important, not least as it is challenging for one actor to engage different time frames simultaneously. This raises the challenge of communicating closely with and working alongside others, whose work may be oriented toward different timeframes. The substance, priorities and direction of reconciliation need to remain subject to continuing dialogue.

# 6. WHAT DOES RECONCILIATION INVOLVE IN PRACTICE?

## Reconciliation work encompasses a wide range of activities

Working on and towards reconciliation is possible through diverse initiatives, undertaken at different levels of society, in formal and informal settings, by various actors. Two ways of clustering activities that demonstrate the wide variety of relevant work in this area are set out below. The first categorises activities in terms of substantive focus; the second relates them to phases of conflict. Another model for clustering activities can be viewed [here](#). The information provided below and the associated diagrams are indicative rather than comprehensive; they illustrate some of what reconciliation work may entail in practice. Examples of a range of different reconciliation activities demonstrate the overlap and lack of neat division between different focal areas or phases of conflict.

### 6.1 RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES IN TERMS OF SUBSTANTIVE FOCUS

Diagram 3 below clusters activities in relation to four focus areas derived from the working definition of reconciliation. These are captured in summary form in the quadrants of the inner circle, reflecting that reconciliation activities are by definition conducted in the present, even if they engage with the violent past and project into the envisioned future.

The four focus areas are set out in [table 1](#), together with an indication of sample activities. A few examples are given of initiatives that relate to each particular focus area, though a number of the examples apply to more than one. These examples can be found together [here](#). The work in these four areas is interlinked and overlapping – reflecting that reality does not abide by neat categories. This is not intended to be a comprehensive or exclusive list of activities, nor does the way in which the focus areas are presented imply a set or linear order.

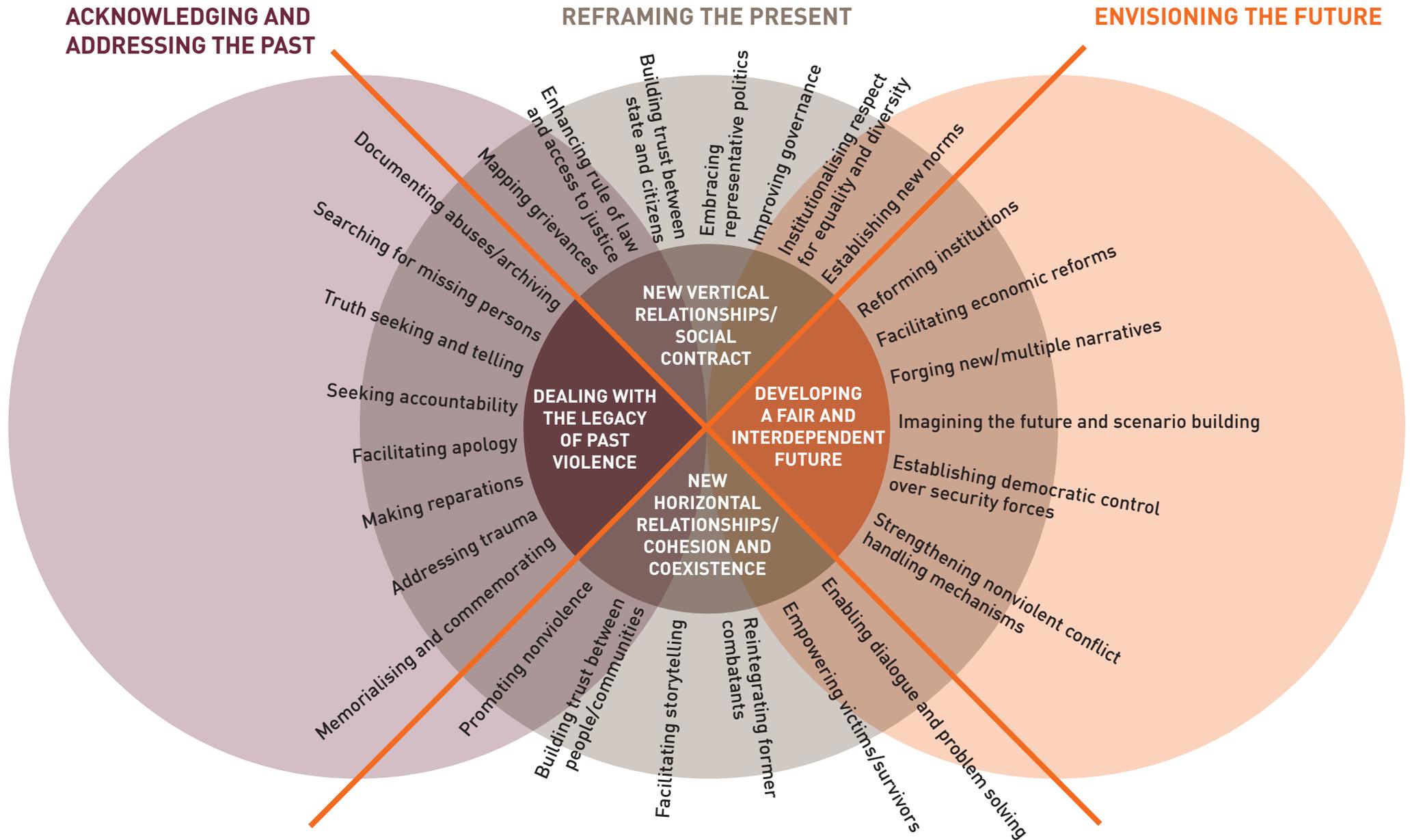
In this [table](#), some activities straddle the four focus areas such as the creation of new narratives, which contributes to developing a fair and interdependent future *and* to new vertical and horizontal relationships. Others seem to fit mostly in one area but have implications for others. Prosecuting war crimes is, for example, part of addressing the legacy of past violence but also feeds into '(re)building vertical relationships and social contract (by preventing persons responsible for serious crimes from fulfilling political or military roles) and helps to develop a fair and interdependent future (by signalling no one is above the law and asserting the importance of human rights). This reflects that reconciliation activities usually work towards multiple goals at the same time, and that work on the past and future coincide in the present. It is also worth noting that formal, state-sponsored processes to address the past tend to attract much attention, but many other initiatives in this area happen out of the limelight.

***Reconciliation activities require a nuanced understanding of the impacts of violence and oppression on different social constituencies and cohorts within them***

Irrespective of the specific substantive focus, reconciliation activities require a nuanced understanding of the impacts of violence and oppression on different social constituencies and cohorts within them – including women and men; youth; persons with disabilities; gender, sexual, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities; and indigenous peoples. The gender, youth and inclusion aspects of reconciliation work warrant special attention because of recurrent shortcomings in some of the dominant and traditional approaches. For example, however promising as a reconciliation initiative, the Palava Hut process outlined in [Example 21](#) runs the risk of missing [an opportunity to rebuild gender relations](#) damaged in the Liberian civil war by mostly conceiving of women as victims of war, despite their active role in ending direct violence.

**i Diagram 3:** Building on Diagram 1, activities are depicted here as taking place in the *present*, even if focused on addressing the past or envisioning the future. The present is being reframed through processes of acknowledging and dealing with the legacy of violence and creating a fair, mutually-acceptable and interdependent future; these help to (re)build horizontal and vertical relationships and lay the foundations for peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and a new social contract.

**DIAGRAM 3: MAPPING RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES IN TERMS OF SUBSTANTIVE FOCUS**



Adapted from an image by S. Keyes (2021)

**TABLE 1: MAPPING RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES IN TERMS OF SUBSTANTIVE FOCUS**

| TYPES OF ACTIVITIES   | SAMPLE ACTIVITIES  |
|---|--|
| <b>(RE)BUILDING VERTICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT</b> generally includes:  |  |
| Activities that enhance vertical interaction between the state and its population, improve governance and build civic trust in institutions, governance arrangements, formal and informal authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conducting listening processes to map grievances</li> <li>• making security services more representative</li> <li>• vetting public officials, members of parliament and security forces for involvement in past violence</li> <li>• creating community safety forums involving members of the police and communities</li> <li>• fighting corruption</li> <li>• creating an ombudsperson’s office to investigate misconduct by public officials</li> </ul>         |
| Activities that strengthen the rule of law and/or institutionalise respect for equality and diversity   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• protecting and promoting human rights</li> <li>• strengthening access to justice through community mediation</li> <li>• tackling impunity and enhancing accountability mechanisms for public officials</li> <li>• reforming electoral laws to enhance inclusion</li> <li>• creating a national human rights commission</li> <li>• constitutional reform and developing legislation protecting linguistic, cultural and religious rights</li> </ul>                |
| Activities that enhance representative politics   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reforming the political system to enhance political pluralism</li> <li>• helping armed groups transform into political actors</li> <li>• creating a parliamentary women’s caucus</li> <li>• creating channels for dialogue, such as advisory and consultative bodies, between government and minorities</li> <li>• facilitating interaction between national leaders and marginalised groups, youth, and diaspora</li> </ul>                                      |
| Activities that enhance self-governance   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• devolution of government authority to regional or local level through decentralisation arrangements</li> <li>• cultural autonomy arrangements that allow communities control over matters important to them such as language education, protection of cultural heritage or traditional lifestyles</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Examples: <i>Ending the state’s militarisation (Guatemala); state-society reconciliation (Colombia)</i></b>  |  |
| <b>DEVELOPING A FAIR AND INTERDEPENDENT FUTURE</b> generally includes:  |  |
| Activities that seek to reform institutions and reform the economy  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tackling exclusion in public service</li> <li>• enhancing independence of the judiciary</li> <li>• strengthening civilian oversight over security services</li> <li>• facilitating land reform and creating a system for fair management and distribution of natural resources</li> <li>• addressing inequity in access to goods and services</li> <li>• reducing military expenditure</li> <li>• increasing social investment in health and education</li> </ul> |
| Activities that seek to develop new narratives, create space for multiple narratives to coexist and/or that seek to imagine the future  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing scenarios or doing transformative scenario planning</li> <li>• revising textbooks to reflect different perspectives</li> <li>• facilitating intergenerational dialogue</li> <li>• supporting participation and reflecting experiences of marginalised groups in the media</li> </ul>   |
| Activities that strengthen mechanisms for handling conflict without violence  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enhancing capacity and systems for the use of mediation</li> <li>• facilitating community policing</li> <li>• enhancing inclusion and gender-sensitivity in traditional dispute resolution</li> <li>• developing complaints mechanisms in governance and law enforcement processes</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Examples: <i>Women’s reconciliation platform (Iraq); parallel history textbook (Israel/ Palestine); regional peace and reconciliation framework (Somali Regional State/Ogaden, Ethiopia)</i></b>   |  |

| TYPES OF ACTIVITIES   | SAMPLE ACTIVITIES  |
|---|--|
| <b>(RE)BUILDING HORIZONTAL RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL COHESION AND COEXISTENCE</b> generally includes:   |  |
| Activities that challenge stereotypes and build trust between people and communities  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing exposure to ‘the Other’</li> <li>• dialogue to develop understanding between former adversaries and competing groups to address prejudices and reduce enemy images</li> <li>• facilitating story-telling, joint development projects, arts and cultural festivals, etc.</li> </ul>   |
| Activities that empower victims and survivors and that reintegrate former combatants  | <p><i>for victims/survivors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting organisation and mobilisation</li> <li>• helping them to document and share experiences</li> <li>• providing counselling services and assisting peer support</li> </ul> <p><i>for former combatants</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing national reintegration programs, local reintegration ceremonies, etc</li> </ul> <p><i>for both</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitating restorative justice processes</li> <li>• facilitating physical and psychological rehabilitation</li> <li>• supporting skills training, job schemes, etc.</li> </ul> |
| Activities that enable dialogue and joint problem solving or that promote nonviolence   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting community dialogues</li> <li>• establishing peace committees with diverse membership</li> <li>• creating or supporting youth platforms and peace education</li> <li>• enhancing local mechanisms for dispute resolution</li> <li>• building capacity in nonviolent communication, mediation, etc.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Examples: <u>Community-led reintegration (Northeast Nigeria); local cultural practices (Liberia); agreeing to coexist (Libya); dialogue of former combatants (Western Balkans)</u></b> |  |
| <b>DEALING WITH THE LEGACY OF PAST VIOLENCE</b> generally includes:   |  |
| Activities that focus on truth-seeking, truth-telling and missing persons   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• documenting abuses</li> <li>• securing or creating archives</li> <li>• establishing commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions</li> <li>• facilitating truth-telling and story-telling through formal bodies and civil society initiatives</li> <li>• locating and identifying missing persons, organising exhumations, and supporting relatives to deal with administrative matters</li> </ul>  |
| Activities that seek accountability and make reparations  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vetting of public officials</li> <li>• alternative dispute resolution</li> <li>• criminal trials, domestic and ‘hybrid’ processes, civil lawsuits</li> <li>• trial monitoring, witness support and protection</li> <li>• devising and implementing measures for individual and collective reparations</li> <li>• compensation schemes</li> <li>• organising restitution</li> <li>• rehabilitating victims/survivors</li> <li>• formal and informal apologies</li> </ul>   |
| Activities that support psychosocial healing and facilitate memorialisation   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• addressing trauma</li> <li>• enhancing counselling services</li> <li>• organising peer support groups</li> <li>• education and awareness-raising on mental health</li> <li>• setting up memorials, erecting monuments</li> <li>• collective memory work</li> <li>• symbolic gestures</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Examples: <u>Memory work across divisions (Armenia/Azerbaijan); memorialisation (Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina)</u></b>   |  |



## 6.2 RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES IN RELATION TO PHASES OF CONFLICT

The sample activities outlined above in relation to substantive focus can also be clustered in relation to when in the conflict cycle an activity is possible and/or most likely to achieve its objectives. While thinking about reconciliation initiatives in relation to the phases of conflict, it is important to recognise that in reality these are not neatly delineated categories, and that several phases of conflict can be evident concurrently in the same context. For example, some regions may still experience violence while peace negotiations are ongoing. Also, progress in formal talks can fluctuate in protracted conflicts.

*In reality, several phases of conflict can be evident concurrently in the same context*

Table 2 is therefore an imperfect attempt to indicate what types of activity are possible at different phases of the conflict cycle. This format implies a degree of precision and clarity that is at odds with the messiness

of reality highlighted elsewhere in this report. It also does not capture the nuance of thinking behind where where to place a dot, and which colour to use. This is necessarily subject to debate, considering not only *what* you can do, but also *how* you are able to do it in a given phase of conflict. Some elements of work in an activity area might be possible at a particular moment in time, whereas others might not. Initiatives that take place during violent or protracted conflict must be approached particularly carefully with a view to participants' security and taking into account the vulnerability of affected individuals and groups, for example women. It is also important to recognise that not all activities will be possible in a given context, irrespective of the phase of conflict. Finally, even when a box has an orange dot, indicating the greatest scope for activities, this does not imply that reconciliation work will be easy.

Despite these limitations, the table is included as a springboard for constructive and nuanced discussion about possible entry points: what might be possible, in what way and under what conditions, in a specific context.

**TABLE 2: MAPPING RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES THROUGH PHASES OF CONFLICT**

● Possible, with significant challenges      ● Possible, with limitations as to what can be achieved      ● Possible and most likely to achieve its objectives

| ACTIVITY AREA  | PHASE OF CONFLICT |                     |              |                 |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|
|  | Violent conflict  | Protracted conflict | Negotiations | Post-settlement |
| Documenting abuses, archiving  | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Searching for missing persons  | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Mapping grievances (social, political, economic)   | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Raising awareness/ building capacity among drivers/ future stakeholders in reconciliation  | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Empowering victims/ survivors (assisting them to self-organise)                            | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Strengthening nonviolent conflict handling mechanisms                                      | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Reflection and dialogue on concerns and priorities for addressing harm done                | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Facilitating storytelling and hearing diverse perspectives                                 | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Community level trust-building initiatives   | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Psychosocial support and trauma work   | ●                 | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Reintegrating offenders/former combatants  |                   | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Forging multiple and/or new narratives   |                   | ●                   | ●            | ●               |
| Negotiating provisions about reconciliation and addressing the past in peace talks         |                   |                     | ●            |                 |
| Informing talks by assisting victims to voice concerns and consulting civil society actors |                   |                     | ●            | ●               |
| Developing national frameworks for approaching reconciliation and addressing the past      |                   |                     |              | ●               |
| Reparation and compensation schemes  |                   |                     |              | ●               |
| Reforming institutions and facilitating economic reforms                                   |                   |                     |              | ●               |

**i Table 2:** The possible activities and phases of conflict are listed in no particular order, and are not comprehensive. A box is dotted to indicate when an activity is possible in one of the phases of conflict. The colour coding indicates the relative ease of carrying out an activity during a specific phase of conflict and/or the likelihood that it will achieve its objectives.

## Reconciliation opportunities and challenges vary at different phases of conflict

### 1. Ongoing violent conflict/absence of political will

As [table 2](#) demonstrates, a range of activities can be pursued during violent or protracted conflict in advance of a settlement, as well as during mediation or post-settlement.

The two examples below, from very different contexts, demonstrate that documentation and [archiving work](#) (collecting testimonies, mapping grievances, documenting abuses, search for missing persons) is possible during violent/protracted conflict and can lay the foundations for future progress in reconciliation.

#### **Example 11** PREPARING THE GROUND

In the absence of a formal peace process in the India-Pakistan conflict over [Kashmir](#) there have been very few efforts to (re)build relationships or promote reconciliation initiatives at national or regional level. Political sensitivities have prevented peacebuilding actors from engaging directly on the theme of dealing with the past and reconciliation. Yet a focus, primarily by human rights actors, on mapping and documenting past wrongdoing and human rights violations has been possible. Gathering individual stories and testimonies is one of the few things that can be done in the current context. Along with existing community-level dialogue and peacebuilding efforts, it lays the ground for these stories to be heard more widely in future, for reviving old relationships and building new ones. It also creates a foundation for a longer term conversation on addressing the past and creating an interdependent future, when the time is ripe.

#### **Example 12** WORK ACROSS PHASES

In Brazil, while military rule was ongoing, the Roman Catholic and United Presbyterian churches organised a daring project to photocopy and microfilm official records that were at risk of destruction, providing information about 7,000 persons tried before military courts between 1964 and 1979. Publication of a summary of the material was only possible after the return to civilian rule, in July 1985. The report [Nunca Mais:Brasil](#) (Brazil: Never Again), documented the extensive use of torture during the military dictatorship. It became a bestseller and led in time to official acknowledgement by the state of its historical human rights abuses and to reparations and truth recovery processes.

*Even in fractured and highly unstable political settings, community-level dialogue and reconciliation initiatives can and do happen*

It is often also possible to work on local level dialogue initiatives without the relative stability of a political settlement. The example from Libya below illustrates such dialogue-based trust-building initiatives that acknowledge harm done and help to contain violence between communities.

#### **Example 13** AGREEING TO COEXIST

Violent conflict and political gridlock have marked Libya since the revolution in 2011 and are compounded by competing power centres, longstanding tribal hostilities and the involvement of multiple foreign powers. The current situation is characterised by the lack of a functioning state and general lawlessness, high levels of violence and numerous local-level conflicts within and between towns. Yet [local informal and traditional mediation efforts](#) manage to de-escalate tension, contain violence, and build bridges between groups. These are often undertaken by tribal councils of elders, and civil society activists and heads of municipal governments may also be involved. The local agreements reached usually focus on facilitating coexistence by resolving immediate issues and often involve a broader recognition that 'harm was done' (e.g. land appropriation by Khaddafi's regime affecting local power dynamics and distribution of resources). More wide-reaching resolution addressing underlying causes of conflict is difficult to achieve in the absence of a functioning state, legal system, and economic conditions that allow for compensation. Despite their limitations these informal mediation processes contribute to pockets of stability and strengthen [local capacity to handle conflict through dialogue](#).

Admittedly there are limits to what can be achieved in the absence of a political settlement or political will at the national level. Yet even in such fractured and highly unstable political settings as Libya, community-level dialogue and reconciliation initiatives can and do happen, helping to enhance security, reduce local tensions and [prevent \(further\) escalation of violence](#).

Evidencing that such work in the midst of violent conflict helps to build resilience or creates conditions conducive to overall settlement is however very difficult. Also, local initiatives do not necessarily 'scale up' to (sub)-regions, or the country at large, so its wider transformative effect is uncertain and may be intangible. This does not make it less valuable for the communities involved; it facilitates everyday coexistence and enables communities to get on with their lives.

## 2. Mediation and negotiation

Where formal processes of mediation and negotiation are ongoing, reframing narratives at elite level may become possible, enabling relationships to be built sufficiently to continue along a path of nonviolent politics towards a mutually-acceptable, interdependent future.

### Example 14 NARRATIVE CHANGE

In the context of Northern Ireland, during the negotiations that eventually led to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998, reconciliation was a device used to promote inter-community partnership. As the UK and Irish governments started to collaborate in the negotiations process, political elites of the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland began to see a need to work together. Over time, the implicit retreat by all sides from incompatible assertions of cultural and territorial domination was reconfigured as a common aspiration to reconciliation with a shared interest in freedom from sectarian harassment.

Mediation and negotiation processes can also enable the setting of parameters for formal, national processes of reconciliation and addressing the past in peace talks. This presents both opportunities and challenges: a peace process that is responsive to immediate priorities can either open up or close down prospects for future reconciliation, depending on how it is crafted.

## 3. Post-settlement

[Table 2](#) indicates that the post-settlement context ideally provides the basic levels of security, stability and political will to address conflict without violence that allow a wider range of reconciliation initiatives. Activities such as developing a national reconciliation framework, or reparations, require certain conditions to make them possible, and these are much more likely to be present after a peace settlement has been reached.

'Post-settlement' though, does not necessarily imply a *post-conflict* environment. Parties still pursue their interests and goals after signing a peace agreement, using political rather than military means. Fundamental issues and competing claims and agendas continue to be played out through peaceful political and policy-making channels as the parties jockey for position. This usually applies both to engagement at the top political level and at lower levels of authority: many former adversaries keep on trying to gain as much and lose as little as possible in the post-settlement environment.

As a result, working on reconciliation remains challenging, even as more opportunities may open up. The political will to proceed – which was present (in some form) at the time of concluding the settlement – may dissipate once constituencies start to grapple with what was agreed, and there are multiple competing demands on scarce resources.

### *Parties still pursue their interests and goals after signing a peace agreement, using political rather than military means*

The example below from Ethiopia's Somali Regional State (commonly referred to as 'Ogaden') reflects the possibility of having multiple mechanisms at different levels and the importance of pursuing links between various initiatives. It also points to the ongoing need to consider representation in mechanisms established to address the past, in a post-settlement context.

### Example 15 REGIONAL PEACE AND RECONCILIATION FRAMEWORK

The regional government of the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia is developing a Regional Peace and Reconciliation Framework in follow-up to the [Asmara agreement](#) signed in October 2018 between the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Government of Ethiopia, which ended a 24-year armed insurgency. This complements the creation of a reconciliation commission by the federal government, which will lead reconciliation processes across the country. Only one ethnic Somali was initially appointed to this federal commission, which for some in the region symbolised the under-representation of Somalis in the federal institutions. The Regional Peace and Reconciliation Framework will consider the complex nature of conflict in the region as the ONLF insurgency was but one aspect of insecurity facing the region. Other elements are federal-state relations, cross-border conflicts with the Oromia and Afar regions, land and natural resource ownership and inter-clan conflicts. The Regional Framework is also meant to promote better coordination and collaboration between the regional government, the ONLF, victims and survivors networks, elders and local communities, and to facilitate links with the federal institutions with a mandate on peace and reconciliation issues.

## EXAMPLES OF RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES

### Example 16 ENDING THE STATE'S MILITARISATION

Following the signing of Guatemalan Peace Accords in 1996, multiple measures were taken to end the militarisation of the state which evolved during 36 years of armed conflict. These entailed, amongst other things, the dismantling of the counter-insurgent legal and institutional framework developed to support the state's violent oppression of dissent (which had led to systematic human rights violations during the armed conflict); creation of a New Civilian Police to replace the highly corrupt National Police; and development of a new Military Doctrine based on democratic principles focused on defending the country from external threats and discarding the 'internal enemy' hypothesis that had long guided Guatemalan military operations. The absence of a policy asserting civilian control over the military however limits their subordination to political authority.

### Example 17 STATE-SOCIETY RECONCILIATION

In Colombia, the Women, Peace and Security Collective has devised a process that starts to facilitate tough conversations about the nature of the social contract. It brings together women from various societal sectors, including those traditionally opposed to one another, such as the security forces, human rights groups and civil society. Women taking part share their experiences of the conflict and in doing so break down some of the institutional and conflict-related stereotyping that informs their views. The focus on women, peace and security also helps participants shift from a 'hard' security paradigm emphasising military capacity to a new security paradigm focused on human security. The conversations constitute dialogue among disparate people that could not previously have been imagined.

### Example 18 WOMEN'S RECONCILIATION PLATFORM

In 2020, a group of 60 Iraqi women peace activists from 5 Iraqi provinces, operating as a network under the umbrella 'Her Role: Inclusive Reconciliation, Lasting Peace', have developed *A Strategy for Peace in Iraq: A Gender-Sensitive National Reconciliation Platform*. The purpose of this policy document is to provide leading actors in Iraq and the international community with a blueprint for building peace and promoting gender-sensitive policy priorities in eight areas that must be addressed in order to create a new reality in Iraq, namely women's empowerment; safety

and security; trust and confidence; victims and survivors; education and youth; governance and redistribution of resources; health and environment, and agriculture. The women engage this platform – which was originally developed in 2018 and updated in 2020 – to generate public support for their vision for peace in Iraq and to call for their recommendations to be adopted and implemented.

### Example 19 PARALLEL HISTORY TEXTBOOK

In the context of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict, national narratives have perpetuated distrust and hostility, and leave little room for acknowledging diverse perspectives on the historical past, culture or future aspirations of the 'Other'. Against this backdrop, an Israeli psychologist and a Palestinian educationalist began working with teams of schoolteachers from both sides to develop history teaching materials. The narratives of the different sides were too far apart to write a joint history book. Instead, project participants developed a binational textbook on the history of the Middle East conflict. This took both narratives separately into account by presenting them side by side – the Israeli narrative on one side and the Palestinian on the other. They did this to foster self-critical thinking and mutual dialogue, considering that recognising each other's historical narrative is a first step toward reconciliation. At the time of writing, the teaching materials were not being used in schools on either side, but are available for use in extracurricular activities alongside approved school books.

### Example 20 COMMUNITY-LED REINTEGRATION

In northeast Nigeria, informal community-led initiatives to support the reintegration of ex-combatants from the Boko Haram insurgency (and its offshoot Islamic State in West Africa) into local communities are in some cases beginning to offer a pathway out of violence for members of armed groups. Long-standing violence has left deep scars on the collective psyche and continues to perpetuate fear, mistrust and animosity. Due to lack of trust in official processes – experienced as being imposed, lacking public engagement and clear communication – communities increasingly have more faith in their own ability to address the need for reintegration, including through safe and inclusive platforms for public repentance. Examples of existing initiatives include traditional reconciliation ceremonies, or *sulhu* (which are often preceded by a period of self-exile to prepare those involved), and oath-taking on the Qu'ran, including public acknowledgement and renunciation of wrongdoing and a request for forgiveness from the community.

### Example 21 LOCAL CULTURAL PRACTICES

The Liberian government has encouraged the use of a traditional conflict resolution mechanism, the Palava Hut, as part of its transitional justice programme to come to terms with the events of the 7-year civil war. The Palava Hut concept stems from a traditional circular building, once common across Liberia, that is used as a discussion space where people go to address wrongs committed within the community. This can involve victims confronting offenders and mediation of restorative justice processes by a respected Elder or panel of Elders. The circular shape symbolises sustained relationships and the process reflects traditional understanding that relational disharmony can threaten community resilience. The concept is now engrained culturally and 'Palava Hut' processes take place outside of traditional spaces. Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommended the establishment of a 'National Palava Hut Programme' to facilitate community-based truth telling, atonement and reconciliation by providing a platform and space for victims and perpetrators to meet and tell their experiences, resolve differences arising as a result of war, and foster peaceful coexistence. Persons recommended for prosecution in the TRC Report for commission of international crimes would not be entitled to be pardoned through this process.

### Example 22 MEMORY WORK ACROSS DIVISIONS

Painstaking efforts over years in the South Caucasus have developed memory work in the context of protracted conflicts. A trilogy of films – Parts of a Circle – tells the history of violent Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict almost 30 years ago. Working together for five years on the films, Armenian and Azerbaijani film makers and journalists researched past events, gathered footage, and interviewed a wide range of people from political leaders to people displaced by war. The series of films they produced cover the period leading to violence, the war itself, and relations since. Having agreed on a core set of facts about the violent past, the film makers tell the history deliberately from different perspectives and challenge the notion that either side has the monopoly on the truth. During the making of the films, relations worsened and escalated into renewed violence, delaying the trilogy's public release. However, a summary film was released in 2020, setting a precedent, sharing the responsibility for presenting a complex and multi-faceted narrative.

### Example 23 MEMORIALISATION

In February 2017, a permanent exhibition opened in the Potocari Memorial Centre (PMC) in Srebrenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina, titled 'Srebrenica Genocide – the failure of the international community.' It recounts the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and focuses especially on the fall of Srebrenica – an enclave containing 40,000 people under the formal protection of a UN battalion of Dutch soldiers at the time – in July 1995, that resulted in the killing of over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces. Housed in the former headquarters of 'Dutchbat', the exhibition brings together several narratives, including a descriptive, factual account of the events based on internationally recognised sources (e.g. verdicts from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia) which museums and exhibitions in the former Yugoslavia seldom put forth. It also incorporates narratives of victims and survivors on the one hand and former Dutchbat soldiers on the other, after extensive and often difficult negotiations between and within both groups. The exhibition seeks to work towards a common narrative to the extent possible and to show diverse narratives in instances where this is not the case. Yet to date it has not been possible to make it a fully inclusive memorialisation that commemorates all the victims of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina; it focuses on the victims of the Srebrenica genocide.

### Example 24 DIALOGUE OF FORMER COMBATANTS

The Center for Nonviolent Action is a group of peace activists of different nationalities with offices in Sarajevo and Belgrade. Among their many initiatives with a focus on peacebuilding and dealing with the past is work with former combatants. Intensive trainings and other work with war veterans who fought in opposing armies during the wars in former Yugoslavia created opportunities for difficult conversations. Former enemies made contact with each other in a safe space that enabled dialogue to try to understand one's own and others' positions. Over time the relationships established among a core group made it possible for them to carry out joint visits to the atrocity sites of all parties to war, across the region. Taking former combatants to commemorate at one another's memorial sites and marking important dates from recent history together is challenging and transformative for the individuals involved. It is also of great symbolic importance: these visits provoke interest and media coverage, and challenge the predominant culture of remembering.

# 7. HOW TO APPROACH RECONCILIATION WORK?

## Focus both on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’: process really matters

Designing an approach to reconciliation requires an adaptive strategy tailored to context, and rooted in local political dynamics and relationships. Reconciliation does not lend itself to a toolkit approach, or to the technical or sequential application of certain political or legal interventions or activities to achieve the desired goal. Getting the process right is key: it not only matters what you do but also, and especially, how things are done.

*Designing an approach to reconciliation requires an adaptive strategy tailored to context, and rooted in local political dynamics and relationships*

When developing or supporting reconciliation processes, the following principles and questions can be used to guide approaches. (See [here](#) for additional pointers for donors).

## PREPARATION

### Engage in thorough, ongoing, and participatory context and conflict analysis

1. Begin from a deep understanding of the context, political dynamics and relationships, and key grievances that need to be addressed.
2. Pay particular attention to understanding and mapping relationships and the potential for improving relationships and building trust. Include gender sensitivity as part of your analysis, and surface diverse experiences, perceptions and power relations. Take this all into account as you explore who is ready to engage, to what extent, and when.
3. Apply conflict sensitivity, anticipate resistance and do not shy away from potentially contentious issues; plan how to mitigate risks. (See also points 12 and 13).
4. Assess meaningful reconciliation practice to date, and judge initiatives by what is done in practice, rather than what is spoken about. Beware of political manipulation, and elites hiding behind the language of reconciliation with little commitment to follow through.
5. Identify where the willingness for meaningful reconciliation lies. Is there buy-in from elements of the political elite, from civil society, or from other opinion formers such as religious leaders? Which actors have the political or social will to drive processes of change?

### Pay attention to culture and language

6. Explore the local terms and vocabularies available for, and associated with, reconciliation. What baggage, if any, do they carry from the past and to what extent can this give rise to misunderstanding? How do terms used by different groups reflect parallel conceptions of reconciliation and diverse experiences of conflict?
7. Factor in the connotations of specific words in a context (e.g. in some contexts the term ‘victim’ is perceived as empowering, in others, ‘survivor’ is preferred).
8. Explore opportunities for forging new language for reconciliation, and shared meanings in translation. Think tactically about how to use terms for framing reconciliation work that are context-appropriate.

### Reflect on the roles and legitimacy of different actors

9. Take your lead from people living in the context: they know best what is possible and needed, and are in the best position to drive change. At the same time, avoid romanticising local actors and approaches and understand there may be drawbacks to local practice (e.g. in reinforcing patterns of exclusion).
10. Be open to engaging people beyond your usual circles. Do not demonise, or dismiss wholesale, those who have played roles in violence and oppression or who have been associated with it in some way. It is important to work with those with the legitimacy to bring about change.
11. Recognise the distinct role different stakeholders can play, and the complementarity of international and local actors. External governmental and non-governmental organisations can often facilitate access to spaces otherwise closed to national or local actors, and/or support their meaningful involvement in such spaces.
12. Reflect on how your own past and current actions impact on your potential to add value in relation to reconciliation work. Be aware of your own assumptions and biases, and of how you are perceived in different contexts.
13. Consider how visible you ‘need’ to be in relation to reconciliation efforts or funding – and about how visibility may affect the legitimacy of initiatives and/or that of actors in context. Discuss with your partners and be ready to take on a behind-the-scenes role if appropriate.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Adopt a multi-faceted and inclusive approach

14. Take a broad approach by identifying reconciliation needs and potential at multiple levels of society (including political, institutional, community, interpersonal and individual). Recognise that the impact of violence will have been different across groups and genders and within communities, which has implications for reconciliation needs and potential.
15. Explore the potential for a centralised, national approach, and the scope for traction through more localised initiatives. Reconciliation entails both top-down and bottom-up processes as well as work driven by local civil society ('middle out').
16. Be aware of inclusion, and gender and youth-sensitivity in programming. Enable broad and ongoing participation and dialogue by different and often divergent parts of society. Be sure to address the needs of victims and survivors, and to involve them in identifying these needs and devising suitable approaches.
17. Think about who might be missing from the conversation. Do not let the agenda be determined by a small group of capital-based NGOs, and be conscious of questions of representation and victim competition.

### Recognise messiness and seize the art of the possible

18. Be pragmatic, realistic and creative. Try to push boundaries, focusing on what is possible at any given point, and be patient.
19. Manage expectations: it is better to put the bar low and expand from there rather than raise expectations and then disappoint people.
20. Resist binaries: think in terms of both/and, rather than either/or.
  - When focusing efforts on one level, keep looking for opportunities to branch out and connect up and down. Efforts at these different levels influence one another and can be mutually complementary.
  - Recognise there are limits to e.g. victim/perpetrator categories: the boundaries between them are blurred. Also, a sole focus on this binary leaves out others who may have been complicit in or benefitting from past violence (e.g. bystanders and beneficiaries), and whose involvement is important for reconciliation.
  - Reflect on which identity markers are important for different types of reconciliation work in a given context. Sometimes clear distinctions, however limited, may be helpful (e.g. victim/perpetrator categories are needed for prosecutions). To achieve other goals, e.g. relating to social cohesion, such binaries are less constructive and 'grey' identities are more helpful.

21. Recognise the importance of working on individual and collective trauma. Identify suitable trauma and resiliency-informed approaches and resources to build trust and create safe spaces for engagement, and explore available psychosocial support services in the context (if any).

### Work collaboratively, recognising that full coherence may be elusive

22. Integrate reconciliation into existing analytical tools and processes, and into varied aspects of programming. Reconciliation work does not need to be standalone. A reconciliation approach can be built into peacebuilding, humanitarian and development work, complementing other priorities, rather than competing with them.
23. Foster exchange and connections in each context that raise awareness among relevant stakeholders of each other's initiatives, and enable synergies. What mechanisms are there for communicating with the range of actors involved? Which actors can provide the 'connective tissue' to link initiatives at different levels?
24. Plan for reconciliation activities to be more than one-off interventions and part of a broader strategy. Yet do not 'chase the rainbow', assuming it is possible or necessary to fit everything into one coherent framework. Accept that a diversity of initiatives (of different scale, scope and focus), may be the most feasible and effective approach.
25. Recognise the limits of scalability and value local initiatives in their own right for what they bring. It is the combination of efforts at different levels (local, national, regional and international) that contributes to sustainable peace.

### Focus on long term, incremental change

26. Be prepared for long-term engagement. Reconciliation is about investing in long-term support of relationship building at different levels and places. Small steps, without immediate tangible impact, can lay the foundation for significant change later on.
27. Accept that the pace of reconciliation cannot be forced, and that results may not be immediately visible or easy to anticipate as part of a linear 'theory of change' and are often hard to measure.
28. Appreciate that priorities for reconciliation will shift over time for individuals, communities and society at large and that memories of violence are transmitted across generations. Create time and space for people to engage in intergenerational dialogue on the past, the present and the future.

# 8. BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR RECONCILIATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PROGRAMMING AND PRACTICE

Progress in reconciliation requires commitment over the long term, and the appetite and financial and operational flexibility to take risks, to learn lessons and to adapt to changing circumstances.

Reconciliation grapples with messy and complex realities and emotions. The targets can shift over time, change is often incremental, and rarely is it possible to plot expected results according to a sequential logic. Work to change damaged relationships requires deep understanding of local political and cultural dynamics, and the credibility and trustworthiness of the individuals involved. It can also be risky, evoking resistance among elites and other groups in society, fuelling friction among former adversaries, touching on trauma, and stirring up strong views and emotions about the past, the compromises of the present and what is necessary to build a better future.

Engaging in this nature of work can present challenges for governmental actors, donors and practitioners alike. For governmental actors and donors in particular, staff tend to rotate regularly, and policies stress the importance of doing no harm which can contribute to risk-aversion in programming and funding decisions. In addition, investment often needs to be accounted for in relation to relatively short-term results, with more focus on immediate outputs than long-term outcomes.

To realise reconciliation's potential as an essential tool for building and sustaining peace, and prevent it from becoming sidelined, or siloed in peacebuilding policies and practice, we propose three areas for future focus:

## 1. Reconciliation as part of strategy: position reconciliation within an overall strategic approach to conflict and peace

- Work collaboratively across departments, organisations and relevant programming areas, including peacebuilding and human rights, and with gender teams, navigating friction that may arise in relation to accountability and fighting impunity.
- Develop multi-year theories of change for reconciliation programmes and/or for reconciliation components of broader strategies and programmes in conflict-affected contexts, to prevent long-term reconciliation objectives being consistently relegated to short-term priorities.
- Reflect on your own relationship to a context (from a policymaker, donor or practitioner perspective) and notions of reconciliation. How do past and current actions abroad and at home impact on your potential

to add value in relation to reconciliation work? What assumptions or biases do you bring to this work? What does this imply for your priorities, blind spots and how you may be perceived?

- Invest in collaborative design of reconciliation programming (or programming components) with local stakeholders, and in particular civil society who are embedded in the context and able to play a leading role over the long term.

## 2. Reconciliation as part of tools and processes: integrate reconciliation into the range of existing analytical tools and processes

- Include assessment of the potential for reconciliation in country-specific and gender-sensitive conflict analysis.
- Retain reconciliation and (re)building social fabric as a metric, and as a priority alongside other programmatic areas through all phases of conflict (including outbreak, escalation, continuation, transmutation and recurrence) bringing a relational lens to building and sustaining peace.
- As part of stakeholder mapping, reflect on which actors need to be included to ensure reconciliation work within a given context is legitimate and effective. Make use of resources that can help surface exclusion, as well as overlooked agency of different groups.
- Adopt monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) practices that allow interrogation of assumptions and harvesting intended and unintended results for reconciliation programming. Consider appropriate milestones or indices for measuring reconciliation initiatives and for understanding 'what works', or what factors are conducive to reconciliation programming. Be open to learning from what seems less effective as well.

## 3. Reconciliation as an inclusive community of practice: encourage this field of evolving practice through ongoing reflection and learning across policy, practice and research

- Identify opportunities in policy development and programming cycles to convene policymakers, practitioners, donors and researchers, including from conflict contexts, to inform analysis, identify entry points and risks, and advise on strategy and programme design.

- Create mechanisms for cross-departmental and cross-organisational learning exchange on reconciliation, including regular policy-practitioner fora. Explore ideas for a broader funded platform for exchange, learning and gathering evidence.\* Draw on examples such as the Civil Society Dialogue Network, a jointly-owned network run by European Peacebuilding Liaison Office and the European External Action Service of the European Union, where practitioners and policymakers develop joint themes and have a budget to involve practitioners from beyond the global north.
- Build an evidence base of comparative examples, including lessons learned from lived experience of reconciliation work in a wide range of contexts.\* This would involve creating a repository of examples, documented in similar ways, and making them easily accessible. This 'compendium of practitioner innovation and experience' could be similar to the New Tactics in Human Rights project. It would grow over time, providing a rich resource for policymakers and practitioners to better understand existing practice, find pointers for potential entry points into new work, and as a collective 'institutional memory' of insights about this nature of work.

## BOX 2: POINTERS FOR DONORS

- Set realistic timeframes and expectations for change: reconciliation work requires a long-term, flexible, and patient approach
- Maintain sustained funding support: the need for reconciliation lasts long after the immediate violence and crisis subside, and there needs to be continuity of funding for reconciliation throughout all phases of engagement in a context, including during long-term development.
- Move away from linear and rigid M&E approaches characterised by logical frameworks with predetermined indicators, targets and single final summative evaluations. While these might be appropriate for other sectors, they are much less suited to work on relational and behavioural change in societies dealing with the legacies of violence.
- Promote and model innovative methods for adaptive management and system thinking to better understand, respond to and measure the impact of reconciliation. Examples include Outcome Harvesting, Outcome mapping, The Most Significant Change (MSC), developmental and utilisation focused evaluations, principles-focused evaluation, and indices and barometers for measuring reconciliation, such as SCORE, SPITPR-5F, and the South African Reconciliation Barometer.
- Adopt an adaptive, iterative and non-linear approach to planning, with a tight learning/self-correcting cycle. Complex is not the same as complicated, and there is a growing field of literature on addressing human complexity through more adaptive approaches.
- Invest in the development, reconsideration and redesigning of theories of change. To have a truly adaptive model, practitioners need to have the space, funds and opportunity to collectively and periodically step out and think evaluatively and critically about what they do, question their assumptions, revise theories of change and redefine outcomes.
- Be open to invest in capacity strengthening and training for implementing staff across all levels.
- Be open to taking calculated risks, and to being flexible and quick to learn from the anticipated and unanticipated successes and failures, so that approaches to supporting this nature of work can adapt.
- Reflect on the optics of donor funding in specific contexts, and the potential for the source of funding to undermine or delegitimise local processes of reconciliation. In making funding decisions, be guided by robust context and gender-sensitive conflict analysis, and by continuous conflict-sensitivity.
- Be open to looking at the bigger picture and to accept working with other donors to move beyond the single project approach.

\* There is a rich field of research and practice in this area. Multiple organisations and institutions are working at the nexus of peacebuilding and reconciliation, bringing together insights and experiences from around the world. These include, but are not limited to, the University of Winchester Centre for Religion, Reconciliation and Peace, InterPeace, The Kofi Annan Foundation, the United States Institute for Peace, Inclusive Peace, swisspeace, INCORE, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Berghof Foundation, and the Mary Hoch Centre.

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*All weblinks accessed 31 March 2021.*

**ANNEX**

**EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE**



## ANNEX EXAMPLE 1

# Challenging monolithic conflict narratives through documentary filmmaking, Armenia and Azerbaijan

Since 1988, Armenians and Azerbaijanis have been divided by a bitter conflict for sovereignty over the contested territory of Nagorny Karabakh, an isolated Armenian-majority area that is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan. Violent conflict in the early 1990s was followed by decades of hostility and the outbreak of a second devastating war in 2020. With barely any contact between them, Armenian and Azerbaijani societies have become almost impermeable echo chambers for mutually exclusive narratives of the conflict, where only the other side bears responsibility.

Over a five-year period in 2011-16 Armenian and Azerbaijani filmmakers and journalists met in neighbouring Georgia to make a landmark trilogy of documentary films – *Parts of a Circle* – juxtaposing divergent narratives of the history of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The aim was to make viewers aware of the subjectivity of different perspectives, and more conscious of their own preconceptions, preferences and biases. The film trilogy invites viewers to engage with a more complex portrayal of contested events and their controversial narration.

The resulting films stepped away from the Armenian-Azerbaijani information and memory wars that have dominated debates between the two nations for decades. They pushed back against monopolies on suffering and the routine dismissal of the other side's human losses as conspiracy or propaganda. The filmmakers reached consensus on a core set of facts about the violent past, and then deliberately approached the telling of

history from different perspectives. In this way, the films were able to re-examine the contested reality and significance of landmark events in the history of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

The *Parts of a Circle* trilogy, completed 28 years after the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict began, is also significant as a bridge between lived and learned experience. Younger generations have had very limited exposure to knowledge about the conflict. South Caucasian history textbooks, for example, are notoriously short on information about the conflicts in the early 1990s. The films consequently offer a source of direct information that is not easily accessible in Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. They also offer a perspective on the viewpoints from which that information is perceived, and, implicitly, reflect on the practice of homogenising the past.

Yet the films were made while Armenian-Azerbaijani relations steadily deteriorated and violence escalated. This resulted in an unfortunate situation where the films could not be publicly released without risk to their makers. To work around this, Conciliation Resources produced a summary film based on the same materials as the trilogy and released online in May 2020. Renewed war just four months later threw relations between the two states into a new crisis. Against a tide of new processes of mutually exclusive memorialisation, the *Parts of a Circle* trilogy creates a precedent whereby multiple voices examine the past and share responsibility for the present.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** Protracted conflict; 30 years post-war; immediately following renewed escalation and war; pre-settlement

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Attitudinal and cultural change; reframing narratives; horizontal relations

## ANNEX EXAMPLE 2

### Navigating reconciliation in Bougainville

The 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA) ended a decade of violent conflict between the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Government and armed groups in Bougainville motivated by self-determination aspirations and disputes related to mining. Bougainville's ambitions for independence – 98% voted in favour of independence from PNG in a 2019 referendum – continue to be met by PNG's reluctance to cede territorial integrity. Within Bougainville, despite significant peacebuilding efforts, multiple issues continue to pose a risk to peace. These include the presence of guns and outlier groups, tensions over mining, and high levels of interpersonal violence.

Restoring the balance in relationships through reconciliation is central to indigenous approaches to peacemaking and peacebuilding in communities across the Pacific region, including in Bougainville. Bougainville is small; parties fighting each other were not anonymous combatant groups but mostly people who knew each other. Victims and perpetrators now live in the same small villages. At the community level, dealing with the past has required strategies that restore relationships and enable people to continue living together. Diverse in nature, reconciliation practices often involve lengthy processes of planning and negotiation. These culminate in coming together to enact a feast and ceremony which establishes an agreed 'truth' and 'finishes' the conflict. The process typically involves paying 'compensation' of pigs, traditional shell money and, increasingly, cash. Churches can play a significant role in offering spiritual healing, while understandings of Christian forgiveness have become interwoven into reconciliation processes.

Reconciliation has been key to consolidating a widespread commitment to peace in Bougainville. However, challenges have arisen. First, reconciliation processes have been monetised: they are costly and compensation demands have grown, as has preference for cash over traditional items. Some actors have employed reconciliation as a money-making device, delegitimising it in the process and donor-government funding has inadvertently fuelled this commercialisation.

Second, scaling-up of reconciliation beyond the community level has proved problematic. For example, an attempt to hold a reconciliation between Bougainville and global mining group Rio Tinto over the highly contested Panguna mine faltered when an agreement could not be reached over how to conduct the process. In addition, ambitions that Bougainville conduct reconciliation processes with the people of PNG, the neighbouring Solomon Islands, and with Australia over their involvement in the conflict have proved difficult to fulfil so far.

Third, reconciliation in Bougainville raises questions about its effectiveness for the whole of society and about gender justice. Women play a significant role as peacemakers and peacebuilders in Bougainville, but the monetisation and politicisation of reconciliation processes have enabled senior men (mainly former combatants and political elites) to capture them. This has reinforced (gendered) power dynamics: 'big fighting men' come together to agree on their versions of the truth, while women often remain silent about their experiences, including sexual violence, as their 'contribution to peace'. Meanwhile youth – about 60% of the population and affected by cycles of trauma and lost educational opportunities – remain excluded from most political spaces.

Finally, while planning and negotiation of a reconciliation can take years, decades or generations to occur, in the lead up to the 2019 referendum there was significant pressure to 'get all reconciliations done'. Rushing these processes has led to a distortion of the restorative elements, which need time. Engagement in processes of reconciliation served as a statement to PNG and the international community that Bougainville was ready to decide its future. At a political level, ambiguities remain around how reconciliation fits into the broader peace process, including the current negotiations between the governments of PNG and Bougainville.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** Primarily post-settlement (but with many elements of 'during negotiations' and of 'protracted conflict')

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Awareness-raising and building capacity of prospective reconciliation actors; dialogue and rehumanising initiatives; creating new narratives; compensation; reintegration of former combatants

## ANNEX EXAMPLE 3

### Indigenous women in Colombia: memory and societal transformation

In Colombia, about 3.5 per cent of the population, approximately 1.5 million people, is indigenous. The protracted civil war (1964-2016) has strongly impacted indigenous peoples' territories, social dynamics and ways of life. Armed groups in Colombia have exploited and manipulated social disadvantage in specific groups as a strategy of war. For indigenous women, multiple vulnerability factors include race, ethnicity, and gender. Women have been killed, treated as 'spoils of war' by armed actors and subjected to sexual violence, aggravated by discriminatory attitudes. In Colombia, indigenous women are also recognised as the reproducers of their culture in societies where ancestral land is inextricably connected to culture. Pressure exercised by the armed groups over indigenous lands therefore impacts women especially seriously. Even before the 2016 peace deal, indigenous women in Colombia were developing strategies to deal with these impacts of violent conflict and, through this process, to also understand and challenge unequal gender dynamics within their communities.

The indigenous Nasa people live in the Colombian southwest in the department of Cauca, a central battle ground in the country's civil war due to its strategic importance, both military and economic. In 2014, the Nasa women undertook a process to remember the violence perpetrated against them during the conflict. During the process, which brought together 90 women from the indigenous reservation of Jambaló, the women came to realise that it was not enough to talk about the violence committed against them by guerrillas, paramilitaries and government security forces. They also needed to talk about the violence that they suffered from their husbands and other men in the community.

The women met for months to talk and weave. Weaving is significant for Nasa women. As in many cultures, the loom is a form of communication in which a woman represents elements of her world view, environment and experiences, gives life to her thoughts, feelings and concerns and essentially tells her own story. At the end of the process, they organised a *Minga* (a collaborative community activity), which lasted three days. During this time about 300 women, accompanied by a few men, marched through the territory demanding an end to the various kinds of violence they faced. During their journey, the elders spiritually cleansed the land, dressed the trees in fabrics they had made and left commemorative posters for women who had been murdered. A group of non-indigenous women, from other regions of the country, also participated in the *Minga*. A group of professionals from the National Centre of Historical Memory also supported their work by accompanying them in their process.

These women built their memory in their own way, through their own voices with their rhythms and worldviews. There is no one path and individual differences are recognised as part of a wider societal process of transformation. The women have also resisted violence and challenged norms of masculine power in their communities, working to diminish the inequalities that foster conflict. The process has provided a space for women to deal with the past as individuals and as a community, while also precipitating attitudinal and cultural change.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** Protracted conflict; pre-settlement

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Dealing with the past; attitudinal and cultural change; horizontal relationships

## ANNEX EXAMPLE 4

### Starting a conversation around dealing with the past and promoting reconciliation in Jammu and Kashmir

The India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir has lasted over seven decades. It has been marked by a series of political and constitutional changes on both sides and the emergence of religious-political groups advocating for self-determination and increased autonomy, especially in the Indian-administered Kashmir Valley. Since 1988, a growing armed insurgency has been challenging India's control over the region. The retaliatory use by India of its coercive apparatus has resulted in gross human rights violations. The loss of special constitutional status (with the abrogation of Article 370) for the wider Indian-administered Kashmir, in which different political aspirations have always co-existed, has aggravated existing divides and conflict fault lines.

In the absence of a formal peace process, there have not been any explicit efforts to rebuild relationships or promote reconciliatory efforts at the national or regional level. The blame game approach used by political actors on both sides makes it more difficult to find common ground. Sporadic calls for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission by civil society have not led to any concrete action by official actors. The first initiatives that can be considered as focusing on making sense of the past and contributing to a reconciliation agenda are those led by civil society organisations, and in particular human rights groups. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Human Rights Law Network and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons have been leading the mapping and documentation of past wrongs and human rights violations. Various actors have collected personal tales and stories of individual sufferings through books, media articles, documentaries and court records. A rights-centred approach focused on collecting victims' testimonies has started to surface concepts of

'reparation' and dealing with the past, notably through the collection of victims' testimonies. International and local human rights groups are working to shed light on decades of human rights violations and to make the plight of Kashmiris known.

The sensitivities associated with a human rights discourse in the region – both India and Pakistan reject allegations of human rights violations committed by their forces and have reiterated that this is a bilateral issue – has meant civil society actors focused on peacebuilding and conflict transformation avoid engaging directly with the themes of dealing with the past and reconciliation. Yet conflict transformation practitioners in the region recognise that attempts to bridge existing divides or heal past wounds will require a sustained, long-term and in-depth engagement on these issues, as well as a context-specific and organic process. Peacebuilding actors are calling for a human-centred approach to healing and reconciliation efforts, and for the creation of safe spaces for people to speak about past violence, injustice and inequalities without fear of discrimination or retaliation.

The Indian government's August 2019 revocation of the constitutional autonomy of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the subsequent communication blackout and heightened securitisation in the region, presented obstacles to trying to engage on these issues. Recent developments, in the form of an agreed ceasefire, provide a new opportunity to revive the discussion. This will require careful attention to avoid politicising the framing of efforts to work on dealing with the past and reconciliation, and to ensure that any terminology used is appropriate to the context.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** During protracted conflict (low-intensity, little progress in formal peace process)

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Transforming horizontal and vertical relationships; dealing with the past; documenting abuses

## ANNEX EXAMPLE 5

### Community-led return and reintegration of ex-combatants in northeast Nigeria

In northeast Nigeria, informal community-led initiatives to support the reintegration of ex-combatants from the Boko Haram insurgency (and its offshoot Islamic State in West Africa) into local communities are in some cases beginning to offer a pathway out of violence for members of armed groups. Despite government claims of a 'technical' military defeat, the violence against security forces, communities and livelihoods – which has wreaked havoc since 2009 and left deep scars on the collective psyche – continues to perpetuate fear, mistrust and animosity.

Government responses maintain a securitised approach. The official national disarmament, demobilisation, deradicalisation and reintegration (DDDR) programme has focused primarily on deradicalisation rather than on sustainable reintegration, let alone reconciliation. As a result of opaque government policy and a lack of communication and public engagement, communities feel that reintegration is being imposed on them and that they are excluded from decision-making processes. As a result, official processes often fail to adequately respond to the fears, needs and concerns of affected communities, leading to ineffective and sometimes inappropriate programming.

Community resistance to top-down state-led reintegration is strong, but there is evidence of a growing pragmatic acceptance among the public that reintegration – if not necessarily reconciliation – is necessary for local security. In part due to fear, suspicion and lack of trust in official processes, communities increasingly have more faith in their own ability to address this need, including through safe and inclusive platforms for public repentance. These can serve as important healing opportunities for survivors of violence and provide a pathway back into communities for people associated with Boko Haram. Examples of existing initiatives include traditional reconciliation ceremonies, or *sulhu* (often preceded by a period of self-exile to prepare those involved), oath-taking on the Qu'ran, and informal yet structured mentoring

processes. Key features of each of these include public acknowledgement and renunciation of wrongdoing and a request for forgiveness from the community.

Such informal initiatives demonstrate an appetite for community-led reconciliation and reintegration processes and their potential. Former combatants have indicated that they are more likely to engage with initiatives that are not solely the domain of the military and that offer a viable chance of a genuine reintegration process beyond simply being returned to the community without follow up or support. Unlike official programmes these community processes require a commitment to transformational behavioural change, rather than a wholesome rejection of an individual's entire belief system. These community-led processes offer hope. However, it is important to acknowledge that some traditional leaders – who are customarily expected to lead these processes – have lost credibility and legitimacy amongst the community since 2009 due to perceptions that they abandoned their communities at their time of need. This makes it important to protect and further reinforce the alternative and non-traditional reconciliation mechanisms that have sprung up in recent years and are led by emerging peace leaders.

Working with communities to explore ways of aligning community-led initiatives with official processes as part of a more holistic, jointly-developed reintegration strategy would help to allay community suspicions and fears and to secure buy-in. It would also provide stronger incentives and clearer pathways out of violence for insurgents. A tailored approach to the gendered aspects of reintegration is also essential to ensure equal opportunities and outcomes for men, women and sexual minorities. Gender-sensitive analysis of drivers of participation in violence, as well as different reintegration experiences and outcomes can help shed light on questions such as why returning women tend to be more easily tolerated by communities. This will ultimately contribute to more effective DDR programming.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** During violent insurgency; pre stable political settlement

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Acknowledging; attitudinal and behavioural change; horizontal relationships

## ANNEX EXAMPLE 6

# Engaging communities through a Listening Process in Mindanao, Philippines

For decades, the Philippines was the site of two insurgencies which took root during the years of martial law under Ferdinand Marcos (1972-1986): one by the communist movement and one by the Moro people in Mindanao. In 2014 the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front concluded a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. This eventually led to the establishment in 2019 of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in the Southern Philippines, which replaced a previous, smaller, autonomous region.

The agreement also established a Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) to promote reconciliation and healing among the different communities affected by the conflict in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. Following the end of the Marcos regime, successive democratic administrations had done little to address the past and the entrenched poverty and discrimination that had fuelled resistance to the central government. Vast numbers of people were left to cope with socio-economic deprivation and political inequalities while a full amnesty benefited those responsible for past atrocities. The TJRC undertook a broad-based 'Listening Process' to collect experiences and narratives in over 200 Moro, indigenous, and settler communities in Mindanao. This was to inform recommendations on how the formal peace process could address legitimate grievances, historical injustices, human rights violations and marginalisation through land dispossession among the Bangsamoro. Running over four months in 2015 and involving 3,000 community members and officials through listening circles, the process yielded multiple perspectives on healing and reconciliation and on the impact of war.

The TJRC's Listening Process was the first serious effort to reach out to a broad spectrum of conflict-affected communities in Mindanao. Researchers were recruited from community-based organisations, enhancing its significance and legitimacy. The bottom-up method sought to prevent reconciliation efforts from focusing exclusively on victim-perpetrator dynamics that could unintentionally reinforce historical gaps between groups, and sustain cycles of violence. It helped to generate a growing social awareness of peace at grassroots level in Mindanao. It also provided the basis for the TJRC's analysis of the conflict's root causes. Three interrelated phenomena - systemic exclusion, a culture of impunity, and deep neglect by the state - had generated historical injustices and legitimate grievances among the Bangsamoro. The TJRC found that these phenomena are linked to forced imposition of a monolithic Filipino identity and Philippine state on multiple ethnic groups in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago, who perceived themselves as pre-existing nations and nation-states.

Despite the power of the TJRC's process and findings, it proved difficult to build a constituency for peace amongst the wider Philippines population, whose view on engaging with the Mindanao population was coloured by a long history of prejudice and demonisation of Muslims. In hindsight, grassroots- and civil society-focused peacebuilding strategies did not sufficiently cohere to lead to a cumulative impact of diverse reconciliation efforts. This would have required a strong, coordinated, strategic framework for bringing the issues and root causes of conflicts in Mindanao to national awareness, especially amongst parliamentarians, politicians and senior civil servants.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** Post-settlement (but prior to the adoption of the Bangsamoro Basic Law establishing the autonomous region).

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Mapping grievances; identifying root causes; horizontal/vertical relations.

## ANNEX EXAMPLE 7

### Building more inclusive narratives in a Georgian-Abkhaz Memory Project, South Caucasus

For over six years, informal civil society groups have worked behind the scenes to document the violent history of Georgian-Abkhaz relations, creating a basis for understanding the past. The societies have been divided by unresolved conflict for over 30 years, following war in 1992-1993 and the secession of Abkhazia. Two groups are working separately on either side of the conflict divide to create parallel archives. They are collating and systematising existing materials: news clippings, video footage, official documents, photographs and personal archives. They are also recording new oral history accounts by people who witnessed events first hand. They are doing this painstaking work in dialogue with one another, with a view to ultimately bringing these archives together to create as full a picture as possible of Georgian-Abkhaz relations leading up to, during, and following the violence in the early 1990s.

Prospects for a peace settlement are distant and formal talks are in stalemate. In the absence of an agreed legal or political framework for conflict resolution, this highly contentious work could begin only by staying entirely under the radar. It goes against the culture of silence and exclusivist narratives that have developed on both sides and been passed down the generations. It has exposed what was initially a small group of individuals to views and perspectives from the 'other side' that were taboo, or that represented groups directly affected by conflict and marginalised or excluded from mainstream politics. The number of people accessing this more holistic picture is now growing.

The need to start working together on deeply contested narratives surfaced through Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue, facilitated outside the region. Individuals from both sides of the conflict conceived the Memory Project, developing their ideas with input from others working on dealing with the past in their own contexts (including the Balkans and Northern Ireland). The project is driven by an understanding that it is essential to document, in as inclusive a way as possible, the violence and injustice people have lived through. In this way, space can be created to talk constructively about the future within the separate communities, and sometimes together.

Providing space and time for the documentation work to develop in a non-threatening way has been important for its sustainability. Local civil society actors have steered the work from the outset, first agreeing a moratorium on public access and eventually reaching consensus on greater visibility. The two groups have handled visibility differently, responding to the different needs and possibilities in their respective contexts: in Tbilisi this started with a public exhibition and in Sukhum/i with facilitated discussions. The impact of this work has been difficult to assess in tangible terms. It will take a long time for mainstream narratives to start to shift, let alone evolve into space for multiple narratives to exist concurrently or for shared narratives to emerge. Yet civil society actors are focused on what is possible, and necessary, to do now. The Memory Project constitutes an important step forward in starting to acknowledge grievances and creating civic space for discussion about the legacies of violence, about responsibilities to prevent future violence, and about how to build sustainable peace.

**PHASE CONFLICT CYCLE:** Protracted conflict; 30 years post-war; pre-settlement

**KEY ELEMENTS OF RECONCILIATION:** Acknowledging; reframing narratives; horizontal relations

**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.

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