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Dialogue in Peacebuilding

Understanding Different Perspectives

development dialogue

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Foreword

'Dialogue' might be an opaque concept, but its application has proven to be crucial for building and sustaining peace. While far from new, it is only recently that dialogue has become recognised as a fundamental peacebuilding action, an essential complement to mediation in armed conflicts and a prioritised method in reconciliation efforts and for building national unity. Dialogue is key for promoting inclusivity, engaging women, youth, marginalised groups, diaspora and people who are typically not at the centre of negotiations or policy making. Dialogue can provide means and opportunities for these groups to be heard and for their rights, needs and priorities to be taken into account. It also allows diverse stakeholder groups to be informed about peace processes and decision making, thereby promoting transparency and dispelling potential misinformation. Thus, dialogue should also be understood as a core preventive measure.

The inspiration to produce this volume came in different forms. Our stated mission is *'to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development and peace, building on Dag Hammarskjöld's legacy'*. Through activities with and in support of the UN system, we aim to catalyse new thinking on how dialogue can be more effectively applied, including as a strategy to support peacebuilding, advance reform processes at the UN and to strengthen multilateralism. The Foundation has worked in partnership with the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office on advancing the twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace passed by the UN General Assembly and Security Council in 2016. We continue to organise thematic seminars and consultations focusing on the implementation of the resolutions at national and regional levels, and to further develop thematic approaches including that of dialogue. This volume is part of that engagement.

The volume is further motivated by our experience from engagement in dialogue efforts and in our ongoing work to recognise and realise inclusivity as a methodology. Through a partnership with Uppsala University's Department for Peace and Conflict Research we arrange

an annual training programme on dialogue and mediation. An impor-
tant incentive was also the Foundation's engagement with civil society
in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. This work followed the 2017
Middle East Peace Conference where government representatives from
over 70 countries signed a Joint Declaration expressing readiness to
support peacebuilding efforts including 'convening Israeli and
Palestinian civil society fora, in order to enhance dialogue between
the parties'. Lamentably, the formal peace process between Israelis and
Palestinians, and civil society's involvement in it, has not moved in a
positive direction since 2017; however, the need to support dialogue
within and between actors remains.

This volume is an attempt to respond to the growing interest to learn
from the successes and challenges where dialogue has been used to
advance peacebuilding. It aims to increase the visibility and recognition
of contributions to dialogue by civil society organisations, youth and
other actors locally and globally whose work often goes unnoticed or is
underappreciated. We also hope that practitioners and scholars working
to strengthen dialogue – both those who contributed to this volume
but also those who read it and engage in efforts to spread its message –
make new connections, exchange ideas and learning and find
motivation to continue the important work that they are doing.

Dialogue is an art in itself – it is rare, fragile and often exposed to risks
of being ignored or misunderstood. It is our hope that this compilation,
amplifying various voices from dialogues for peace, will inspire further
dialogue in peace efforts. It is time to listen, to learn and to lend
support, allowing dialogue to take place and to inform preventive and
peacebuilding actions.

Henrik Hammargren,
Executive Director,
Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Introduction

> *The object of a dialogue is not to analyse things, or to win an argument, or to exchange opinions. Rather, it is to suspend your opinions and to look at the opinions – to listen to everybody's opinions, to suspend them, and to see what all that means. If we can see what all of our opinions mean, then we are sharing a common content, even if we don't agree entirely. It may turn out that the opinions are not really very important – they are all assumptions. And if we can see them all, we may then move more creatively in a different direction. We can just simply share the appreciation of the meanings: and out of this whole thing, truth emerges unannounced – not that we have chosen it.*
>
> David Bohm[1]

The exercise and practice of dialogue can be traced back thousands of years, perhaps even to the beginning of civilisation.[2] In more recent times there has been a surge of interest in dialogue, with the use of the term and its application proliferating within the disciplines of peace-building and development, but also in other fields such as education and public policy. This perhaps in part can be attributed to the growing and deepening polarisation that exists in many communities across the globe and both manifests itself in and is further fuelled by strong and adverse geopolitical interests. On issues as diverse as immigration, climate change, arms control and religious freedom, the discourse between politicians, in the media and even within communities or families is marked by entrenched positions, vitriolic accusations and a rejection of data or facts. This detracts significantly from the efforts that are needed at local, national and international levels to work together to address the world's urgent development challenges and to achieve the goals laid out in the 2030 Agenda. Many thus recognise the need for more space and means to engage in genuine dialogue, among and between communities, between political parties and within global multilateral bodies like the UN Security Council.

Contextual developments

To understand the role of dialogue in peacebuilding and in strength-
ening social cohesion today it is important to place it in the context
of evolving dynamics of conflict, specifically violent conflict, and shifts
in international efforts to build and sustain peace. Three dimensions
should be considered. The first is the changing characteristics of violent
conflicts, which are increasingly internationalised and exacerbated
by proxy engagements and external military interventions, and with
cross-border and regional implications. Other developments include a
proliferation of non-state actors, a growth in violent radical movements,
and religious positioning used for political mobilisation and purposes.
Climate change-instigated conflicts are causing new security threats and
the relationship between armed conflict and armed violence is frequently
blurred, with urban and gang-related violence and organised crime
causing instability. Changing demographic realities and the effects of
rapid and massive urbanisation pose additional challenges to peace that
call for new responses, including an expanded use of dialogue.

The second, more positive dimension is that higher quality peace
agreements are reached, increasingly as a result of inclusive and com-
plex processes that build on the evidence that greater inclusion leads
to greater sustainability, and the recognised roles of women and youth
in peacebuilding and sustaining peace (enshrined in Security Council
Resolutions 1325 and 2250). The 2016 peace agreement in Colombia
with its more than 500 provisions can be taken as an example. While
this complexity carries possible risks, such as greater vulnerability in
implementation and unrealistic expectations, it also allows for detailed
actions, support and monitoring.

Finally, the third dimension is the recognition within policy circles and
the broader international community of the need to sustain peace over
time and with a comprehensive approach that puts prevention at its
core. The twin resolutions on the review of the UN peacebuilding
architecture (commonly referred to as 'the Sustaining Peace resolu-
tions'), adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council
in April 2016, recognise sustaining peace as a goal and a process that
encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation,
continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting
parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation and
moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.[3] There is
also an acute awareness of the need for more and dedicated resources
to be allocated for peacebuilding, with efforts ongoing to develop new

instruments and financing strategies. The potential for dialogue to be applied as a useful tool and approach to advance efforts to sustain peace is considerable.

On definitions

Dialogue is often used colloquially to refer to any kind of conversation, sometimes even applied interchangeably with the term *discussion* or even *debate*, and frequently linked or grouped with mediation. This volume does not provide or advance a particular definition of dialogue but rather strives to recognise the strength and beauty in diverse interpretations of its meaning and application. At the same time this publication aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what differentiates dialogue from other forms of communication and to facilitate an exploration of how dialogue and mediation are closely linked and mutually supportive – both theoretically and from country experiences – and what that means for external actors who are supporting broader peace efforts.

The contributions in this volume testify to the diversity of ways in which dialogue can be defined and applied. Each chapter starts with a definition of how dialogue is understood in the context of the individual article and from the perspective of that author. In scanning the opening words of each chapter, one quickly gets a sense of the range and variation.

Most of the authors take as a starting point that dialogue aims to increase mutual understanding, both of one's own and others' positions. But views vary to some extent on whether the process of dialogue needs to focus on producing an issue-based result (that contributes to resolving conflict) or whether the practice of dialogue itself – creating the safe space and mechanism for exchanging views, examining assumptions and strengthening relationships – is the primary purpose, with outcomes in terms of issues resolved considered secondary.

This distinction is similarly found in academic literature on dialogue.[4] David Bohm, a theoretical physicist widely noted for many achievements including his classic article *On Dialogue*, was a known proponent of this latter interpretation of dialogue, defining it as a process of 'opening up judgements and assumptions' and developing 'shared meanings'.[5] Harold Saunders of the Institute for Sustained Dialogue on the other hand puts the focus on transforming relationships, underlining that 'always the moderators and participants are searching

for the dynamics of the relationship that cause the problems and must be changed before the problems can be resolved.'[6]

While a few of the contributors in this volume seem to align with this *process-as-purpose* view, all recognise the importance of outcome in the form of solution or change, whether immediate or eventual, underscoring that dialogue that is regarded as talk without action runs the risk of exacerbating tensions or conflict rather than having a positive impact. Some authors thus emphasise the important linkages between dialogue and mediation or negotiation processes.

Applications of dialogue and considerations for implementation

The volume gives a glimpse of the multiplicity of ways in which dialogue is and can be applied to address conflict and to strengthen peacebuilding efforts, from contexts ravaged by ongoing armed violence like Afghanistan or Somalia to situations of seemingly intractable conflict like Israel and Palestine, as well as in countries and communities typically described as peaceful like Sweden. Although they range widely, common themes do emerge, including the reasons for and results of applying dialogue and some critical considerations for designing and facilitating dialogue processes.

Several of the authors identify the use of dialogue as a key instrument for promoting inclusivity, engaging women, youth, marginalised groups and other actors who are typically not at the centre of policy making or negotiations. Borja Palladini's contribution highlights how dialogue promoted during efforts to monitor the peace agreement in Colombia enables stakeholder groups to stay informed about the peace process while having the opportunity to express their needs and perspectives and to identify factors that continue to pose risks and drive conflict. The potential to constructively engage youth and to counter perceptions of marginalisation by young people through dialogue is underscored in many pieces, including those by Qais As'ad, Sarah Dolah and in the contributions by member organisations of the United Network of Young (UNOY) Peacebuilders.

Another common theme raised in the different papers is the potential of dialogue to transform strained vertical relationships between the state and society, or to cultivate civic trust in governance and official institutions. Drawing on the many years of experience her organisation has working in the Jordan Valley, Yana Abu Taleb emphasises the critical aspect of peacebuilding to create linkages between policy makers and

community-level efforts and suggests that dialogue is an effective means to do so. The contribution by Mohammed Shale Billow and Simon Richards presents experiences from Somalia where elders are instrumental in promoting intra- and inter-clan dialogue and contribute to the critical connections between informal and formal peacebuilding processes in the country.

The contributions raise many considerations that are critical in order for dialogue processes to be successful. Several authors emphasise the importance of careful and thorough preparation that involves building trust and for ensuring that basic conditions are present, such as that participants are prepared to genuinely listen and respect other perspectives and to share without fear of retribution. They also underscore the need for follow up and sustained engagement. The role and identity of the facilitator is key to success and most recognise that this calls for acceptance by all participants and for multi-partiality. Finally, several contributions identify the media and, in particular, social media as a significant force and consideration, with the potential to support or advance dialogue gains as well as to undermine the process by deepening polarisation and disseminating misinformation.

The aim and structure of the volume

This publication aims to deepen understanding and awareness of dialogue as a critical aspect of and tool for peacebuilding and for strengthening social cohesion by exploring different approaches to and perspectives on the use of dialogue in different contexts. It also highlights successes and challenges learned from these experiences, letting the stories of practitioners and scholars working with and on dialogue speak for themselves while serving as a resource to promote exchange between actors in different parts of the world and working at different levels. Most of the authors work for organisations that have mandates and many years of experience supporting or facilitating dialogue and with established reputations in this field. However, it is important to note that the contributions represent the perspectives of the individual authors.

The volume is presented in three parts that aim to provide structure but are in reality quite interlinked and to some extent overlapping. The focus of the first part is on theoretical and conceptual considerations related to dialogue; the second part presents experiences of dialogue initiatives from their application in different contexts; finally, the articles in the third part serve to highlight particular themes within dialogue experiences and from the perspectives of different stakeholder groups.

In Part One of the volume, Henning Melber's article offers a backwards glance at the life and work of Dag Hammarskjöld. He provides examples of how the Secretary-General's natural dialogical approach made him a skilled civil servant and negotiator and suggests that this approach still has relevance today. Moving us through developments over the past few decades, Sebastian Kratzer provides insights into more recent changes to how peacemaking and peacebuilding are conducted and presents experiences from his and colleagues' work at the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue in advancing peace processes in a number of different contexts. He also outlines some of the nuances and linkages between dialogue and mediation. In the third contribution Janna Greve reflects on the role of a third-party dialogue facilitator and highlights what she sees as some the key characteristics and skills required to successfully perform this role.

In Part Two we are presented with different applications of dialogue in a diversity of contexts and engaging varying levels of actors. From the Track 1 level dialogue efforts in Venezuela explored in the contribution by Michael Camilleri and Riva Kantowitz to the tireless efforts of the Parents Circle-Families Forum to connect Israelis and Palestinians at the personal level described by Robi Damelin, we can see the potential of dialogue to address a wide range of conflict situations and to promote peacebuilding. Bernard le Roux's experiences from Sweden underscore the universal applicability of dialogue and confirm that some of the basic premises and considerations for ensuring a successful outcome from such efforts are the same regardless of the geographical context. His contribution is different, however, in proposing that dialogue can be useful to recognise areas of polarity and for allowing these to be amplified before attempting to find common ground.

Part Three of the volume explores dialogue from the angle of select thematic areas and perspectives, noting up front that this is understood to be a limited selection that could be elaborated with many different and equally important themes. The first contribution by Samuel Rizk offers an insight into recent efforts by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) to support national and local dialogue initiatives, providing examples from a variety of contexts. It highlights the importance of inclusion and of accepting higher risk thresholds if international actors are to be successful in these types of peacebuilding efforts. In the second article Peter Wallensteen presents how an academic seminar can be a useful format for advancing dialogue especially in protracted conflict situations, drawing on his experience engaging Israelis and Palestinians in this type of initiative in the years that

preceded the Oslo Agreement. The following three contributions by Cynthia Wakuna, Ilias Alami and Sarah Dolah give evidence to the important work by and engagement of youth in promoting dialogue in their communities, underlining that especially for young people it is essential that dialogue is complemented or followed up with activities to build their capacity and to advance the ideas or proposed actions that emerge from
discussions.

In Rafael Tyszblat's chapter we are provided with a glimpse into the use of digital technology to promote intercultural dialogue and potential for further advancing the use of this type of tool. Salma Malik calls attention in her piece to the imperative to enhance the participation of women in dialogue processes, drawing on her own experiences and perspective from South Asia. The final two chapters in Part III by Edla Puoskari and Alessandro Rossi, and Antti Pentikainen examine fundamental and challenging questions of how to bridge faiths and worldviews in and through dialogue and how dialogue can promote healing and reconciliation.

We hope that the articles in this volume provide useful examples and ideas that will stimulate reflection and further inquiry into how dialogue initiatives can support local and global efforts to sustain peace and to realise the ambitious 2030 Agenda, leaving no one behind. Given the urgency of working together at all levels and across political, ideological and other divides to address current global challenges and to build more inclusive, peaceful and just societies, this volume can perhaps provide inspiration on how to avoid 'dialogues of the deaf' in favour of dialogue that genuinely promotes mutual understanding.

Endnotes

[1] David Bohm, *On Dialogue,* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004).

[2] In the introduction of Peter Stearns (ed.), *Peacebuilding Through Dialogue, Education, Human Transformation and Conflict Resolution*, (Charlottesville, VA: George Mason University, 2019), Stearns provides a useful synthesis of some early uses of dialogue and their development and relevance in the present context.

[3] United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 April 2016, Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture', (General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/70/262, UNGA, 27 April 2016);
United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution adopted by the Security Council at its 7680th meeting on 27 April 2017', (S/RES/2282, UNSC, 27 April 2016).

[4] A thorough overview and deeper exploration of these ideas can be found in Ann Kelleher, 'Applying an Academic/Practitioner Analysis to Community Dialogue's Practice', spring 2016.
https://www.communitydialogue.org/content/academic-analysis-cd-practice

[5] D. Bohm, *On Dialogue,* p. 32. (See endnote 1.)

[6] Harold H. Saunders, 'Sustained Dialogue in Managing Intractable Conflict', *Negotiation Journal,* vol. 19, issue 9, January 2003, p. 87.

Part One:

Part One:
Conceptualising dialogue

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Dag Hammarskjöld on dialogue

By Henning Melber

Dag Hammarskjöld made the entry to the right into his private notebook in 1955 which was later posthumously-published.[1] Despite failures and setbacks, he can be considered a successful mediator, who applied the principle of dialogue in conflict negotiations.[2] His diplomatic skills were tested to their limits in several cases, most prominently during the Suez crisis of 1956 and in the Congo from 1960 to 61. These situations showed the opportunities and the limitations of his office and the United Nations during the times of the Cold War.[3]

> *'It is more important to be aware of the grounds for your own behaviour than to understand the motives of another.*
>
> *The other's 'face' is more important than your own. If, while pleasing another's cause, you are at the same time seeking something for yourself, you cannot hope to succeed.*
>
> *You can only hope to find a lasting solution to a conflict if you have learned to see the other objectively, but, at the same time, to experience his difficulties subjectively.'*
>
> Dag Hammarskjöld

'Never, "for the sake of peace and quiet", deny your own experience or convictions,' Hammarskjöld penned in his private notebook in 1952.[4] And he noted: 'It is easy to be nice, even to an enemy – from lack of character'.[5] For him, dialogue meant honest exchange of views based on one's own convictions, combined with the willingness to listen and to understand the other, in order to find a common solution. For the international civil servant, he explained, this would require, as a point of departure, loyal service to the values vested in the normative frameworks of the United Nations. A steadfastness, also essential as a matter of credibility:

> *Our relations to our fellow men do not determine our attitude to ideals, but are determined by our ideals. If our attitude is consistent, we shall be consistent in our loyalties. If our attitude is confused, then our loyalties will also be divided.[6]*

Dag Hammarskjöld's convictions were inseparable from the word and spirit of the UN Charter. He also made no distinction between politics and the personal. This was an early form of the notion that the personal is political and that one should live up to one's convictions on all levels. As he observed in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis:

> *The 'great' commitment all too easily obscures the 'little' one. But without the humility and warmth which you have to develop in your relations to the few with whom you are personally involved, you will never be able to do anything for the many.*[7]

His quiet diplomacy aimed at seeking confidential exchanges as trust-building measures. This provided others the opportunity to explain their views in a conflict – but also allowed him to do the same. Openness and respect for 'otherness', without compromising on the fundamental priciples as laid down in the Charter, were his point of departure in efforts to find a solution. He was particularly careful in the nature of his communication:

> ***Respect for the word*** *is the first commandment in the discipline by which a man can be educated to maturity – intellectual, emotional, and moral. Respect for the word – to employ it with scrupulous care and an incorruptible heartfelt love of truth – is essential if there is to be any growth in a society or in the human race. To misuse the word is to show contempt for man. It undermines the bridges and poisons the wells. It causes Man to regress down the long path of his evolution.*[8]

Such understanding also implied the use of language for creating additional manoeuvring space. While Hammarskjöld complained about the lack of clarity in Security Council resolutions regarding the Congo mission, political theorist Ernest W. Lefever notes that, at the same time, Hammarskjöld used the ambiguity of interpretation for some of his decisions on how best to apply the mandate:

> *He regarded such abstruseness as essential to give him sufficient latitude to act effectively when there was agreement only that something should be done. The British and French criticized him for this quality. A French representative once called him a 'master of the calculated imprecision'.*[9]

According to Peter Wallensteen (former Dag Hammarskjöld Professor in Uppsala) Hammarskjöld's diplomacy aimed at:

> *Finding the common interests of the parties, before they discover the irreconcilable differences they also have. Acting early, quickly and after careful thought was Hammarskjöld's special strength.*[10]

A particular case in point was his success to obtain a mandate to mediate in the Suez crisis despite the opposition of the United Kingdom and France (in alliance with Israel), by securing support of the United States and the Soviet Union based on common interests at the time. He thereby prevented a veto to his proposal. In another clever move, the draft resolution was submitted to the Council by Tunisia. The rest is history.

UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (left),
and Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr, United States Representative to the UN (right),
holding an informal consultation on Hungary on 3 November 1956. Photo: UN Photo

Dag Hammarskjöld. Photo: UN Photo

Brian Urquhart, the longest-serving UN staff member at that time
(he joined the organisation in 1945 and worked closely with five
Secretary-Generals) observed:

> *Hammarskjöld was extraordinarily sensitive to the difficulties and sensi-*
> *bilities of the people with whom he was dealing. He had an exceptional*
> *talent for suggesting effective solutions that could be accepted without offence*
> *by the parties to a conflict. One key to his success as a negotiator was his*
> *ability to retain his mobility and to avoid either getting himself boxed in or*
> *committing others to rigid public positions that they would have difficulty in*
> *changing. By preserving his freedom, he could often make local progress even*
> *in situations that appeared hopeless. His keen sense of timing allowed him*
> *both to keep alternatives open and, at the right moment, to create new and*
> *unexpected options for the parties. In an apparent deadlock he had a talent*
> *for spinning a new concept that the conflicting parties might be able to grasp*
> *at without losing face.*[11]

The 'Hammarskjöld approach' is evident in his ethics, his concept of
solidarity, his sense of fundamental universal values and human rights,
his respect for the multitude of identities within the human family and
his insight that policy ultimately has its core in the inner nature of the
individual actors involved. His approach to mediation, peacebuilding
and peacekeeping remains relevant today:

- Acknowledgement of diverse interests as a point of departure for
  exploring settlements for a conflict (including face-saving
  compromises).
- Willingness to listen and understand before offering one's own
  ideas for a possible solution.
- Determination to honour the spirit and word of the UN Charter
  as the sole guiding principle for the values to be protected and
  policies to be pursued.
- Steadfastness in resisting being used as an instrument by any
  Member State because of its influence or political orientation.
- Believing that every UN Member State deserves respect and that
  the UN is as much there for the weak as for the strong.
- Being convinced that any internationally-lasting agreement should
  be brokered by and through the authority of the UN Secretariat,
  which should always be in charge of and maintain ultimate con-
  trol over UN interventions, not least through the executive power
  vested in the Secretary-General.
- Hammarskjöld held a firm belief in what we now call 'inclusivity':
  the importance of engaging with the various agencies and actors
  in their own right and on an equal footing. When opening an
  exhibition of Asian art in 1956, his remarks indicated the mindset

of someone who was willing and able to cross cultural boundaries without any attitude of supremacy: 'when Asia can speak – as Asia – to the West, and when the West learns to listen and to respond in the spirit of a new and equal relationship, mankind all over the world will profit by it.' [12]

In many ways he saw his own role as recognising and respecting those who otherwise would not be included in dialogue, negotiations, and a search for lasting solutions. Tragically, this conviction motivated a decision that resulted in his death and that of 15 others in his company at the time. Efforts to bring peace to the Congo by ending the secession of the Katanga province culminated in military encounters between the blue helmets and the Katangese rebel forces during August and September 1961, risking to derail the whole mission. Having just arrived in the Congo, Hammarskjöld spontaneously took the initiative over and above his mandate to arrange for direct negotiations with the secessionist leader Moise Tshombe. They agreed to seek common ground in a personal exchange at the Northern Rhodesian mining town of Ndola close to the Congolese border. The meeting never happened. Approaching the Ndola airport in the night of 17/18 September, the Secretary-General's plane crashed under hitherto unclarified circumstances.[13]

Endnotes

[1] Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, (New York: Ballantine, 1993), p. 96.

[2] See Brian Urquhart, *Hammarskjold*, (New York: Harper&Row, 1972);
Manuel Fröhlich, *Political Ethics and the United Nations. Dag Hammarskjöld as Secretary-General*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008);
Roger Lipsey, *Hammarskjöld: A Life*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2013);
Carsten Stahn and Henning Melber (eds), *Peace Diplomacy, Global Justice and International Agency: Rethinking Human Security and Ethics in the Spirit of Dag Hammarskjöld,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[3] See Henning Melber, *Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations and the Decolonisation of Africa*, (London: Hurst and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[4] Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, p. 71.

[5] Ibid, p. 70.

[6] Dag Hammarskjöld, ' "International Service". Address at Johns Hopkins University Commencement Exercises', Baltimore, Maryland, 14 June 1955,
in Andrew W. Cordier/Wilder Foote (eds), *Public Papers of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Volume II: Dag Hammarskjöld 1953-1956*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 503.

[7] Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings,* p. 113.

[8] Ibid, p. 94. (bold italics is in italics in the original).

[9] Ernest W. Lefever, *Uncertain Mandate. Politics of the U.N. Congo Operation,* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 30.

[10] Peter Wallensteen, *Dag Hammarskjöld*, (Stockholm: The Swedish Institute, 2004), p. 40.

[11] Brian Urquhart, 'Dag Hammarskjöld: The Private Person in a Very Public Office' in Robert S. Jordan (ed.), *Dag Hammarskjöld Revisited. The UN Secretary-General as a Force in World Politics,* (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), pp. 140f.

[12] Dag Hammarskjöld, 'Remarks at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the occasion of the opening of a special loan exhibition, "Asian Artists in Crystal" ', New York, 8 March 1956, in Andrew W. Cordier/Wilder Foote (eds), *Public Papers of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Volume III: Dag Hammarskjöld 1956–1957,* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 60.

[13] See for details Susan Williams, *Who Killed Hammarskjöld? The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*, (London: Hurst, 2011). For a summary of the investigations by the UN since then until the end of 2018 see chapter 7 in Henning Melber, op. cit.; additional new details presented in Maurin Picard, *Ils ont tué Monsieur H. Congo, 1961. Le complot des mercenaires Français contre l'ONU.* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

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Better together
Trends in dialogue and mediation

By Sebastian Kratzer

Dialogue is generally understood as an inherently inclusive mechanism of exchange between conflicting parties to deal constructively with conflict in a broader sense.

While statesmen and diplomats have been practising mediation for centuries, the mediation of violent conflict is only recently undergoing a conscious professionalisation and acquiring its own dedicated standards, principles and institutions.[1] This article provides an overview of current mediation practice and identifies its complementarities with broader dialogue and peacebuilding efforts discussed in this volume.

To provide some conceptual background the article also briefly touches on the definitional differences between mediation and dialogue, as well as peacemaking and peacebuilding; describes today's current global conflict landscape as seen from the perspective of a mediation organisation; and gives concrete examples of current peacemaking practice.

Between theories and realities
Resolving violent conflict and building peace is a complex and longterm process. In the post–WWII era, civil wars last from seven to twelve years on average[2], which is about four times as long as interstate wars.[3]

In theory, this implies a gradual shift from peacemaking to peacebuilding work. In early conflict resolution models, peacemaking implies efforts to stop the fighting, put an end to the violence and reach a peace agreement. Peacebuilding on the other hand is seen as a long-term process aimed at gradually changing the structures, relationships, attitudes and behaviours driving a conflict in society; it seeks to create the basis for positive and sustainable peace.[4] Usually, peacemaking is meant to create the opportunity for post-conflict peacebuilding, and includes various approaches – negotiation, mediation, arbitration and judicial settlement.

Within this system, mediation and dialogue are two inter–linked tools that come with their own characteristics and important differences. Dialogue, a more general term, does not have a single definition but is generally understood as an inherently inclusive mechanism of

exchange between conflicting parties to deal constructively with conflict in a broader sense. From a peacebuilding perspective this usually confers more importance on the process of transforming relationships rather than expecting concrete tangible outcomes (though it's good to have some concrete outcomes, to avoid dialogue fatigue). These processes also tend to take place at different levels of society and can be geographically widespread.[5]

Mediation[6] is a tool to address specific conflicts[7], often by getting the leaders of governments and opposition or armed groups to resolve their concrete differences through mutually-acceptable agreement. Mediation is thus inherently outcome focused, working towards concrete and relatively short-term results. A mediator typically takes a modest approach towards peace, with a reduction in the intensity and scale of actual or potential violent conflict often considered the most realistic outcome. Results can take a more tangible form (such as peace agreements, ceasefires, or humanitarian agreements), or come as more intangible yet valuable interim results (establishing first contact or channels of communication with hard-to-reach armed groups). Often, a specific mediation process will not meaningfully survive the resumption of fighting, whereas broader dialogue processes might stand a better chance of lasting through cycles of violence. All this leads, in theory at least, to a relatively clear division of roles, taking place at distinctive phases of a (potential) violent conflict and at different levels of society.[8]

In reality, data suggests that a majority of conflicts are recurring rather than being newly onset or permanently resolved[9], indicating that our work is often about sustaining peace, or managing tensions, fragility and/or disorder in the absence or maintenance of positive peace. Many practitioners in the field hence tend to look beyond the theoretical division between dialogue and mediation, and especially at the unofficial levels, the distinction between both tools can be blurred. Practitioners thus rather focus on the results they hope to achieve, and the tool(s) most likely to get them there.

A changing conflict landscape
In the last decade the number of successfully concluded peace agreements has drastically fallen.[10] Those that have been signed, like in Colombia, have a mixed record of implementation.[11]

This might be partially due to the changes in conflict we are witnessing, towards models of warfare less suitable to traditional tools of conflict management.[12] On the one hand, the classic model of inter-state warfare

continues to decline (and with it the number of victims it causes).[13] On the other hand, this trend is offset by the emergence of other conflict dynamics: the proliferation of non-state conflicts (with 82 active non-state conflicts and fatalities recorded in 2017)[14]; a rise in geopolitical tensions and the renewed potential for catastrophic warfare; and the importance of organised crime in sustaining many of today's conflicts. As conflicts are becoming more protracted[15], the original division between peacemaking and peacebuilding becomes ever more obsolete.

For mediation to be successful, it requires coherent groups and strong leadership that can commit on behalf of an organisation and guarantee implementation of agreements. The differences in the two separate negotiations between the Government of Colombia and the country's two main armed opposition groups are a telling example. Whereas the government was able to conclude an agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC) – a highly structured and disciplined organisation with clear lines of command – it has not been able to resolve the conflict with the National Liberation Army (ELN), with a traditionally more diverse membership and autonomous modus operandi.[16] If a group's leaders cannot enforce the outcome of a negotiation within their group, no agreement will hold. Modern groups' dispersion across borders will further amplify the problem. All this renders today's conflicts difficult to resolve with traditional peace agreements, posing new challenges for the mediation field.[17]

Mediating modern conflicts

For peace processes to be successful, they should engage all levels of society. Any tool by itself is unlikely to work or yield sustainable peace. While traditional Track I mediation – formal, exclusive, elite-level negotiations – works in specific circumstances[18], the new challenges posed by the geopolitical, strategic, tactical and technological realities of today's armed conflicts require innovative thinking and adaptation by those seeking their peaceful resolution.[19]

This is reflected, more or less successfully, in some of the reforms of the international peace architecture, such as the UN's peace and security pillar that aims to prioritise prevention and sustaining peace, and enable better integrated peace operations. Similarly the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), as a private mediator – without political leverage, has to be tuned into the changing needs and requirements of conflict parties and peace processes, thus reflecting the sector's trends and developments.

Below is an overview of methodologies and lessons regarding current peace-making initiatives to share insights with the wider peacebuilding community on how mediation practice is evolving and can complement larger efforts in peacebuilding and strengthening social cohesion.

Thematic and creative entry points

Faced with complex conflicts, mediators need to look for unorthodox ways to gain access to or unblock a situation. Private mediators and civil society are especially well-placed to be creative and take risks. If political negotiations are stalling, they can try engaging on issues that do not necessarily link to the core conflict, are more technical than political and do not necessarily require a formal agreement by the parties. At some point nevertheless, these efforts need to somehow link back to or advance the main point of the negotiations. This way mediators may be able to achieve quick successes, create opportunities for mutual cooperation, build trust and encourage parties to engage in dialogue.

During HD's engagement in Ukraine, for example, the team identified the environmental degradation and damage of industrial infrastructure as a major risk of the conflict, one that if ignored would cause massive damage and health risks to constituencies on both sides of the frontline. Focusing on this issue of mutual concern has enabled HD to informally bring the parties to the table to discuss possible joint technical actions.

A wider spectrum: from local to global engagements

In the face of stalling or faltering national peace processes, rising proliferation and fragmentation of actors, peacemakers are directing more attention to local-level peacemaking and agreements. Ceasefires, evacuation agreements[20], governance and resource-sharing agreements can play a tactical as well as strategic role in reducing violence in the absence or failure of national-level agreements. This bottom-up approach helps empower communities and drive momentum for shared solutions. To be successful, this approach requires local expertise, strong access to conflict parties and relationships with their constituencies on the ground. While neutral outsiders have been traditionally viewed as the mediators of choice in conventional Track I processes, the intricate and protracted nature of today's conflicts requires insiders with expert knowledge of the context and local networks who can stay committed for years and decades.

Effective peacemaking demands a decentralised approach, with practitioners connecting conflict parties and other relevant actors in various ways. HD, for example, uses a hybrid approach of insider and outsider

mediation: linking well-connected and knowledgeable peacemakers from local contexts with international experts, who bring comparative experiences from around the world, far-reaching networks and thematic know-how.[21] In the Philippines, for example, HD has created and supports a network of local mediators. This network, in turn, carries out mediation work in Sulu, supported by staff in Manila, Singapore and Geneva.

In the Sahel region, where state control is weak and official peace processes do not yield much influence beyond the capitals, HD is mediating agro-pastoral conflicts in the tri-border area of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso through traditional conflict-resolution networks. Providing support to traditional chieftains and carefully-selected community leaders in ten networks across 22 municipalities allows for locally-led approaches to resolve conflicts and follow up on any agreement. Early results have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach: more than 70% of 400 identified local conflicts have been resolved through negotiated agreements.[22] Nevertheless, these processes are never completely detached from larger national and regional processes and can be problematic in their own right.

At the other end of the spectrum, with tensions resurfacing between states, there is value in having unofficial and discreet communication and negotiation mechanisms that allow states to address their differences away from the pressures of public opinion and rigid political positions. As such, actors like HD find themselves providing deniable and quiet negotiation channels and platforms to discuss potential practical solutions to disagreements. Under the right circumstances, these can become part of formal political dialogue processes or fora.

One of the most salient examples are disputes between states in Asia involving their coastguards and fishing vessels. In a context like this, where formal political talks are seen as too sensitive by the parties, HD was able to informally bring together navy and coastguard representatives to discuss interim security management and incident-prevention mechanisms so that incidents at sea would not escalate into a larger conflict. This engagement has led to an agreement on the concrete points these representatives could discuss, and has contributed to greater confidence in the parties' capacity to address the wider issues on the table. As states saw that the outcomes of these discussions were in their interest, this informal process slowly turned into a formal agreement. Discreet actors like HD can provide these services as their deniability and informal nature are considered to entail less risk for participants, greater access to

The Dafi, Samoko, Fulani, Dogon and Bozo communities of the Baye municipality, located in the area of Bankass and the region of Mopti in Mali, signed a peace agreement on Thursday, 25 July 2019 in Baye. The Agreement put an end to a year-long intercommunal conflict among these communities. Photo: Humanitarian Dialogue

The Maputo Accord for Peace and Reconciliation was signed in 2011 by Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi and the main opposition group Renamo leader Ossufo Momade. It followed the signing of a cessation of hostilities agreement between the two sides in Gorongosa – Renamo's heartland in central Mozambique. Photo: Peace Process Secretariat

necessary decision makers and the required technical and political expertise needed to benefit the parties and the process.

The risks and benefits of inclusive processes

Qualitative inclusion makes for more sustainable and better-quality peace agreements, and increased chances for successful implementation.[23] As such, a greater and more pragmatic focus on inclusion, and the use of technology to facilitate meaningful participation, are becoming stronger aspects in the mediation field. This work can take many forms depending on the peace process and the political space available for the participation of, for example women, civil society and youth.

A place at the main negotiation table for otherwise-marginalised groups is often the preferred option, but blind insistence on inclusion without adequate preparation and support may simply set such groups up for failure, largely for the questionable benefit of ticking the gender/inclusion box. Also, tough negotiations do not always lend themselves to opening up to large numbers of participants, as it risks rendering the process inefficient. A mediator's job is thus to generate and guarantee creative ways to create spaces and channels for these groups to develop distinct proposals, and influence the negotiation process and its outcomes in the most efficient way.

This is one clear point of distinction between the two tools: whereas mediation is often elite-level focused, dialogue is usually inclusive of many different groups and participants. This makes dialogue a suitable avenue to inform more formal mediation and Track I initiatives, ensuring representation of a wider array of issues at the negotiation table and promoting buy-in from civil society to any potential agreement. Ideally, both mediation and dialogue efforts form a logical and strategic part of a broader strategy for peace.

In Libya, for example, the UN asked HD to hold public consultations across the country to inform the Libyan National Conference as well as the UN's mediation efforts. The consultation process sought to engage citizens from all segments of Libyan society, particularly those usually excluded from elite political dialogue. In total, HD organised 77 consultation meetings in 43 different locations, with special arrangements to allow for marginalised groups to speak freely. More than 7,000 Libyans participated, including 30% through a dedicated online platform. The consultations also relied on social media, including through Twitter and Facebook campaigns that encouraged Libyans to participate

via an online questionnaire. In total, about 140,000 people followed the process, while the Twitter account had about 1,800 followers. Approximately half a million comments were generated in three and a half months.[24] The outcomes of the process then helped shape the agenda for the main national dialogue events.

As an external actor, reaching out to and engaging with armed, political or extremist groups can involve significant risks and unanticipated consequences. Dialogue and mediation can alter the power balance and relationships within groups as their leaders will see any external engagement through the lens of how this will alter internal power dynamics. It can further affect a group's power relations with other groups, their constituents, and the government.[25] The resources, leverage and international attention associated with involvement in an official process can create perverse incentives for leaders to take up arms. As de Waal suggests, 'violence is a means of bargaining and signalling value', and leaders of armed groups will use the means at their disposal to do just that.[26] Any external actors need to include these considerations into their thinking.

The aftermath of the national consultation process in Libya is a case in point. Although public outreach and engagement contributed to increasing the political transition's inclusivity and progress in the negotiations, in the end military leaders decided to resume fighting, imposing a sudden halt on negotiations and an uncertain future in regards to the political transition of the country.

War, mediation and new technologies

Technological advances are changing the ways wars (and politics) are fought, with new methods and means of warfare creating new military, political, legal and ethical considerations.[27] The 'third revolution in warfare', ie the development and proliferation of lethal autonomous weapons, poses unprecedented challenges to the regulation and resolution of conflicts.[28] Moreover, the scale and technical advances in the use of propaganda and mis- and disinformation are how conflicts evolve.[29] At the same time, new technologies affect the practice of mediation, and practitioners have to understand the opportunities and risks associated with the dual–use nature of social media and digital technologies.

The mediation sector is only now starting to catch up. The UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, together with HD, developed a toolkit on digital technologies and mediation[30] in armed conflict. This online platform is meant to help mediators better grasp how digital technology is impacting their work and showcases the digital tools

available for conflict analysis, engagement with conflict parties, increased inclusivity of a process, and designing and delivering strategic communications.

Assuring quality, demonstrating results

Mediation and dialogue are effective and efficient means of ending armed conflict. Yet, while some peacemaking interventions produce measurable results (such as peace agreements or ceasefires), measuring and showing the positive impact of mediation and dialogue efforts remain a challenge for both practitioners and donors. Traditional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) models, often borrowed from the development sector, are not capable of delivering the needed insights in complex and sensitive conflict environments.

In recent years the sector has set out to explore and develop means of analysing, measuring and demonstrating the value of peace work that is adapted to its needs and requirements. An appropriate model of 'peace M&E' is one that will embrace the methods and constraints of mediation – confidentiality, flexibility, the difficulty of showing impact – and the requirements and pressures faced by donors to guarantee that tax payers' money is well spent.[31]

Since 2014, some of the sector's main mediation and donor organisations have come together annually to build consensus in support of appropriate, robust and field-friendly evaluation methods for the sector.[32] National and multilateral accountability mechanisms have recognised the need for adaptive and flexible M&E mechanisms in the mediation sector rather than static indicators and detailed logframes. Emerging conclusions are that an appropriate M&E model for peacemaking should, instead of solely focusing on the ever-elusive question of impact, seek to ensure that initiatives have a sound strategy, timely adaptation and quality decision-making, while also reporting observable results using available evidence when and where possible. Examples of promising initiatives for the sector include the Asia Foundation's Strategy Testing[33], the Crisis Management Initiative's approach to measuring results[34,] and HD's adaptive M&E[35] and peer review model.[36]

Better together: mediation and dialogue for peace

In spite of all of the above innovations and adaptations, no agreement alone can bring about lasting peace. Mediators are coming to realise that too much importance is attached to negotiations and attainment of agreements, missing the chance to consider, plan for and invest in what will come afterwards.

Moreover, for too long the conclusion of an agreement was seen as the pivotal point, whereas many conflicts are adapting to the agreements intended to end them, and persist. Colombia is, once again, a case in point: the peace agreement did not simply result in the cessation of violence, but allowed hitherto hidden conflicts to (re)emerge and led to a rise in social, economic, criminal and political violence.[37] Even at their best, mediators can make a limited contribution to creating peaceful societies[38], and require new and better ways of working with a wider array of peace actors.[39]

For the mediation field, this will include better design and inter-linkage of mediation and dialogue tracks. Non-official avenues are more important than ever because formal mechanisms are struggling to produce results. Better coordination between peace process actors is the minimum necessary in responding to today's fragmented conflicts.

But this need extends beyond the mediation field to the wider peace-building, humanitarian and development sectors, where different actors' expertise – for example on engagement of youth, the participation of women, organising inter-faith dialogues, wider questions of governance, natural resource management, environmental sustainability – need to be better aligned to address increasingly complex and protracted crises.

Mediators will have to play an essential role in providing clarity in the face of complex conflicts on how political decisions are taken, how power is accumulated (and lost), and the calculated use of violence by leaders to signal their bargaining power.[40] Non-traditional actors – private, independent organisations – able to take risks and engage with any conflict party leaving aside ideological considerations occupy a niche in identifying and using unconventional means to create the space necessary for larger peacebuilding efforts. Only in combining our skills and efforts in the political, development and humanitarian sectors will we succeed in developing adequate ways of managing, preventing and – eventually – resolving wars.

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works since 2017 as Project Manager with the Sub-Saharan Africa Programme of the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), based in Helsinki. Janna has expertise in gender-sensitive conflict analysis and conflict transformation via inclusive dialogue; transitional justice through reintegration, reconciliation and dealing with the past; and development and humanitarian issues. In her current position, she supports mediation and conflict prevention initiatives, including enhancing ownership and capacities of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities. She also works with inclusive cross-border dialogue efforts of key stakeholders in regional conflicts, with a focus on the Lake Chad Basin and the wider Sahel region. Prior to this position, from 2013 to 2016, Janna was Head of the Medellín office of the Organization of American States (OAS) Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP-OEA). She has published a range of articles on development and conflict dynamics in Africa and South America.

Emotional intelligence, humility and 'sisu'
Requirements for facilitating dialogue

By Janna Greve

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as carefully-facilitated conversation and exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge between parties and stakeholders to develop avenues that can contribute to resolving conflict and preventing the outbreak of new violence. Accordingly, facilitated dialogue is embedded in a process designed to lead to positive change and provides the ground for the active and, ideally, inclusive participation of key actors as well as the adequate conditions for them to both listen and speak respectfully in frequent meetings throughout a longer period of time.

Contemporary conflicts are often of a protracted and transnational nature, with interlinked root causes and a variety of state and armed non-state actors, including extremist groups, involved. Conflict resolution processes are correspondingly and suitably time-consuming and complex. They require, on the one hand, long-term commitment and adequate human and financial resources, and, on the other hand, active and sensitive efforts to ensure complementarity and the coordination of efforts between all those willing and able to support these processes. Within the mosaic of actors implementing different measures for sustainable peacemaking, private diplomacy organisations such as the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) play a crucial role. They do so because, unlike state actors, they have the ability to quickly adapt and deploy experts who not only have contextual experience and thematic knowledge, but also have the characteristics necessary for facilitating dialogue in a conflict resolution process.

As an independent peace broker CMI has a specifically 'Nordic' approach, one that focuses on the deepening of trust, tolerance and respect between key actors engaged in a conflict as well as promoting inclusivity as a prerequisite for the legitimacy of any peace agreement. The approach is also rooted in the idea that neither the pen nor the sword alone is capable of overcoming grievance and mistrust. Dialogue between those involved in conflict is the first step towards peace and is the foundation for the sustainable resolution of conflicts.

Accordingly, if there were a recipe for sustainable and positive peace, dialogue would be at the top of the list of ingredients. This is mirrored in the approach of CMI's founder, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, peace mediator and former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari. His engagement was based on the insight that 'what people have started, people can end',

implying that only inclusive dialogue can lead to outcomes that are acceptable to all key stakeholders and pave the way for sustainable peace. Therefore, facilitating dialogue in response to the demand of conflict parties and national stakeholders, remains a core element of CMI's work in conflict resolution to this day. Such support enables stakeholders to address problems and differences, test ideas, search for constructive, inclusive solutions and most importantly to build common ground.

Emotional intelligence as part and parcel of a facilitator's skillset

For any facilitated dialogue initiative to be fruitful, especially in highly-volatile contexts with sensitive and decisive issues at stake, the facilitator should possess certain personality traits, one of which is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is difficult to measure but is vital for interacting sensitively with others, navigating group dynamics and engaging directly or indirectly to provide constructive guidance. Emotional intelligence is needed especially when designing dialogue processes to help understand and interpret the moods and mindsets of the participants. It continues to be essential throughout the process to manage expectations, build trust and ensure the buy-in of all parties to the dialogue. All of this allows for much more constructive exchanges on divisive topics.

However, emotional intelligence needs to be complemented by developed skills, including the ability to listen; creative 'out-of-the-box thinking' to identify solutions to problems and to create an atmosphere favourable for a frank and respectful exchange of viewpoints; and flexibility to adapt the process design if needed.

Humility at every step of the facilitation

Being an accountable and reliable third-party dialogue facilitator often requires taking on a discrete and behind-the-scenes support role to ensure that discussions do not slide backwards or fail to reach consensus. However, facilitators must also be aware of the limits to the support that they can provide in any given circumstance, taking into consideration the human, financial and time resources available. First and foremost, it is *humility* which makes such conduct effective. Humility in this context also implies active self-reflection, in the knowledge that continuous learning from others is an inherent requirement of facilitating positive dialogue outcomes. As Paul Lederach puts it, 'Peacebuilding requires a type of humility that recognises that no matter how much I know or have learned, there is always more. The essence of humility is found in the constancy of learning and adaptation'.[1]

The top three considerations for facilitators to promote dialogue in support of peacebuilding and sustaining peace

1 OWNERSHIP

support actors' commitment to dialogue, so that their demands, needs and representation are taken into consideration in the process design

2 INCLUSIVITY

encourage increased inclusivity of dialogue processes by providing safe spaces and sharing good practice for the voices of all key stakeholders to be heard

3 RESOURCES

manage expectations and be clear on what you can deliver with existing resources

A winter's day on Liuskasaari, Helsinki, Finland, January 2018. The word 'sisu' was originally ascribed to the Finnish people who managed to withstand the unfavourable circumstances found in harsh conditions. Photo: Janna Greve

Cultural, social and political norms shape the context where the facilitated dialogue takes place and require a facilitator to adapt and continuously learn. In that regard, mixed-culture facilitator teams composed of individuals who can provide perspectives based on different cultural backgrounds and contextual experiences have proven especially valuable. As an example of this, CMI's engagement in facilitated dialogue processes in Sub-Saharan Africa is actively realised by facilitators of different ages, genders, nationalities and cultural backgrounds (European and African). Such teams can help design a process that builds on contextual realities and carefully adapts to changes in tempo and environment, and can creatively introduce new elements, tools and methodologies to address evolving or emerging challenges.

'Sisu': a Finnish word with global significance for dialogue facilitation

Sisu, a word of Finnish origin meaning perseverance, patience, robustness and endurance, was originally ascribed to the Finnish people who managed throughout the centuries to withstand the unfavourable circumstances found in the harsh conditions of the Nordic environment. However, the trait of sisu can also be ascribed to a successful facilitator since the essence of its meaning has proven of immense importance for maintaining dialogue processes. In the work of CMI, a good amount of sisu is required for constantly encouraging the key actors to engage in dialogue, standing ready to provide motivating and constructive avenues to overcome frustrations and fears of failure, creating a favourable atmosphere for open discussions and providing discrete logistical support according to a realistic timeframe. At the same time, the actors engaged also require sisu, through their abiding commitment to continue discussions even in the most challenging moments of a dialogue process.

This is particularly relevant in contexts where the informal dialogue process takes place in the absence of an effective formal process, and immediate breakthrough is therefore unlikely. In the context of the intra-Palestinian dialogue, for example, despite a formal engagement led by Egypt, disillusionment has become widespread. Sisu and creative thinking have therefore been required in the work of CMI's facilitators to maintain a commitment to the informal dialogue. This commitment allowed for conversations about key national issues which the formal process had not focused on in depth and detail, such as national strategies, political programmes, representation and reforms of national institutions. It has also been critical for maintaining contact between divided regions and among different communities of Palestinians. These traits have also proven highly important for channelling frustrations into fruitful deliberations,

both in closed-door meetings and in public debates, on how to maintain societal cohesion and promote political participation in the absence of functioning official processes.

Sisu needs to be complemented by humility, emotional intelligence and an understanding of existing limitations. Learning and reflection take time, and taking breaks between the different steps of a facilitated dialogue process can be critical. The design of a process usually requires continual adaptation and cannot simply be pushed through with brute force to sustainable ends. Facilitation teams always need to re-orient, recalibrate and discuss internally which direction they can jointly take to help carry the process forward. Bearing these aspects in mind is crucial to make sisu a constructive rather than obstructive force.

Preparing the ground for inclusivity

Emotional intelligence, humility and sisu are a valuable mix of traits for any facilitator aiming to guide a dialogue process constructively and efficiently and pave the way towards a sustainable outcome. However, to be sustainable, the process demands inclusivity. Already at an early stage of designing a dialogue process – together or in close communication with key stakeholders familiar with patterns of exclusion or marginalisation of certain groups in the given context, whether through patriarchy or other structural factors – the facilitator should possess a thorough analytical knowledge of the key actors who need to be engaged. The facilitator needs to be culture- and gender-sensitive and explore all possible avenues for effective inclusion. The facilitator therefore requires sensitivity to recognise barriers that exclude groups whose participation could otherwise strengthen a process, and needs to support the creation of safe spaces for engagement with these groups or take steps towards an inclusive 'all-society' approach.

In CMI's work in Libya, a careful assessment of the context and consultations with numerous stakeholders informed the decision to focus on marginalised groups and voices whose inclusion, through buy-in and input, is essential for a sustainable transition. Processes to support dialogue among political parties, representatives of the Fezzan region and influential women from across the country, aim to generate concrete solutions to conflict, enhanced local agency and strengthened links with formal efforts. Within the different dialogue platforms in the Fezzan region attention to inclusion is important: political parties are represented by both men and women, and efforts have been made to include additional women and youth. Furthermore, CMI's work with Libyan women has led to invaluable information on women's views about their past and

future role in the political process. This information has been derived from a broad survey which was conducted by CMI and supported by the Women's Working Group and engaged hundreds of Libyan women in regions such as Fezzan, Sirte and Derna. Moreover, cooperation among influential civil-society women involved in the process has been enhanced, and they now share regular updates on their work and exchange lessons learned as well as focus areas for future initiatives. Finally, the Women's Working Group has strengthened their interaction with national actors as well as with international actors.

The role of information technology and resources

In recent years, new information technologies have helped CMI's dialogue facilitators to be more agile in advancing processes, to act on different track levels with various national actors and those within concerned communities, and thereby, partially, to enhance the complementarity of informal and formal processes. Information technologies have also allowed for responding quickly when new windows of opportunity open up and have simplified engagement in logistical matters. At the same time, the ability to communicate more quickly has increased the risk of ad hoc actions and responses by those engaged in a facilitated dialogue. This can be unhelpful if shared rather publically, since impromptu responses or reactions, particularly on social media, can have a significant negative impact on a process. When communication is not managed, and words are not carefully chosen, this can lead to misinterpretation or, in the worst case, contribute to a breach of trust, at times even putting peoples' safety at risk. Facilitators nowadays need to be constantly aware of the inherent security risk linked to communication technology and take specific measures to avoid harm to those engaged in facilitated dialogue for the purpose of conflict resolution.

Finally, financial support for dialogue facilitation is indispensable. Any facilitated dialogue process requires a certain amount of flexible funding so that the facilitator can themselves provide support in a manner that is accountable and responsive to the context and needs that are inevitably evolving. It is critical therefore for facilitators to liaise and maintain strong partnerships with donors, and to sensitise them to the immense value of facilitated discrete dialogue efforts as a means for sustainable conflict resolution. Advocating for continued donor support to dialogue is even more crucial at times where some leaders are calling for increased military spending. It is important to underline that military approaches alone cannot sustainably end conflicts. While multilateral approaches provide a backbone for sustainable conflict resolution, some governments integrate complementary or alternative measures to resolve and prevent conflicts

in their foreign policy agenda and place special importance on allocating financial support to independent third-party actors to provide discreet dialogue facilitation. Such third-party actors can contribute valuable information for agenda-setting and policy-making processes, and provide independent insight into the course of long-term dialogue processes.

Conclusion

The interlinked dynamics of different geographical regions mean that it is increasingly difficult to remain indifferent to the violent outbreak of conflict in any one part of the world with the thinking that it does not affect one's own context. However, as history bears witness time and time again, 'quick-fix' military responses to complex, and often transnational or transregional, conflicts inevitably lead to unsustainable if not counterproductive results. Such approaches ignore or are incapable of alleviating the tensions at the heart of a conflict and fail to address the root causes that drive cycles of violence. These root causes are best identified by engaging those involved in or directly impacted by a conflict. Independent actors specialising in dialogue facilitation are able to provide expertise and support in process design, as well as safe spaces to allow for constructive exploration of the issues at stake and potential ways to overcome tensions and violence. The characteristics needed for dialogue facilitation play a critical function in achieving desired results: the combination of emotional intelligence, humility and sisu is, in most conflict settings, necessary for facilitators to respond effectively to the demand for constructive dialogue. With these characteristics the necessary expertise and constructive motivation can be provided during the long road towards the resolution of violent conflict.

Endnote

[1] John P. Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The art and soul of building peace*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 107.

Part Two:

Part Two:
Practising dialogue – country perspectives

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When 'dialogue' becomes a dirty word
The case of Venezuela

By Michael Camilleri and Riva Kantowitz

> *'This is no time for dialogue.'*[1]

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood broadly to include formal Track I and Track II negotiations between high-level political actors in Venezuela from 2002 to the present, the particular structure and dynamics of which have varied over time.

These words, spoken by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence to an audience of Venezuelan exiles in February 2019, conveyed the Trump Administration's combative approach toward the authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro. But Pence also knew it was an easy applause line. For many Venezuelans, the very idea of dialogue with Maduro has become shorthand for naivety and betrayal.

Their scepticism is perhaps well-founded. In light of past dialogues that served mainly to buy Maduro political space at challenging junctures, many sectors of the contemporary Venezuelan opposition to Maduro – and some of its backers in the international community – now reject the proposition of high-level political dialogue entirely, rendering all the more difficult a peaceful resolution to Venezuela's current volatile political standoff and humanitarian catastrophe.[2]

A winner-takes-all mentality that rejects the possibility of a negotiated solution to Venezuela's deepening crisis represents a serious obstacle to resolving this crisis and preventing further violence. As some members of the international community attempt to kick-start negotiations between opposing factions in Venezuela – including, most recently, talks convened by the Norwegian government in Oslo and Barbados – an adequate comprehension of this context is essential.

This article seeks to understand and account for the failures of past dialogue efforts, in particular examining the role of the international community. A number of external actors have engaged in various mediation and dialogue processes in Venezuela, starting in 2002. How and why did these actors engage and was this constellation productive? Did this group of international actors advance or hinder the chances of a peaceful solution to Venezuela's political conflict and resulting social and economic crises? Was there sufficient understanding of the ripeness for dialogue, or

indeed of the underlying factors driving the conflict? Given the current polarised reality, are there steps the international community can take to foster productive dialogue? Could these include measures designed to provoke a hurting stalemate, engage other external actors, or empower civil society or influential leaders within Venezuelan society?
What is the role of Venezuelan citizens and community-based actors in these processes? These questions are critical to future peacebuilding efforts in Venezuela, and may offer important lessons for similar efforts elsewhere.

Two decades of dialogue in Venezuela: A short history

Between 2002 and 2018, Venezuela witnessed four significant national dialogue processes formally intended to address the country's acute political conflict and its practical manifestations, including outbreaks of violence.[3] Each of these dialogues traces its roots to the election of President Hugo Chávez in 1998. A charismatic former military officer and self-described socialist, Chávez promised to upend a discredited political system and govern for the country's neglected masses. His efforts to do so almost immediately engendered deep political divisions in Venezuela, culminating in protests, an oil strike and a failed coup d'état in 2002.

In the wake of the 2002 coup attempt, Venezuela's political factions embarked on a lengthy and modestly successful negotiation. It had two things clearly in its favour. First, both Chávez and his political opponents felt the need to negotiate to achieve their aims. Second, the negotiations were facilitated in a serious and rigorous manner by the Carter Center in collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN Development Programme (six countries also served as a 'group of friends' accompanying the process). The effort was initiated by the Carter Center at the invitation of the Chávez government, with other facilitators (particularly the OAS) introduced to provide greater confidence to the opposition. In addition to mediating the Track I negotiations, these facilitators worked with social movements and mass media in an effort to transform the underlying causes of the conflict. The negotiations produced a series of agreements that committed both sides to respecting constitutional norms and refraining from violence. It also paved the way for a recall referendum against Chávez in 2004. The referendum represented success insofar as it channelled the opposition's efforts to remove Chávez through a democratic vehicle. After Chávez won a majority in the referendum, he emerged strengthened and moved almost immediately to sideline his opponents and accelerate his consolidation of power.

Chávez governed with relatively strong levels of popular support – and, not coincidentally, high oil prices – until his death in 2013. His chosen successor Nicolás Maduro inherited little of Chávez's political charisma or guile. With oil prices and production falling, Maduro struggled to manage an import-dependent economy saddled with falling revenues and unsustainable spending. With GDP shrinking by half during his first five years in office, inflation topping one million percent and food and medicine growing scarce, Maduro faced growing popular agitation. His response has been characterised mainly by brute force – killing protestors, jailing opponents, co-opting independent institutions such as the courts, and ultimately securing his own 2018 re-election via fraud. On three occasions, however, Maduro has used dialogue with his opponents as a tactic to relieve pressure and shore up his rule. By raising expectations of a negotiated solution to Venezuela's political confrontation and its accompanying economic and social crises, Maduro calculated – correctly – that he could deflate pressure from the streets until such time as he was on more solid political footing and could terminate the talks.

The first such dialogue occurred in 2014. In response to sustained opposition protests that left 43 dead and close to 2,000 detained, Maduro convened a national peace conference with the political opposition (an often-fractious coalition of parties known as the Democratic Unity Table (MUD)). The agenda and methodology were fuzzy from the start. Three South American governments and the Vatican were invited by the government to be witnesses, but their participation was limited. Two months of meetings produced little except the release of a high-profile political prisoner, and the talks soon stalled. For Maduro, however, they succeeded in taking the oxygen out of the protest movement, which represented the MUD's most significant source of strength at the time.

The MUD's fortunes improved in December 2015, when it won a majority in the national legislature and began planning for another recall referendum. Maduro used his control of the electoral authority to block this initiative, and in an effort to manage the ensuing confrontation, he convened a National Dialogue Table with the opposition, with 'international accompaniment' provided by the Vatican, the head of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the former leaders of Spain, Panama and the Dominican Republic, with the Vatican and the former presidents each taking the lead in facilitating discussions on a particular thematic area of the established agenda. In contrast to the 2014 dialogue, the 2016–2017 negotiations were better structured and had a clear agenda focused on peace, human rights, the economy and the electoral calendar. Of the international participants, the Vatican contributed the most,

achieving the release of a number of prisoners through its coordination of the human rights track, and conditioning its continuing participation on concrete progress in other areas. Divisions within the MUD hampered its effectiveness in the negotiations. Fundamentally, however, the talks again revealed a lack of political will on the part of the government, including further authoritarian consolidation by Maduro (such as making Supreme Court appointments without the requisite approval of the opposition-controlled legislature), even while talks were ongoing. Ultimately, Maduro succeeded in using the talks to run out the clock on a recall referendum.

Finally, the Maduro government and opposition again returned to negotiations in late 2017 and early 2018. The precipitating factor was the re-emergence of widespread opposition protests sparked by a Supreme Court decision that purported to vacate the functions of the national legislature. In addition to internal pressure, the Maduro regime faced growing international condemnation and isolation, including targeted sanctions against regime leaders by the United States. Formal talks in the Dominican Republic began in December 2017, with Dominican President Daniel Medina presiding in the company of former Spanish President José Luis Zapatero (a veteran of the 2016–2017 talks), and with Mexico, Chile, Nicaragua and Bolivia operating as guarantors. Despite their modest formal role, the foreign ministers (particularly those of Chile and Mexico) engaged energetically, developing a draft agreement that formed the basis for discussions. President Medina participated actively in the negotiations and staked his personal capital on the talks. It proved of little use. The MUD arrived at the negotiations internally divided, and one of the parties making up the coalition withdrew midway through the talks. The Venezuelan public knew little about the agenda or objectives of the talks, which were conducted abroad and on the condition that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed'. The government delegation, perhaps divided itself, was unable or unwilling to make significant concessions, and talks fizzled out after a few months. The death knell was a unilateral announcement by Maduro on the date of presidential elections – a matter that had been central to the discussions in the Dominican Republic.

In addition to these formal dialogues between competing political elites, there have been parallel efforts to cut through Venezuela's deep political divide by convening talks among alternative actors. One such effort was the so-called 'Boston Group', an informal group – originally created in 2002 – of Venezuelan politicians from both political factions, with the support of US politicians from the state of Massachusetts. While the

group has been less active in recent years, relationships built during its early years (including with Maduro, a former legislator) proved crucial to negotiations over the 2018 release of American prisoner Joshua Holt led by US Senator Bob Corker. Because the Boston Group had included Venezuelan legislators from across the political spectrum, it has occasionally been suggested that it could be resurrected as a platform for dialogue between Venezuela's political factions. However, following Corker's successful negotiations for Holt, three opposition parties warned him that they would not participate in any attempts at mediation, reflecting again their deep suspicion of dialogue as a strategy for resolving Venezuela's political crisis.

There have also been efforts by civil society groups to generate Track II discussions. One example is the Venezuela Expert Group created by the Institute for Integrated Transitions[4], an effort to convene actors on all sides within Venezuela to advance dialogue and peaceful solutions to the country's crises. Other international civil society groups have worked to create the conditions for meaningful dialogue by, for example, building cohesion and negotiation expertise within the opposition or convening Track II discussions among relevant international actors.

Lessons learned

The repeated failure of political dialogue in Venezuela has come at a high cost. Arguably, the flawed dialogues of the past have rendered the task of peacebuilding in Venezuela, now more urgent than ever, even more difficult. The failures are appropriately attributed to bad faith on the part of the Maduro regime and, to a lesser extent, divisions within the opposition. The role played by the international community, however, also deserves scrutiny and prompts some difficult questions, including most fundamentally: under what conditions should the international community get involved in and support dialogue? Who holds inter-national actors accountable for their engagement? And at what point and through what types of interventions could a different approach to dialogue or mediation efforts have helped to avoid the current crisis and contributed to the prevention of violence and the promotion of peace? We draw the following principal lessons:

Ripeness. The extent to which the international community assessed the ripeness of dialogue in Venezuela – much less tested it by seeking to establish preconditions for negotiations or took steps of their own to produce a hurting stalemate – appears to be limited. In contrast to the 2002-2004 negotiations, the three negotiations between 2014 and 2018 took place in an environment of clear imbalance of power between the government and opposition. Maduro convened the negotiations as a tactic for navigating spikes in opposition energy; the record suggests that he himself and/or crucial elements of his governing regime were never disposed to negotiating in good faith over matters that could threaten the regime's hold on power. The opposition's limited sources of strength – street protests, control of the legislature and the threat of a recall referendum – were actually eroded during the course of these negotiations, as Maduro likely intended, with only minor concessions achieved in return. In this sense, international parties to the talks at times served as unwitting accomplices to the further consolidation of authoritarian rule.

Role of the international community. The external actors that have engaged in formal dialogue or mediation processes in Venezuela have had varying motivations and at times, dubious credibility. In some cases, the personal interests of individual mediators were questioned, leading to further loss of faith in dialogue. Particular scrutiny fell on former Spanish president Zapatero, who was alleged to be representing Spanish oil and tourism companies with interests in Venezuela (he denied the former and acknowledged the latter while claiming he received no payment for his services). The opposition grew convinced that Zapatero and others (such as the head of UNASUR) were not neutral would-be mediators but rather operating in defence of Maduro's interests. The Vatican, in contrast, has been comparatively rigorous in its approach to the issues and willing to use its leverage to push negotiations forward. However, a key takeaway from the Venezuela experience is that even well-intentioned international actors can do more harm than good to the cause of conflict resolution by lending their legitimacy to negotiation processes that are not yet ripe. Further, the absence of accountability in the international system for external actors' engagement as would-be peacebuilders potentially contributes to the lack of systematic assessment sometimes witnessed in the Venezuela case – which renders more urgent that these actors themselves put in place rigorous internal processes to guide their intervention. In this regard, it is notable that, with the exception of 2002-2004 talks, the UN has not played a role in Venezuelan negotiations, perhaps due in part to its own assessment of the (un)likelihood of a successful outcome.

Methodology. In contrast again to the 2002–2004 talks, recent negoti-
ations have been characterised by a significant degree of improvisation.
Of the three, the 2016–2017 talks had the most structured agenda and
working methodology. However, little preparatory work was done,
international actors had differing levels of engagement and at times
competing interests, and the process for reaching agreements – between
and often within the two parties – was never clear. In some cases, such as
the Vatican's efforts in the 2016–2017 talks and those of Chile and
Mexico in 2017–2018, international facilitators interpreted their man-
dates expansively and proactively, employing their limited leverage and
creative energy in an effort to produce a workable agenda and tangible
progress. Even in these cases, however, the talks' status, methodology and
dynamics were vague, and the best efforts of international actors were
ultimately frustrated by the Maduro regime's lack of good faith.

Inclusivity and transparency. Recent dialogues in Venezuela were
conducted among political elites, with no role for civil society or other
domestic actors. In at least one instance, the early stages of talks were
televised. But the agenda, objectives and progress of negotiations were
generally murky to the Venezuelan public. For example, the draft agree-
ment that formed the basis of 2017–2018 talks remains secret. And
neither side prepared its supporters for the possibility of concessions.
As a result, civil society, whose demands (in the form of protests)
triggered the 2014 and 2017–2018 negotiations, often felt detached from
the process and predictably grew sceptical of the entire exercise as talks
failed to produce results.

Track II processes. There have been limited formal attempts to engage
a broader segment of society – in particular, influential elites or leaders
with significant constituencies outside of the primary negotiating parties
– in creating the conditions for a successful political dialogue. In part,
this is explained by the orthodoxy demanded on both sides. In particular,
the tendency of the Chávez and Maduro regimes to turn on erstwhile
allies who are perceived as disloyal strongly disincentivises participation in
Track II discussions by those who maintain proximity to the regime
– a reality that has hindered the efforts of civil society to convene such
discussions. Still, it is worth exploring this aspect of engagement and
considering tools utilised in other conflicts – for example, interactive
problem-solving workshops – to see if engaging actors who are
influential outside of formal mediation processes could be a useful tool in
creating ripeness.

Conclusions

Current developments in Venezuela, including a worsening humanitarian emergency and a volatile standoff between Maduro and National Assembly leader Juan Guaidó (recognised as interim president by over 50 countries), underscore the vital role that credible negotiations could play in a peaceful, democratic solution to the country's crisis. Indeed, it emerged in late April 2019 that Guaidó and his allies had reportedly sought to secretly negotiate a transition with officials close to Maduro, even while publicly decrying the idea of 'dialogue'.[5]

Meanwhile, the international community has sought in different ways to create a framework for potential negotiations, perhaps most prominently through the International Contact Group comprised of several countries from the European Union and Latin America, and more recently, via the standalone efforts of the Norwegian government. While the International Contact Group explicitly established early presidential elections as a principal objective of its engagement, Norwegian negotiators have been more ambiguous and tight-lipped about their objectives. The Norway-backed talks have advanced in fits and starts since May 2019.[6] In August the Maduro regime responded to expanded U.S. sanctions by threatening to pull out of negotiations and convene early legislative elections (originally scheduled for December 2020 – a likely poison pill. Throughout the process, Guaidó has had to contend with the shadow of past negotiation failures and the resulting scepticism of his political base and coalition partners. As Norwegian diplomats attempted to restart talks in mid-August, Guaidó insisted, 'The regime in previous years used (dialogue) to stall for time and generate doubts within the opposition. They will not do so in this case'.[7]

A number of countries have applied targeted and (in the case of the United States) sectoral sanctions aimed at generating pressure on Maduro, or those around him, to make the concessions that would facilitate a democratic transition. In this sense, at least some current efforts appear to incorporate the recognition that absent something approaching a hurting stalemate, negotiations are unlikely to succeed. Indeed, past Venezuelan experience has made credible dialogue more elusive at the moment it is most needed, pointing to the need for a more rigorous and transparent approach to international accompaniment of dialogue efforts – a lesson that merits consideration well beyond Venezuela itself.

Caracas. Photos: Adobe Stock Images

This article reflects developments through August 2019. The following month, the Norway-facilitated negotiations referenced in the article ended without an agreement. The political window for negotiation is now closed, but Venezuela's crisis grows only deeper. If and when another formal dialogue takes place, as is likely, the lessons identified here will remain salient.

Endnotes

[1] Harriet Alexander. 'Mike Pence tells Venezuelan exiles in Miami: "This is no time for dialogue. This is time for action".' *The Telegraph*. February 1, 2019. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/01/mike-pence-tells-venezuelan-exiles-miami-no-time-dialogue-time/

[2] See generally Frank O. Mora, 'Stabilizing Venezuela: Scenarios and Options', (report, Council on Foreign Relations, 14 June 2019). Available at: https://www.cfr.org/report/stabilizing-venezuela.
Inter-American Dialogue's Venezuela Working Group, 'Transition Interrupted: Prospects for Democratic Change in Venezuela', (report, Inter-American Dialogue, April 2019). Available at: https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TransitionInterrupted.pdf.

[3] See Francisco Alfaro Pareja, 'Mecanismos alternativos de diálogo y negociación en el conflicto político de Venezuela (2002-2018)', *Pensamiento Propio* No. 47, 19 September 2018. Available at: http://www.cries.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/007-Alfaro.pdf.
Jennifer McCoy and Francisco Diez, International Mediation in Venezuela, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 2011).

[4] IFIT's Venezuela Expert Group is an independent platform of Venezuelans seeking to advance dialogue and a peaceful solution to the country's varied crises. The Group meets continuously to analyse the prospects for a negotiated solution to the many challenges affecting the country, and to develop and disseminate realistic technical proposals that take account of relevant international experiences and the specificities of the Venezuelan context. In carrying out these activities, IFIT and the Venezuela Expert Group speak with actors on all sides.
See https://www.ifit-transitions.org/countries/venezuela.

[5] 'A Treacherous Stalemate in Venezuela.' *Washington Post*, May 2, 2019. Availabile at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/opinion/venezuela-maduro-guaido.html.

[6] 'A faint hope for Venezuela'. *The Economist*, July 18, 2019. Available at: https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2019/07/18/a-faint-hope-for-venezuela.

[7] 'Norwegian delegation in Venezuela to restart dialogue: sources, Guaido'. Reuters, August 14, 2019. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics/norwegian-delegation-in-venezuela-to-restart-dialogue-sources-guaido-idUSKCN1V41SC

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On the frontlines of sustaining peace in Colombia

By Borja Paladini Adell

In the context of this contribution, my focus is on the dialogic process, a way of being and behaving and a set of capacities that promotes trust and peace-oriented change that is inclusive, collaborative and integrative of other people's opinions.
A dialogic approach uses dialogue strategically as one of the methods to build peace, but also explores ways of connecting key people and institutions, mediating political spaces and making them more transformative and supportive to help societies to transition from destructive conflict to peace.

Sustaining peace in Colombia

Conflict-ridden societies, including – counterintuitively – those that have recently overcome violent conflict through a political settlement, are fraught with mistrust, polarisation, and resistance to change. The implementation of peace agreements is often the new arena where tension and controversy manifest themselves. In Colombia, for example, the recent peace deal has not evolved into a vision uniting Colombians around a common path towards a better future, but instead into one of the main cleavages amplifying polarisation and fragmentation in the country.

Against this backdrop, the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, with the Barometer Initiative[1], is monitoring and technically supporting the implementation of the peace agreement at the request of the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP), the strongest guerrilla movement in the country before its disarmament in mid-2017. The peace deal signatories requested Kroc develop an independent scholarly methodology for identifying advances, difficulties, gaps and concerns in real time, and to provide this information to the national and international monitoring and verification committees. They also invited Kroc to support, through its monitoring efforts, the continuous improvement of peacebuilding capacities in the country alongside implementation.

While doing this work in Colombia, several actors, including the peace agreement signatories, have on several occasions requested that Kroc differentiate between what the government has done and what FARP-EP has done to implement the accord, a request that if

accommodated could be used by one side to criticise the other for not complying with the accord. Kroc has always resisted these calls because making judgment was not part of the original mandate for the monitoring effort, and it could have been used by either party, or by society, to accuse Kroc of being partial and, therefore, irrelevant.

As a peacebuilding actor, the Kroc Institute has sought to move attention away from the divisive finger-pointing game that characterises the political context in Colombia into a richer more cooperative and evidence-based conversation about how to constructively navigate the challenges of the post-agreement phase of the peace process.

In a context of extreme combative polarisation around peace, as is the case in Colombia, how has Kroc created a political space in which to present its monitoring work without itself becoming a factor of division and exclusion and getting entrapped in the noisy contentious narratives currently splitting Colombia on the peace process? How has Kroc tried to incentivise key Colombian stakeholders to focus on constructive conversations about how to advance the implementation process rather than focusing on blaming others for things that are not working?

Hybrid approach: monitoring the agreement and promoting peacebuilding through a dialogic approach

To face the challenges described above, the Kroc team decided to combine its scholarly expertise with a dialogic peacebuilding-oriented approach.[2] The Barometer Initiative has developed two intertwined lines of work.

The first uses an academic method to rigorously measure implementation. Through an accumulative iterative process, a team of peacebuilders and scholars collect, validate, analyse and code hundreds of pieces of information from a diverse plurality of sources.[3] Kroc regularly monitors progress in the implementation of 578 measurable and observable commitments included in the peace accord. These commitments were clustered into a matrix of 18 themes and 70 sub-themes to facilitate the continuous quantitative and qualitative analysis. In addition, Kroc has analysed the concrete commitments included in the peace accord related to gender, ethnicity and local peacebuilding. Using this empirical evidence, Kroc engages with top decision makers and other strategic platforms of stakeholders – opinion makers, journalists, academics, members of congress, representatives of the international community and civil society, among others – with regular

updates about the implementation process. The reports identify advances, difficulties, gaps, delays, concerns, bottlenecks and early alerts of renewed violence. They also present comparative analysis about other peace processes, and how other countries have dealt with similar dilemmas, tensions and difficulties. The theory of change that informs Kroc's work is that timely evidence-based information on the progress and challenges of implementation, with comparative information from other countries, helps to focus commitment on the process, encourage action to achieve implementation and navigate the post-agreement complexity, and constructively address emerging challenges and road-blocks.[4]

From 2016, Kroc has provided three comprehensive public reports on progress towards implementation: one public report analysing the implementation of the gender stipulations of the peace agreement, and more than 30 written and oral confidential briefs presenting relevant analyses and concerns about different areas of the peace agreement. Kroc officials have presented these reports to key decision makers in formal top-level committees tasked with monitoring the implementa-tion, and in more than 100 follow-up meetings with senior staff of the government, as well as many others among the international community and civil society representatives. In addition, in 2019, Kroc is preparing five regional reports to analyse implementation at the local level; a fourth comprehensive report on all of the peace agreement stipulations; a second report looking more specifically at those stipula-tions with a focus on gender; and an additional one looking at progress in implementation of commitments related to ethnicity.

The second dimension of the Barometer Initiative is the dialogic approach. Kroc has complemented its scholarly workflow with a collaborative process with many actors. When designing the Barometer Initiative, the Kroc leadership decided to select in Colombia a multidis-ciplinary team of skilled dialogue and trust-building practitioners with academic and policy backgrounds, motivating them to go beyond tech-nical desk-based academic work, and make use of their peacebuilding skills. Since 2016, the team has regularly organised and sustained formal and informal spaces such us meetings, focal groups or coffee conver-sations fostering collaboration and joint analysis with hundreds of Colombian actors at different levels of society (national and local) and with different decision-making responsibilities. Some of these dialogic spaces are more formal: a set of facilitated events where people come together in a safe space, develop a common understanding about the peace process through honest conversation and listening, and identify

Local dialogue with rural communities in Samaniego of the Nariño Department, Colombia.

A moment for mourning in Las Lajas, Iplales, Nariño Department, Colombia.   *Photos: Borja Paladini Adell*

options to address bottlenecks. Many of them are informal, focusing on sharing information, conversing about the value of the accord's implementation as a way to meet social and political needs, and fostering creativity to face impasses and implementation problems. Kroc's team has promoted, facilitated or participated in these spaces providing the empirical evidence coming from its monitoring work. The spaces have been fundamental in providing context and quality to the monitoring process, facilitating participatory conflict- and peace-oriented analysis, and building trust, commitment and relationships among different stakeholders that are important to develop ways to respond to the peace process bottlenecks.

As an example, Kroc is facilitating the process to monitor the distinctive stipulations within the peace agreement with gender and ethnic components, respectively. The initiative has been collaborative with the participation of women and ethnic platforms and other key stakeholders interested in monitoring and evaluating the implementation using these distinctive lenses. The Institute has shared its methodology and exchanged data and analysis with these groups. This has been done through regular dialogue events and advocacy meetings with other key actors where the participants, including Kroc, have benefitted from the rich quantitative and comparative assessments on the progress of implementation, and have promoted joint participatory analysis qualifying it, providing context to the assessments and identifying common recommendations.

An additional example is the process to monitor the peace agreement implementation at the local level. With a team of ten professionals based in ten regions, the monitoring has involved the organisation of regular formal and informal dialogue spaces at the local level, with the participation of hundreds of community members. This process allows for the co-creation of knowledge with local actors, with the aim to feed it into Kroc's academic workflow, making the analysis more inclusive and legitimate. Everyday and local understandings of the peace process status have complemented the quantitative and comparative assessments creating a much richer picture of the peacebuilding dynamic. This distinctive bottom-up analysis has indeed enriched the meetings with key decision makers, and enhanced the legitimacy and power of the information provided.

Truth opens the doors to peace and reconciliation. Local dialogue workshop in Olaya Herrara, Nariño Department, Colombia.
Photo: Borja Paladini Adell

Conclusion

Reductionist rhetoric, and black–and–white accounts of the peace process are still pervasive in Colombia. However, as Kroc's experience indicates, it is possible to facilitate and mediate political spaces not driven by schism, where the focus is on fact-based and forward-reaching constructive conversations. Dialogue events have been part of the equation. But trust and relationship building, strategic weaving and networking, and participative and inclusive analysis have complemented the dynamic to promote a more meaningful process. A dialogic approach has forged quality interactions among key stake-holders, and has provided a more transformative platform to sustaining peace in Colombia and supporting its war-to-peace transition.

Endnotes

[1] The Kroc Institute is a peace research institution based at the University of Notre Dame, USA. One of its main research programmes is the Peace Accord Matrix (PAM), which systematically analyses the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements in the last 40 years. In Colombia, the Kroc Institute is monitoring and technically supporting the verification of the peace accord implementation, responding to a formal invitation from the Government of Colombia and the Colombian guerrilla FARC-EP. Working at the nexus between research and practice, the Peace Accords Matrix Project is home to the largest existing collection of implementation data on intrastate peace agreements. PAM team members regularly provide research support to on-going peace processes on issues of peace agreement design and implementation. More info: https://kroc.nd.edu

[2] More information about the concept can be found at:

- John P. Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace,* (Oxford, MA: Oxford University Press, 2005).

- Bettye Pruitt and Philip Thomas, *Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners*, (Washington/Stockholm/New York, Organization of American States, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2007). https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/democratic-dialogue-a-handbook-for-practitioners.pdf

[3] Kroc gets its information from hundreds of sources including state institutions; civil society; communities; women's and ethnic organisations; think tanks and universities; surveys; local national and international media; and focal groups among others.

[4] Borja Paladini Adell and Sean Malloy, 'More inclusive monitoring of peace agreement implementation', in Andy Carl (ed.) *Negotiating inclusion in peace processes*, Accord 28, Conciliation Resources, 2019.

Robi Damelin

was born in South Africa and immigrated to Israel in 1967 as a volunteer in a kibbutz. In South Africa, Robi was very active in anti-apartheid activities. She lost her son David in March, 2002, when a Palestinian sniper shot him while David was on the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) reserve duty. David was a student at Tel Aviv University studying for his Master's in the Philosophy of Education and an active member of the peace movement. Since 2003 Robi has been making use of her personal pain for reconciliation rather than revenge and thereby contributing to the creation of a ray of light for peace in the Middle East. As responsible for Parents Circle-Families Forum's public relations Robi gives many interviews to international and local media, thereby using the media as a tool to promote peace.

On history through the human eye
Moving Israelis and Palestinians beyond exclusive truths

By Robi Damelin

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as listening while not necessarily agreeing. This is opposed to mediation where one would expect there to be a compromise.

The ongoing Palestinian–Israeli conflict continues to create barriers. These barriers are emotional, physical, and bureaucratic, separating Israelis and Palestinians by ensuring that when interactions do occur, they maintain the asymmetry of power currently present between the two societies. The need for dialogue and mutual understanding has become even more important following failed political negotiations, and heightened violence which could easily devolve into a full-blown war. This general feeling of despair leads to an increase in isolation on both sides.

The Parents Circle – Families Forum (PCFF) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) comprised of more than 600 Israeli and Palestinian bereaved families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the conflict. Instead of revenge and hatred after loss, they have chosen to channel their grief into reconciliation. The vision of the PCFF is to create a framework for a reconciliation process to be an integral part of any future political peace agreement. PCFF is not affiliated with any political party, though all of its members are politically aware individuals and try to exert influence in the political system wherever possible. Some members of Israel's Parliament are sympathetic to our cause. In the past, lobbying by PCFF within the Parliament helped to establish a block of members who recognised the need for reconciliation. However, in the present political climate, creating a similar block would be very difficult.

Reconciliation is traditionally understood as a post-conflict task necessary for healing a divided society. PCFF challenges the assumption that reconciliation should wait, suggesting instead that any peace process that does not reach beyond each nation's politicians will be incomplete. In fact, PCFF sees reconciliation as a tool for challenging the stalled peace process. Without a process of reconciliation that focuses on recognising one another's humanity, we have learned from experiences of past peace agreements that at best, one can hope only for a temporary ceasefire and momentary relief from violence.

PCFF's mission is to drive a process of deepening mutual understanding, empathy and emotional transformation through dialogue enabled by interaction and storytelling that helps participants understand how the 'other' sees and interprets their personal and national history. What makes the work of the PCFF unique is the fact that people who have suffered the most from the ongoing violence have chosen to convert anger and revenge, helplessness and despair into actions of hope as a process towards peace and reconciliation. Unlike mediation that asks for compromise, in the dialogue PCFF facilitates no one is asked to compromise their narrative but rather, all are invited to acknowledge with empathy the narrative of the other.

History through the human eye: A Parallel Narrative Experience

In the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, often classified by scholars as intractable, there are psychological factors that play a major role in perpetuating the violence and preventing resolution. Reconciliation will depend on the ability of Israelis and Palestinians to change their attitudes, shattering the vicious cycle in which extremism on one side nourishes extremism on the other, grappling and coming to terms with the past, and acknowledging the power asymmetry between the two sides and the way it currently manifests itself.

PCFF serves as a beacon of hope and is vital in its ability to bring Israelis and Palestinians together to engage in dialogue. Its Parallel Narrative Experience (PNE) project includes an 80-hour module made up of unilateral and bilateral workshops and dialogue activities between Israelis and Palestinians. Dialogue occurs as participants explore and share their personal experiences living in conflict and visit sites such as the Holocaust Museum and Palestinian villages that existed before 1948 and are now located within Israel's borders. These shared experiences provide a concrete context and basis for discussion about how the interpretation of personal and national narratives from both sides contributes to the complexity of the conflict. The module also includes tours of current sites of conflict and discussions about their impact, such as the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. This is not an exercise in the comparison of suffering but rather an exercise to show empathy and deepen understanding of the views of the other.

The core goal of the Parallel Narrative project is to help people move beyond exclusive truths and begin to empathise and understand other perspectives on the same events. The PCFF has focused on bringing the concept of narratives to Israelis and Palestinians because, in the search for reconciliation, our unique contribution is our stories and our

histories. The personal story of bereavement and the choice to reconcile and choose a path of non–violence serves as a great 'opener' for deep dialogue with the other side. This is a platform for those involved in conflict to communicate and share perspectives, experiences, ideas etc. In turn, this interpersonal interaction shifts entrenched attitudes that peace is not possible because there are no partners for peace towards an attitude that partnership is possible despite rather hopeless conditions.

This method could be adapted to other regions where groups experience deep polarisation and have a history of violence caused by the other. One opportunity to share its model that PCFF has been exploring is with bereaved mothers among African-American communities in the United States and bereaved mothers of police officers from the same communities. This type of dialogue could also be relevant for communities in Sri Lanka, Nigeria, India and Pakistan, to mention a few. Where applied, the model would need to be adapted to the context and the facilitators together with participants would need to identify the appropriate historical and contemporary sites.

Working with parallel narratives serves as a catalyst for the creation of empathy with the 'other'. Over the years, the PCFF has witnessed and evaluated its power and impact on the reconciliation process among Israelis and Palestinians.

Specifically, evaluations are conducted by collecting survey data from participants of programmes that use this methodology. This data is later analysed by external consultants and scholars and show on average that:
- 86% of participants reported an increase in their level of trust in the other side.
- 93% of participants reported an increase in their level of empathy for the other side.
- 62% of participants reported an increase in their willingness to be engaged in activities supporting peacebuilding and reconciliation.

We have over one thousand alumni from the Parallel Narrative programmes. They have become very active and have created a rippling effect in their respective communities. Alumni have become more involved in pro–peace activism and also have come together to create projects and actions of solidarity. Past joint projects include a confer-ence for all local peace NGOs and a booklet in phonetic Hebrew and Arabic to be used in hospitals so that patients can communicate with each other.

Working with youth and young adults

The Dialogue Meetings held by PCFF are ongoing activities, conducted on a daily basis in Israeli Schools and Palestinian youth clubs for 16 to 17-year-old students. This has enabled us to reach thousands of students all over Palestine and Israel. Since the second 'Intifada' there is a whole generation who has never met the 'other side'. These dialogue meetings may be their first encounter with their perceived enemy. After hearing the personal narratives and the joint message of an Israeli and a Palestinian bereaved member from the PCFF, students demonstrate a change in attitude and willingness to explore the possibility of dialogue as an alternative to violence and an understanding of the needs of the other. External evaluations of school dialogue meetings found that 64% of students had an increase in their positive perception of the 'other'. Further, 57% of students reported an increased belief in the possibility of peace. The PCFF has also developed training for teachers after learning that teachers' attitudes regarding peace and narratives of the 'other' can be an obstacle to achieving a positive impact through dialogue meetings. Teachers are trained to guide their students through open listening exercises before dialogue meetings, as well as provided guidance and activities for leading post-dialogue meeting discussions with their students.

Our Youth Summer Program for bereaved Palestinian and Israeli youth is another integral part of PCFF's programming every year and is also a powerful example of the potential for achieving an emotional breakthrough, which is created by seeing the humanity in the other. Some 40 to 60 bereaved Palestinian and Israeli youth, aged 14 to 18, take part in an intensive week of dialogue and team-building activities. The Youth Summer Program is typically held in the northern part of Israel, with special emphasis placed on choosing a location close to the sea. Opportunities to visit the sea are rare for Palestinian youth. The week that the youth spend together not only focuses on activities that build rapport between them, it also provides a space for the difficult conversations that emerge through the dialogue meetings that are held during the programme. The fact that youth who participated in past programmes have returned to work as counsellors testifies to the transformation experienced by these young people. It also speaks to the importance of the continuation of the meetings that help the youth maintain their relationships and become messengers of peace among their peers. The impact of these programmes is lasting and is not just a temporary encounter. Youth are expected to become ambassadors of the PCFF's messages and to share their experience with friends, thereby creating a ripple effect.

Women participate in an International Women's Day march in Tel Aviv, in which 70 Israeli and 70 Palestinian bereaved women took part. Photo: Yifat Yogev

Organisers of the march handed a flower to members of the public and on each flower there was a note which read, 'We would rather give you a flower than to put one on a grave'.

Israeli and Palestinian youth are easily influenced by extremist messages, in part because they have no memory of a time without violence and separation. Established by PCFF as a follow on to the Summer Program, the Young Ambassadors for Peace is an innovative programme designed to create the next generation of peace leaders in which the youth continue the PCFF's work of non-violence and reconciliation by speaking about the importance of peace and by developing educational projects for their peers. The Young Ambassadors for Peace are in constant contact with PCFF staff and members who guide the programme. They maintain contact with their fellow ambassadors through a WhatsApp group and Facebook page. The extraordinary success of this programme and the commitment of these bereaved young adults aged 19–30 is a source of pride for PCFF. In their work together, they recently created a photograph exhibition called 'Change for Hope'. The exhibition is being taken on a tour of high schools in order to stimulate dialogue about the conflict among youth.

Women and their role in the Parents Circle – Families Forum

Women are never actively invited to the peace table, so much of the work we are doing is to create an atmosphere for women to take a more active role in the peace movement. At PCFF the important role that bereaved women have in bringing about a peaceful lasting solution to the conflict is well recognised. During the First Uprising, Palestinian women were active participants in pushing for change in Palestine. This seems to have dissipated over the years, and some of our purpose is to recreate an active role for women in grassroots peacebuilding. This group has increased their activism, engaging in activities that have drawn attention to their narratives from all over the world. One project involved the creation of a cookbook, 'Jam Session', which tells their stories and illustrates the dialogue that was created through the sharing of recipes. They also created 'Steps for Peace', an embroidery project which helped to supplement the income of the Palestinian women. Additional initiatives include art exhibitions such as 'The Presence of the Void' and 'The Fabric of War', intended to bring awareness to the price of violence and ongoing bereavement through creative mediums such as film. The women are now taking part in a series of workshops in which they engage with one another to learn, experience and explore the meaning of reconciliation. These workshops have solidified the relationship of some 50 women from both sides and has created a cadre of Palestinian and Israeli women who conduct dialogue meetings both in Israel and Palestine, ensuring a much stronger feminine voice in peacebuilding.

Conclusion

The message we bring of reconciliation, non-violence and the creation of hope is not only a local message. Palestinian and Israeli PCFF representatives travel all over the world. We stand on stages and speak in one voice to call for an end to the conflict, a sight that grows increasingly rare as national and international opinions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict become increasingly polarised. What could be more powerful? We also are happy to share our experience and model with other groups around the world, engaging in discussions about how it can be adapted to differences in culture and circumstances.

There is a need for stronger collaboration between academics and NGOs, for the work of practitioners like those at PCFF to inform scholarship, and for scholarship to bring new insights to our work. Current academic literature on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to be deployed by either side to further entrench their position. Or it provides abstract and simplified views that trivialise the complexity of the conflict as it is currently lived and understood.

Funding for the PCFF's work is becoming more difficult to secure. Reconciliation and other peacebuilding activities are incremental and long-term work, not easily measured in two-year project timelines or monitoring and evaluation matrices. The decision of the current United States administration to cut all funding for cross border activities in 2018 presented a further set-back to the PCFF whose members view this cut in funding as short-sighted and dangerous. We cannot bring a nation to its knees and then imagine that they will want peace. History teaches us the very opposite. Unfortunately, funding for reconciliation activities is easily treated as a political football, is driven by trends in donor priorities, or is shifted to other contexts as violence sparks elsewhere in the world. What is overlooked is the impact that the conflict continues to have on Palestinians and Israelis every day.

We are more than convinced of the need for dialogue, as cutting off Israelis from Palestinians creates fear, suspicion and violence. Taking into consideration the withdrawal of funding by the Trump Administration, now more than ever, there is a greater need for funding, technical support and solidarity from the international community.

Qais As'ad

joined the Carter Center in 2016 as the field
office's Program Manager in Israel and Palestine.
In addition to the management of the field office
programmes, he provides analysis about a variety
of political issues, including Palestinian political
division, human rights and the Palestinian–Israeli
conflict. At an early stage of his carrier, Qais joined
the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as Chief of Staff of the General
Secretariat of the Executive Committee. Later, he worked as a Political Advisor at the
British Consulate-General in Jerusalem, where his role included providing analysis
and policy advice for the UK government on a variety of political issues, on human
rights-related issues in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including settle-
ments, barrier, access and movement of the Palestinian people and Palestinian
national human rights.

Palestinian youth dialogue
Building a more inclusive society

By Qais As'ad

Statistics indicate that 65% of the Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are below the age of 24.[1] Years of protracted conflict with Israel, and the internal division between the West Bank and Gaza, continue to dramatically degrade the already volatile future prospects and quality of life facing Palestinian youth. Youth have become plagued with unemployment, with less educational opportunities, less public participation and little hope for a better future. Amid this gloomy reality, Palestinian youth must be steered and motivated to become leaders and decision-makers. To achieve this goal, it is vital to create a national circle of dialogue amongst the youth themselves and with other national actors to map the road towards a brighter future for peace in Palestine.

> *In the context of this distribution, dialogue is understood as a means to endorse inclusivity to promote peacebuilding and stability in conflict-affected societies. In the Palestinian context, dialogue can enable youth to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to play a constructive part in breaking the status quo and improving their harsh reality.*

The situation facing youth

Palestinian youth across the OPT have grown up having never experienced self-determination. The Israeli occupation has become entrenched, determining the course of their lives, and fragmenting their geographic, political, economic, cultural and social realities. The Israeli occupation's control regime has created a fractured reality. Roadblocks, the expansion of settlements and the decade-plus-long blockade on Gaza have turned the OPT into isolated cantons with different statuses, governance and security control. This has contributed to the absence of coherent national institutions that could shape their political, social and economic environment.

The chronic divide between the West Bank and Gaza has led to further fragmentation between Palestinian youth, widening the gap between them and their national institutions, as authoritarianism progresses. The political stalemate between Fatah and Hamas has also exacted hefty

political, economic, social and institutional costs, both in general, and for youth and marginalised social sectors in particular.

According to recent data by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-29 has reached 40%. The rate of unemployment among graduates holding an intermediate diploma or higher was 55.8% (37.8% for males and 72% for females). Adding that to the harsh living conditions, many promising young men and women have expressed a desire to emigrate to other countries to seek better prospects for themselves.[2]

Despite the gloomy reality in the OPT, many youth organisations are making major contributions to the empowerment of their communities and in the development of economic and social capital. They provide an opportunity, a resource and real potential to drive a positive change in their current situation. One of these organisations is the Sharek Youth Forum, which focuses on strengthening young people's eco-nomic prospects by providing them with the skills needed to succeed in the labour market. Burj al-Laqlaq is another Palestinian organisation working on empowering young Jerusalemites residing in the Old City through sport and cultural activities. A third youth organisation whose work is worth highlighting is the Sky Geeks focused on supporting start-up businesses in Gaza and expanding education about tech entre-preneurship.

Alienation of youth

In early 2018, the Carter Center concluded a study, in cooperation with the Center for Development Studies at Birzeit University, on the atti-tudes of Palestinian youth towards civic engagement. The study high-lighted how youth evaluate their experiences in existing opportunities for civic participation. The study also explored ways to bring about the kinds of social, political and institutional transformation needed to pro-mote the full engagement and presence of youth in Palestinian political decision-making circles.

The initiative was grounded in the recognition that Palestinian youth have been the backbone of the national movement since the late 1980s. They were the driving force for mobilisation during the first and second intifada and in student politics and other social and economic agendas. The most recent 'March of Return' protests in Gaza are yet another demonstration of Palestinian youth being at the centre of political activity and thereby influencing the dynamics of conflict. Nevertheless, the space

for and ability of youth in the OPT to engage fully in peacebuilding and development continue to face severe obstacles:

1. There is a widely disavowed democratic deficit in the Palestinian territories. Most young people have never participated in a Palestinian national election nor have they had the possibility to work in decision-making roles within government institutions, thus leaving them with little recourse to change their political reality. This has left Palestinian youth largely absent from the processes of decision-making and community development. In addition, a growing number of youth are losing confidence in their national governance bodies. In fact, the previously mentioned study shows that 62.7% of Palestinian youth were not content with the performance of the Palestinian Authority (PA). It revealed that 61% of Gaza's youth rated the PA's performance as 'poor' to 'very poor'. In the West Bank, 34.1% of those surveyed gave the same answer.

2. The study also found that 51% of Palestinian youth perceive the performance of the political parties as 'poor' and 'very poor'. This reflects a strong sentiment among youth that political parties tend to ignore the roles young people play within their internal decision-making structures. This exclusion of Palestinian youth has led to further alienation and disenfranchisement of youth from political processes. It has driven a wedge between them and political elites who, despite inherent occupation-imposed restrictions, are nevertheless tasked with making decisions and setting far-reaching policies on behalf of their young constituents.

3. There is a tendency to isolate Palestinian youth as a category particularly distinct from other segments of Palestinian society. Palestinian sociologist, Jamil Hilal, stresses that instead of monochromatic approaches to addressing youth, the majority of youth-oriented programmes tend to look toward the enablement of youth in specific kinds of activities as the answer to their problems – be it as economic actors (focusing on poverty or employment), or political participation (helping their voices to be heard in decision-making).[3] For Hilal, this is akin to addressing the issue of youth 'as though they are an added entity and are not a constitutive element of society, and as though these concerns are only particular to them and not to the entire society living under the conditions of the OPT today'.

Looking ahead

On 9 December 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. The Council urged Member States to consider ways to increase the overall representation of youth in decision-making processes at all levels in preventing and resolving conflicts. In the past there have been few attempts to achieve this goal in Palestine, with the two below worth noting:

1. In 2009, a Palestinian Youth Parliament (PYP) was established in the OPT. The body consisted of 132 members, who were divided into committees with 12 members each, tasked to examine the needs of youth and to cooperate with the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The initiative aimed mainly at empowering youth's participation in the democratic process and to establish dialogue between young people and decision makers. Unfortunately, the project was terminated due to lack of funding and the closure of its office in Gaza by the Hamas movement.

2. In 2016, a coalition of local and international organisations launched a project dubbed 'Palestinian Youth: Together for Change'.[4] This project aimed to promote the participation of Palestinian youth in supporting social and political change at national level. The objectives of the initiative were to a) achieve common positions within the youth segment regarding various political and social issues and b) to bridge geographical and political divisions among the youth to develop strategies and propose political and social alternatives to the status quo.

In the Palestinian context, there is an urgent need to move beyond the status quo. In considering their political and ideological inclinations, it would be reckless to leave the youth unattended and marginalised from public policy and participation, as youth represent the most vulnerable and turbulent group within Palestinian society. Palestinian young people need direction and must be motivated to become the leaders, decision-makers and visionaries of the future. A leading path for change is to be found in creating a national circle of dialogue among the youth themselves and between youth and other local actors. Palestinian youth groups, civil society actors, political parties and representatives of the international community have a shared responsibility to promote this approach through:

1. *Promoting youth dialogue through electronic platforms*
    According to statistics published in 2017, there were over three
    million internet users in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which
    amounts to 60% of the population; 59% are youth between the
    ages of 18 and 24.[5] This makes utilising social media and electronic
    platforms, enhanced by research, studies and effective discussions
    an important tool to spark constructive dialogue derived from the
    real political, economic, social and cultural needs of the Palestinian
    people.

    Digital platforms would also be a useful tool to orient the pub-
    lic, institutional representatives and youth groups in approaches
    for adopting modern methods for political participation. Utilising
    electronic digital platforms can help to overcome physical barriers
    and enable the inclusive participation by a variety of youth, experts,
    specialists, activists, opinion makers and influencers of Palestinian
    public opinion to guide and formulate a new approach to con-
    structive dialogue.

2. *Promoting national initiatives for youth dialogue*
    A cornerstone in this approach would be the establishment of a
    collective mechanism for dialogue between the various actors in
    the vibrant youth segment. While pursuit of democratic elections
    is vital, it is also important that youth be equipped with the
    knowledge and skills for networking, lobbying and alliance forma-
    tion. Rather than wait for elections while frustration mounts, it is
    important for young people to be able to influence events now.
    This needs to be done in the OPT as a whole, so that youth
    networks and linkages are strengthened across the West Bank,
    including Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, enabling them to
    cohesively lobby for their priorities in unison (empowerment,
    education, employment, freedom of speech, etc).

3. *Convening the National Conference to promote the inclusivity of youth*
    There is a need to enhance the connection that youth have with
    decision-makers at the national level. It is vital to enable and
    facilitate a serious and continuous dialogue between youth and
    decision-makers within political parties and civil society
    representatives. While most of the youth are not engaged, or
    involved with the political leadership, Palestinian political parties
    and civil society constitute important allies because they share the
    same priorities and demands.

4.   *The donor countries*

International donors have spent millions of dollars over the past three decades to promote dialogue in the context of Palestine and Israel. However, the failed cycles of negotiations have led to a lack of trust in peace processes, especially among the Palestinian youth population. This has led OPT youth to prioritise an approach to challenging their reality (occupation, division and exclusion) with a resistance mentality. They strongly stand in support of activities which are rights based. In this context, it is time that donor countries realise the importance of intra-Palestinian dialogue to promote inclusivity. It is time to adopt dialogue based on common ideals – democracy, civil rights and human rights.

Endnotes

[1] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), www.pcbs.gov.p

[2] The PCBS data shows that about 24% of the young people in OPT have a desire to emigrate abroad.

[3] Jamil Hilal is a sociologist at Birzeit University and a senior research fellow at the Palestinian Institution for the Study of Democracy (Muwatin) in the city of Ramallah, the West Bank.

[4] Genevieve Beck-Roe, 'Undivided we stand across the separation wall: Palestinian Youth Together for Change', blog post, 9 March 2016.
https://www.afsc.org/blogs/acting-in-faith/undivided-we-stand-across-separation-wall-palestinian-youth-together-change

[5] http://ipoke.co/SocialMediaOnPalestine2017.pdf

Shirine Jurdi

holds a Bachelor's and Master's in International Affairs from Lebanese American University and did doctoral studies at Tokyo University in Foreign Studies which paved the way for work on topics pertaining to international peace and security within a gender perspective.

A member of international networks, she is the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional representative of the Women's international League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the MENA regional liaison officer for Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (MENAPPAC) and project coordinator for projects in the Permanent Peace Movement. Her work on disarmament and gender has been extensive; member of the coalition on Control Arms, and currently team leader of WILPF Lebanon on Ban Killer Robots Campaign.

A snapshot from Lebanon
Interview with Shirine Jurdi

Throughout several years of conflict and violence, civil society in
Lebanon has played an important role, engaging in efforts to promote
dialogue and peace. With independence in 1943, the country established
a confessional political system known as the National Pact, distributing
power between the three largest religious groups: Maronite Christians,
Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims.[1] Tensions between these groups,
regional instability and external involvement from regional powers
led to a series of conflicts and acts of violence known as the Lebanese
Civil War (1975–1990). The conflict, which caused an estimated 90,000
deaths, left 100,000 people badly injured and displaced close to a
million people, officially came to an end with the 1989 Taif Accord.[2]

Almost thirty years after the Agreement, internal political instability and
regional unrest continue to threaten sustainable peace in Lebanon.
Hezbollah continues its military activity in southern Lebanon, instigat-
ing attacks against Israel. The country also has received an estimated
1.5 million refugees from Syria, contributing to increased tensions
between refugee and host communities.[3] Post-civil war Lebanon has at
the same time seen a rise in civic activism, protests and demonstrations,
particularly following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri
in 2005. Women's organisations and associations play a large role in
efforts to sustain peace. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation spoke to
Shirine Jurdi to learn more about how these popular movements have
contributed to dialogue in Lebanon, as well as the role of women and
international actors in promoting these efforts.

Shirine Jurdi is the regional representative of the Women's Inter-
national League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a peace movement
that started in Lebanon in 1962. Working in parallel to WILPF
International programmes, the movement in Lebanon aims to leverage
a feminist perspective on peace, redefining security and promoting
social and economic justice. WILPF Lebanon works with its mem-
bership on the operationalisation of the Women, Peace and Security
(WPS) agenda (Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent

resolutions) by engaging and providing a platform for actors with a diversity of age, religion and expertise. WILPF works with refugees on projects that strengthen leadership, provide education and focus on environmental sustainability.

What have been the most critical issues that dialogue efforts in Lebanon in recent years have aimed to address?
To understand dialogue as it relates to recent critical issues in Lebanon you first have to look historically at the role of dialogue in the country and to examine the horizontal and vertical cleavages that exist in the country.

The process that led to the 1989 Taif Accord and the end of intra-Lebanese violence included official dialogues in Geneva and Lausanne involving international and Arab interlocutors. Yet there was still a lot of political tension in the country and suppression of opposition and popular dissent. The assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005 and the withdrawal of Syrian troops ushered in a new era in Lebanese politics in which people took to the streets (in what is referred to as the Cedar Revolution) in order to have their voices heard. No one called on them to do so, they just felt something had to change and they wanted to inform that change. Official political dialogue began a bit later, with a National Dialogue that was initiated in 2006, focusing on issues that were driving political and social divides in the country.

When no political dialogue is happening – or it is taking place without inclusion – it takes place at the street level. Today in Lebanon you see lots of protests, which are a type of dialogue. They take place frequently since we have no other platform or outlet to have a proper dialogue at the national level. The protests are inspired by concerns about issues of daily life such as the lack of equal access to electricity; corruption within official institutions; the need for electoral reform; political participation of women; and citizenship laws. These concerns are not put at the top of the political agenda because it would require examining and rethinking carefully the status quo in Lebanon. Lebanese citizens themselves are not ready for that; people seem to prefer honouring and safeguarding the status of their political and religious leaders at the expense of their own rights.

We have a clientelist society and people's opinions and views are typically dictated by their religious and/or political affiliations and networks. Privileged individuals feel protected and feel that the leaders with whom they have personal connections give them the things they

need. Political leaders are not willing to relinquish the power they have gained over the years, which is not really conducive to genuine national dialogue.

What have been the key advantages of using dialogue as a method of addressing conflict issues and for building and sustaining peace in Lebanon? Dialogue efforts in Lebanon have not led to concrete changes and are not taking place in pursuit of a long-term vision of sustaining peace, with prevention at the core. At the same time, as soon as political actors engage in a dialogue or announce the intention for a *tawlet hiwar*, or national dialogue, tensions calm down immediately. For that reason dialogue does play an important role within the political system for politicians to manage conflict.

Civil society's work also affects how politicians use dialogue. Protests to some extent have had a positive impact, as they raise the voice of people who otherwise are typically ignored by politicians. For example, the mass protests in 2015 over the government's failure to address the garbage crisis had a direct effect on the way politicians included issues in their election campaigns, such as recycling and electricity plans. Similarly, recent protests to endorse civil laws, including civil marriage, are likely to have an impact although to what extent is hard to gauge at this time.

Government has been increasingly responding to the demands of civil society, including the need to comply with international declarations. There was, for example, a national consultation that involved diverse stakeholders, including civil society and international donors, on developing a Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) strategy although the consultation was limited in focus and the action plan is still not being implemented. A similar process is now underway in developing a National Action Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Civil society in Lebanon is active – there are many different actors, including groups affiliated with political parties. However, there is serious fragmentation among different groups as all seem to want to do things on their own. Civil society groups need to engage in dialogue amongst each other and develop a unified strategy or vision. In this regard, WILPF–Lebanon wants to support such a united platform.

What are some of the key considerations needed when engaging refugees and displaced persons in dialogue on peacebuilding and sustaining peace?
The situation of Syrian refugees poses a big challenge for Lebanon and is causing disagreement between political blocks internally. The country was faced with this huge refugee influx without a national strategy and it's important to remember that Lebanon is not a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has not signed its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status on Refugees. There is no real dialogue at the national level on what should be done with regard to this issue.

The religious composition of Lebanon and the country's confessional political system means that the refugee situation is approached as a demographic question rather than an issue of human rights. In the media, Syrians are often blamed for economic and infrastructure problems and there is a concern that just like the Palestine refugees, those from Syria will be in Lebanon permanently. While Christian Syrians are well taken care of (as is or was the case for the mainly Christian Iraqi refugees), Muslims are not. Given that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are primarily Sunni Muslims, their presence will lead not only to a change in the religious demographic composition of Lebanon but also likely influence future elections. This causes animosity among many Lebanese host communities towards the refugee population. There should be efforts, including through dialogue between host and refugee communities, to make both sides feel safe and to foster greater understanding. Refugees also need to be protected against hate speech and racist rhetoric on social media, which has been increasing.

Palestine refugees are still living in camps after being in Lebanon for 71 years. It was only fairly recently that institutions such as the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee were created to promote dialogue with Palestine refugees, but certain issues, like the question of citizenship, remain highly sensitive. At the local level, there are lots of events and activities – primarily donor funded – between municipalities, refugee camps and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to facilitate training and capacity building to strengthen social cohesion and resilience and to address the challenges that the respective communities are facing.

There is a need for more dialogue, especially with donors, about how to respond to the financial cuts to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which is responsible for providing education, health and other vital services to Palestine refugee communities where the Lebanese government does not.

*What has been the engagement of women and girls in dialogue processes
in Lebanon and what impact has it had?*
Women are calling for dialogue that promotes social and economic
equality and belonging for women in the country. Efforts range from
demands to amend the personal status law which makes women and
men unequal before the law and discriminates between Muslim and
Christian women, to calling for equal citizenship laws. As such, the
presence and active participation of women, though very fragmented,
has a strong impact on state policies. While more work is needed,
women are paving the road to equality through dialogue, protests,
activism and various projects mainly within civil society.

However, they need to have a greater voice in decision-making and in
official dialogue efforts in Lebanese society and politics. Greater
political empowerment of women at the household level is critical.
This would require a change to the personal status laws[4], which govern
a woman's role in society, and the abandonment of religious courts.

What you need is cooperation between donors and political leaders to
ensure that not only are women empowered, trained and capacitated
to do more but that local leaders have similar training on the need to
work together with women. Rural NGOs also need to be engaged.
There is a need to activate a platform for all civil society groups work-
ing on women's issues – including between older and younger age
groups – to be able to have a dialogue on national issues.

*In what ways has the international community supported dialogue
initiatives in Lebanon? What impact do their engagement and funding
structures have on these efforts?*
Financing from international donors is critical in Lebanon as it keeps
civil society active – in raising awareness, conflict resolution and
dialogue. Most international support that Lebanon receives, however,
is not for dialogue, but rather for training or distribution of non-food
items.

While the international community at times takes into consideration
the needs and perspectives of local civil society organisations (CSOs),
donors often come with pre-existing mindsets and try to apply their
own ideas (including how and with whom to advance dialogue), which
most of the time do not work in Lebanon. They also tend to favour a
handful of larger NGOs that are based in Beirut and give them lots of
funding (often more than is needed) even if there may be smaller, rural
NGOs better suited to work on a particular issue. There is also a need

for more sustainability and long-term thinking by international donors. If training sessions are offered on a specific issue such as environmental protection, for example, and then committees are set up to carry out activities, once the project ends considerations should be made to provide technical support or engagement with the government on how to take over the initiative.

How can we better understand the impact of dialogue processes on peacebuilding goals? How are dialogue processes essential components of broader efforts to achieve sustainable peace?
Dialogue is a process that contributes to peacebuilding just as peace is a process. It is important to have a culture of peace and dialogue among politicians. When channels of dialogue are present it allows communities to address conflict and overcome obstacles without resorting to armed violence. It also can give space to allow for conflict to manifest – as long as it doesn't lead to or involve violence – as one aspect of creating peace. For example, Lebanese support for the right of return of Palestine refugees is one aspect of creating a just peace for Lebanon and for Palestinians. Despite the horizontal and vertical cleavages that exist in Lebanon and the prospects, as well as fear, of a return to civil war or armed conflict, dialogue is taking place across and with different actors and, given its importance, warrants greater support.

Endnotes

[1] UCDP – Uppsala Conflict Data Program, https://ucdp.uu.se/

[2] The Taif Accord made official what had already been agreed to in the unwritten 1943 'National Pact', dividing power between a Christian president, a Sunni prime minister and a Shiite parliamentary speaker. S. Haugbolle, 'The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war', Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, 25 October 2011.

[3] 'UN Lebanon Annual Report 2018', UN Lebanon, 2019.

[4] Lebanon has 18 personal status laws that govern the country's major sects, each with its own religious court.

Yana Abu Taleb

is the Jordanian Director of EcoPeace Middle East which is a unique regional organisation that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli environmentalists to promote sustainable development and advance peace efforts in the Middle East. The organisation has offices in Amman, Ramallah and Tel-Aviv. As Jordanian Director, Yana Abu Taleb leads EcoPeace activities concerning the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, the Good Water Neighbors and the Water Energy Nexus Projects, and serves as a liaison to and lobbies governmental and private sector actors and organisations on major regional policy issues relevant to environmental protection and transboundary water. She is heavily involved in solar energy projects in the region and promotes renewable energy initiatives in Jordan. She has co-authored many reports and policy papers and speaks regularly at local and international conferences. Before becoming the Jordanian Director of EcoPeace Middle East, she was the Deputy Director and Regional Projects Manager for the organisation. She also managed a programme aimed at modernising the educational system in Saudi Arabia implemented by the British Council. She received a degree from the University of Jordan in 1996.

The art of dialogue in a polarised region

By Yana Abu Taleb

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as the communication of ideas with a mindset that acknowledges different perspectives with the aim of maximising human well-being.

The Jordan River Basin is located at the heart of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and is shared between Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Its transboundary nature has played a major role in forming the geopolitics of the region as it drives competition to control water resources in one of the most water-scarce areas in the world. Direct negotiations between the riparians[1] of the Jordan River Basin began with the Madrid Conference in 1991 in an attempt to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The significance of direct negotiations goes beyond its immediate outcomes as it is an implicit acknowledgement of the existence of the other even when this very existence is officially disputed. What began in Madrid culminated in a set of interim agreements between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli government known as the Oslo Accords, and the signing of a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. Negotiations with Syria and Lebanon have not witnessed similar progress thus far.

The mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Jordan and Israel provided the needed legal framework for establishing new channels of dialogue between the people of the three countries. Prior to official agreements, the borders between Jordan and Israel were closed and the Palestinians had no central authority recognised by Israel. In addition, legal recognition provided the social legitimacy needed to engage in dialogue at the less-than-official level, as cooperating with the enemy is often perceived as 'treasonous'.

In 1994, at a time of optimism, when the promised 'fruits of upcoming peace' were thought to have a potentially negative impact on the shared environment, a group of environmentalists from Jordan, Israel and Palestine decided to establish a regional civil society organisation (what has come to be known as EcoPeace Middle East) with the aim of mitigating the impacts of future economic activities between the three countries and to promote environmental sustainability.

High expectations are often associated with deep disappointments and this was also the case here. The lack of progress in negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis took its toll on the way people interacted and perceived each other. The need for dialogue to protect the environment from increased economic activities during peace time has turned into the need for protecting it from waves of violence and hostilities. Progress over transboundary water issues between Palestinians and Israelis has been held hostage in the process of efforts to reach a final status agreement, including the status of Jerusalem and refugees, which has been in a deadlock for almost three decades.

Why dialogue?

The ever-changing nature of human perception does not change basic human needs. The change in perception does not negate the need for security, peace, sustainability, water and a clean environment. Conflict begins with the perception that human needs can be satisfied through hostility and confrontation, overlooking the link between human needs and human well-being. Therefore, adaptability is an intrinsic feature of effective dialogue. For dialogue is not considered to be an end in itself but is intended as a means to an end with the end being to continuously realign perception to human needs, and human needs to human well-being. EcoPeace has adapted its approaches in a way that allows it to address the unfolding new reality mainly through its strategy, programming and unique approach of working both at policy level and with local communities.

After the second intifada in September 2000, EcoPeace became convinced that relying solely on decision-makers to bring about positive change is not enough on its own without involving the people who are most affected by the conflict. Therefore, in 2001 EcoPeace established its flagship programme, 'The Good Water Neighbors', with dialogue between local communities in Israel, Jordan and Palestine over shared water and environmental issues as the cornerstone. By raising awareness over the current status and the transboundary nature of water resources, local communities can understand that they have a vested interest in dialogue with their neighbours. They can also see that we, as human beings, have more in common than we might have initially thought, that cooperation is not a luxury but a necessity, and that nationalism and the acknowledgement of the other are not mutually exclusive.

The two main components of the Good Water Neighbours programmme are community involvement and youth education. At the community level, cross border communities in the three countries are

identified and chosen to be partnered with a neighbouring community on the other side of the conflict, taking their mutual dependence on shared water resources as a basis for dialogue and cooperation on sustainable water management. To promote youth education the project creates a meeting platform that enables dialogue on transboundary water problems and facilitates positive interaction among youth from the region.

Working at the grassroots level is not intended as a substitute for working with decision-makers, but to complement it. Combining top-down with bottom-up approaches is most effective because it integrates local, national and regional dialogue, recognising the intertwined nature of these levels. The legitimacy of decision-making cannot be separated from its impact on its constituencies, hence the more the people of the region are educated about sustainability and cooperation, the more they can effectively influence the decision-making process in constructive ways that are supportive of solutions and less prone to radicalism and populism.

Obstacles to successful dialogue

One way to understand what makes dialogue effective is by investigating its hindrances. One of the main obstacles to meaningful dialogue is an 'all or nothing' mindset, which can apply to decision-makers as much as to ordinary members of the community. In this regard one could wonder why solving water issues should wait for a comprehensive peace deal when it could be seen as an area where collaboration and mutually beneficial relationships could already now be developed, drawing on the advances in desalination technology and its wide-scale implementation in Israel. Initiating dialogue over more narrowly focused issues such as water could likely create an atmosphere of trust and could pave the way for negotiations over more sensitive issues.

Another hindrance to successful dialogue can be described as having a 'fault-finding' mindset. It is easy to see the faults in other people's reasoning, perspectives or behaviours but one's own shortcomings are more difficult to identify and to acknowledge. In its educational workshops, especially with students, EcoPeace aims to mitigate this tendency by engaging participants in role-playing games that train students to negotiate on behalf of the other. This serves to sharpen negotiation skills and helps participants to be less attached to their own subjectivity. When the other side's point of view is properly understood, it is easier to find middle ground in which people can meet.

Identifying actionable steps towards peace

Although mitigating the impacts of anticipated economic activities as a result of a peace agreement was the main rationale behind establishing EcoPeace, creating regional sustainable projects can equally advance peace when expectations about peace agreements have not materialised. Dialogue should not be reduced to people sharing different views, but rather, it ought to be seen as an opportunity to identify realisable actions and solutions that are conducive to peace, building on emerging understanding between parties in conflict. This is where EcoPeace's Water-Energy Nexus project comes into play.

The Water-Energy Nexus project is an ambitious project that aims to foster cooperation and interdependence between Jordan, Israel and Palestine, building on Jordan's potential to become a regional hub for the production of solar energy, and using this energy to desalinate sea water from the Mediterranean in both Israel and the Gaza strip. This arrangement could satisfy future water needs in the region, while taking a step towards adaptation and mitigation of climate change, thereby helping the three countries to meet their carbon emissions reduction targets as per their commitment to the Paris Agreement.

The exchange of renewable energy and desalinated sea water capitalises on the comparative advantages of each party. It creates a win–win situation and encourages future political dialogue due to the interdependent nature of the proposed exchange. When EcoPeace advocates the Water-Energy Nexus project to decision-makers in the three countries, its arguments are backed by scientific research confirming the economic, technical, environmental and geopolitical benefits of the project if implemented.[2] The idea is inspired by the coal and steel agreements in post WWII Europe which formed the basis of the European Union as we know it today.

The implementation of the Water-Energy Nexus Project necessitates dialogue both at the national and regional levels over its technical, legal, economic and geopolitical aspects. Some of the questions that need to be considered include: what kind of agreements, legislation and contracts need to be in place? What would be the necessary infrastructure and most suitable locations for its implementations? How can agreement be reached on the units of exchange? What geopolitical risks are there to the initiative and how can those be mitigated?

Attachments to competing interests and values often prevent dialogue and turn it into a series of monologues. However, certain types of

attachments can be used skilfully to advance dialogue and peace. This is where the business community and private sector can play a major role in advancing sustainability and stability in the region. Its profit-driven nature of activities makes it in many ways more rational and less vulnerable to sentimentalism. The move towards environmental sustainability is costly and cannot be achieved without the involvement of the business community. In 2015, EcoPeace published the first Regional Master Plan for Sustainable Development in the Jordan Valley proposing 127 profitable projects that can be implemented by the private sector.

Applying the unifying potential of religion

Identity is a unifying force among people, but also can serve to increase polarisation when used by people to position themselves in opposition to people of other identities. The Middle East is a conservative and religious region predominantly inhabited by adherents to the three Abrahamic religions. Drawing on the significance of the Jordan River to Muslims, Christians and Jews, EcoPeace has designed a faith-based initiative that has focused on rehabilitating the Jordan River.

The influence of faith on decision-making cannot be underestimated and it can be equally used to divide people as well as to bring them together. Through EcoPeace's faith-based campaign, religious and political faith leaders signed a covenant supporting the rehabilitation of the Jordan River and calling on the Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian authorities to take action to prevent its further deterioration.

Conclusion

EcoPeace's activities are rooted in dialogue at many different levels, and much of its influence comes from the organisation's ability to convene. EcoPeace's experience has made it resilient and adaptive to political sensitivities. Its model shows that successful dialogue must be driven by perseverance and a determination to identify solutions rather than remaining focused on problems. The path to genuine peace begins with a thorough analysis of existing problems in a given context, and allowing human creativity, through dialogue, to come up with proper solutions.

The relationship between decision-making and public opinion allows civil society organisations to play a unique and important role in advancing dialogue by influencing both. When official negotiations between politicians reach a dead-end, dialogue between communities can counteract the stagnation and help move things forward. When public sentiment is negative, then the focus of advocacy towards

decision–makers can help to deescalate tension and move negotiations forward.

Moreover, when economic ties are established in the form of regional projects, it helps to create incentives for dialogue. Having interests at stake that would be negatively affected by conflict allow these interests to serve as an asset for future regional stability.

Endnotes

[1] Riparians in this context includes the 5 countries sharing the Jordan River Basin: Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan and Palestine.

[2] David Katz and Arkady Shafran (eds.). *Water Energy Nexus – A Prefeasibility Study for Mid-East Water-Renewable Energy Exchanges,* (report, Amman, Jordan: EcoPeace Middle East/Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2017).
http://ecopeaceme.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/WEN_Full_Study_Final_Web.pdf

Ko Ko Lwin

is an experienced trainer in the areas of peace-building, community development and dialogue facilitation. He has provided training for communities, as well as international, national and local civil society organisations across Myanmar for more than a decade. He is one of the founders and the Executive Director of the Organization for Building Better Society. Furthermore, he has extended his capacity to become an internationally certified trainer in Neuro Linguistic Programming and is now the Chairperson of the coaching and training company Winning Life.

A snapshot from Myanmar
Reflections from Ko Ko Lwin

Rakhine State in western Myanmar is one of the regions most affected by violent conflict in a country that has seen varying degrees of civil war since independence in 1948. Strong state-based discrimination and violence has been coupled with deep tensions and segregation between communities of different ethnicities and religions. Despite restrictions on civic space, there are civil society initiatives that engage in peace-building at the community level.

The Organization for Building Better Society is a national non-governmental organisation that was established in 2016 by a group of like-minded persons from different circles in the peacebuilding, community development and humanitarian fields. The aim of the organisation it to promote peace practices among different communities, and to empower them to address causes of poverty.

Ko Ko Lwin, the founder and Executive Director of the organisation, explains how the use of dialogue is key to the organisation's work:

A well-facilitated dialogue creates a neutral space between persons with different points of view and values and empowers them to reflect, relate and change at an individual level, ultimately leading to broader mutual understanding.

We are a relatively young organisation that works in Rakhine State, in areas that have seen violence between ethnic and religious communities in the past years. In this context we strongly believe in building respect and acceptance for diversity through dialogue. Given the current high tensions between communities, we do not bring representatives of different ethnicities and religions together but instead promote peaceful and respectful values within each community.

Through the use of dialogue, we help students practice reflective thinking and acceptance of different points of view. To achieve this, it is important to not only talk about dialogue, but to also create a conducive environment for it. Therefore, we provide an open space for dialogue between students on a bi-weekly basis.

We have learned that dialogue practice over an extended period of time helps students reshape their thoughts to develop a positive mindset, self-awareness and understanding of perceptions from various angles.

In addition to training local civil society organisations in facilitation and dialogue skills for peacebuilding work in communities, we include dialogue as a component in all our trainings regardless of the subject. For example, we run an introduction course in social sciences for young people from various backgrounds such as university students, community-based volunteers and self-employed youth. Alongside the main subjects of development, history, economics and politics, they get a chance to understand and practice dialogue and reflect on its value in the current situation in Rakhine State.

Over the past three years, more than 500 students have taken our courses. Many youth who participate in our activities have previously been involved in the violence, and in general they have improved significantly after participating in our dialogues and started to accept diversity as a beauty. However, when they share these thoughts with other young people they face criticism. We stay in contact with them to encourage them to practice their values even when the context and other people around them are judgmental and extreme.

As an organisation we also put the 'dialogue values' up front and apply mutual respect as our motto. No one is allowed to judge a colleague; instead we aim to build constructive understanding among ourselves. For example, we always engage in dialogue to listen to each other when faced with a conflict and no one violates the value of respect even against those on the lowest salary grade of the organisation.

Teaching dialogue in and of itself is not that powerful. By modelling our values in the way we educate and the way we act after the training, we make a stronger impact on the students.

Simon Richards

has over 25 years of experience in the field of peacebuilding in diverse international environments and organisations within Africa (particularly in the Horn region), Asia and the Pacific. His technical work in fragile states, conflict-affected and post-conflict environments has focused on supporting peace processes and programming in the areas of conflict management, stabilisation and peacebuilding, through programme design, implementation and evaluation, as well as providing technical, policy and strategic advice to stakeholders including national and local governments, civil society organisations, contractors, and the corporate sector including the extractive industries. He recently joined Life & Peace Institute in 2018 and is now serving as strategic advisor.

Mohamed Shale Billow

has worked in the field of peacebuilding for over nine years with a range of civil society organisations and international NGOs, supporting programmes in northeastern Kenya and Somalia, as well as cross-border initiatives in Ethiopia and Kenya. For the past six years, Shale has been working with the Life & Peace Institute, currently serving as Programme Manager for the Institute's Somalia Peacebuilding Programme, extensively engaging communities and local authorities across south-central Somalia and policy stakeholders and practitioners at regional and international levels. He has a Master's in International Studies from the University of Nairobi, a post-graduate diploma in education from the Islamic University of Uganda and a bachelor's in Islamic Studies from the International University of Africa, Sudan.

Blending mediation and dialogue in Somalia

By Simon Richards and Mohamed Shale Billow

This article explores the relationship between dialogue and mediation in community conflict in south-central Somalia. Somalia is currently characterised by the absence of rule of law, few functioning courts in rural areas[1], and a lack of effective government. It is also beset by many complex unresolved conflicts in which stakeholder roles may shift between being peace or conflict actors depending on circumstances. In this fragile environment, where strong state institutions are absent and traditional governance mechanisms eroded, dialogue and mediation are critical.

Dialogue can be described as direct interactions within a peace process between the conflict protagonists or potential protagonists themselves. This may be at an individual, family or small-group level or at the sub-clan level, or in very serious cases it may involve the whole clan.

Life & Peace Institute (LPI) has been working in the Somali context since 1991 with its national non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners. In the past two and a half years they have developed multi-stakeholder civil society platforms in Hiraan, Galgaduud and Middle Shebelle. These platforms provide opportunities for civil society dialogue across and within clans and sub-clans, to manage issues and compensate for the inadequacies of formal conflict and dispute-reso-lution institutions. They bring people representing different layers of society together, to work towards solutions of conflicts and disputes. Each platform is composed of approximately 40 elders, religious leaders, women and youth. Local and regional authorities are not members in order to avoid potential politicisation of the issues, but take on an observer status to attend meetings and dialogues. Having observer status serves to prevent later disputes on what was agreed. Authorities often (in theory) have designated responsibilities to follow-up after a peace agreement has been agreed upon, either to maintain the peace or bring security to an area.[2] The observer status 'keeps them honest' and makes them aware of their statutory and governance responsibilities, separate from their possible clan affiliations.

The Hiran Inter-Community Platform conduct a meeting with religious leaders in Mataban District, June 2019.

A community member addresses Hawadle and Habargidir clans during inter-clan dialogue in Mataban, May 2018.

Hawadle and Habargidir peace agreement, July 2018.

Photos: Life and Peace Institute

The culture of dialogue is deeply-rooted in Somali society, where *'let us dialogue'* means *'let us agree'*. Communities have no trust in existing justice systems, where they exist, and so turn to alternative mechanisms to obtain justice, deliver compensation judgements and enable society to function. Through the platforms, LPI and partners draw on these cultural and religious traditions to support communities to sustain peace, resolve small and large conflicts and prevent their escalation.[3]

Importantly, the successful resolution of small-scale disputes at an individual or family level builds confidence in the mechanism to deliver justice. The trust and success developed creates space for deeper dialogue within and across those clans using the platform, which subsequently enables the management of more serious conflicts at the community level involving multiple actors. These community-level dialogues allow for the possibility of more transformational processes to emerge—deeper learning about other clans and how to relate to each other differently—that can contribute to the achievement of longer-term peace.

Blended mediation and dialogue

In Somalia the complex nature of community-level conflicts, between clans as well as sub-clans, means a variety of responses and paths to their resolution, or more often their management, are required. This blurs distinctions between mediation and dialogue and results in hybrid approaches. Dialogue and mediation are not easily defined in Somalia and may not conform to how they are understood in other contexts. They may involve basic negotiation between parties, for example concerning the payment of *'diɣa'*[4] ('blood money'), or valued livestock such as camels, in compensation for a death, injury or offence against a person or family that has been wronged. Another example would be the negotiation of agreements to resolve disputes between individuals, families, communities or clans. However, in the experience of LPI and its partners supporting civil society platforms in Hiraan, Galgadud and Middle Shebelle, a working characterisation could be as follows:[5]

Dialogue: Can be described as direct interactions within a peace process between the conflict protagonists or potential protagonists themselves. This may be at an individual, family or small-group level or at the sub-clan level, or in very serious cases it may involve the whole clan.

Table 1: Comparing dialogue and mediation across intra- and inter-clan conflict

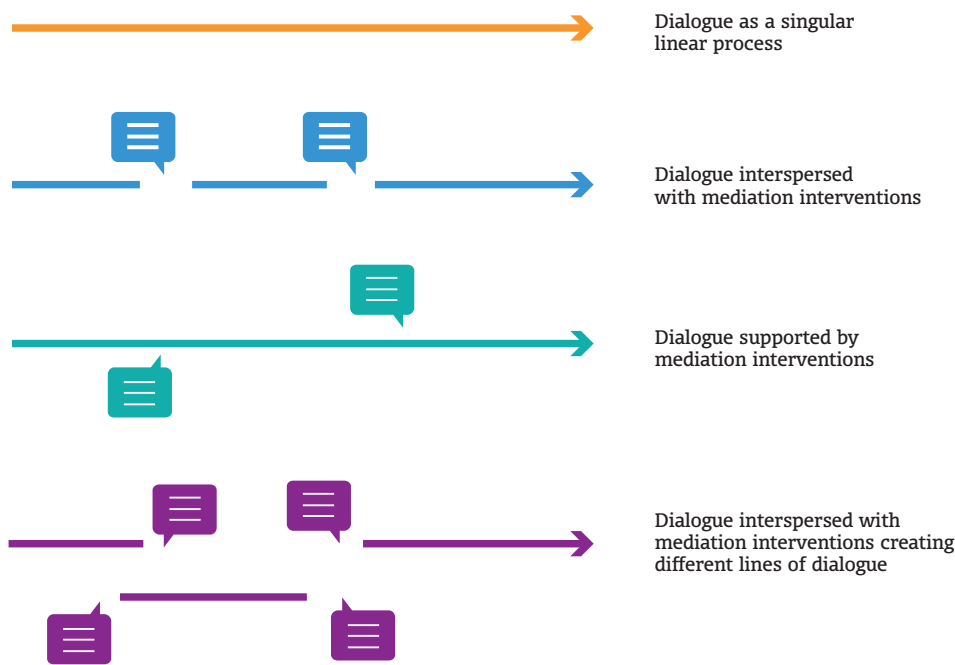| Scale	Nature of conflict	Characteristics of dialogue processes	Characteristics of mediation
Individual cases or conflicts between families	Intra–clan	If protagonists cannot reach resolution through direct dialogue themselves, they may refer the issue to the sub–clan elders or clan elders for adjudication.	If required, may involve a specific elder or religious leader from within the clan or sub-clan or a small group of male elders.
	Inter–clan	If between families or individuals from different clans with risks of escalation potentially involving many people. A small group of male elders from each clan will lead the dialogues.	May involve a specific elder or respected leader from within either clan or sub-clan a little distant from the issue, or a small group of male elders.
Larger scale community conflicts possibly involving large numbers of people	Intra–clan	Between sub-clans there may be initial more inclusive larger community meetings, followed by further dialogues between elders from the sub-clans. If agreement is reached there may be further involvement of women and youth for dissemination of agreements.	May involve single acceptable mediators from other sub-clans or the head of the broader clan, or even members of the diaspora. If the dialogue is stuck or heading in the wrong direction. Rarely involves mediators that are completely external.
	Inter–clan	Often occurs to discuss conflict after initial internal meetings within clans have taken place. Involves key elders from both sides. May be influenced by diaspora occasionally.	May involve single acceptable mediators or more than one at a time, from within the clans or occasionally from a different clan, or a member of the diaspora, depending on the issues and conditions, in conjunction with the dialogue process. Mediation may alternate with dialogues, take place simultaneously, or involve different mediators at different times.

Mediation: Involves an individual or group of intermediaries of some sort between the parties, bringing them together or assisting them to resolve the issue. Importantly though, mediators themselves are likely to have clear relationships to the protagonists but are recognised as being able to rise above any potential interests and are respected by both parties.

A typical case, as experienced by LPI, of how dialogue or mediation is used to respond to conflict in communities might take the following form: as inter- or intra-clan tensions rise, they reach a point where clan elders have to decide how to respond: as a group or through one individual. This is determined by the seriousness of the issue and what is appropriate for that particular case. The tensions are driven by multiple pressures operating for and against potential conflict in Somalia. How people align determines the seriousness of the potential outbreak. The more people advocating for violence the more likely the conflict will be serious. Other factors such as the nature of recent incidents or people tapping into deep-seated historical grievances, will determine the level of conflict and who takes part. Each case is unique, and this diversity of circumstances means there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and peace processes are likely to require different leaders or mediators involved in dialogue each time.

As dialogue and mediation processes are interdependent it is difficult to distinguish one from the other, but one can distinguish some differences in characteristics, depending on the nature of the conflict and whether it is intra- or inter-clan. The scale of the conflict will also have a bearing on how it is approached. These differences are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 identifies the different characteristics but not how dialogue and mediation interact within a single peace process. Such a process may start either as an effort at mediation and develop into broader dialogue or vice versa, or indeed they may be combined or intertwined so that each takes the lead at different times. Figure 1, developed by LPI, attempts to illustrate these variations.

Figure 1: The role of mediation in peace processes

Dialogue as a singular
linear process

Dialogue interspersed
with mediation interventions

Dialogue supported by
mediation interventions

Dialogue interspersed with
mediation interventions creating
different lines of dialogue

The nature of mediators in Somalia
(developed by LPI from their experience in Somalia)

**A mediator in the Somalia context needs to have the following
characteristics:**

- Be accepted by that part of the 'clan ecosystem' from which the
  conflicting parties come;
- Have moral authority, with strong relationships, able to 'bridge' clan
  divides;
- Preferably have deep knowledge of the conflict history and how
  issues were tackled previously;
- Be listened to and able to influence their own clan;
- Negotiate the delicate balance between having clan ties but being
  able to rise above clan interests; and
- Thus, be considered sufficiently 'neutral' to be respected by the
  other side.

Mediators are likely to be elders from the same clan or sub-clans involved in a conflict rather than a more distant third party. They also play a variety of different roles within a peace process.[6] They may initiate broader dialogue processes, unblock dialogues and peace processes that are stuck or intervene if a process appears to be heading down a wrong path. They may also engage in formal or informal shuttle diplomacy throughout dialogue processes to augment or assist in steering the process successfully. For instance, while a dialogue may involve a group of leaders from different clans negotiating with each other in the 'formal' arena, an additional communication channel can be enabled informally through a mediator, or possibly through the engagement of different leaders or influencers in the clans. These additional mediation options work to supplement dialogue processes and mean that peace processes and dialogues rarely completely collapse. Rather, mediators can break deadlocks. Thus, situations of larger-scale community conflict in Somalia tend to be addressed formally through dialogues, usually through groups of elders from the two clans sitting together to address the issues. Mediation though usually takes the form of a set of additional interventions, often through the informal realm, to augment, supplement or iron out issues in alternative informal venues and environments.

This allows for initiatives to take place that may require different approaches to address some aspect of the issue or to tackle certain people or sections of a clan. For instance, if there is an individual elder blocking the process or not willing to compromise in some critical aspect that would otherwise enable agreement to be reached, this person can be reached through the use of particular mediators that may have relationships to his family or that are respected by that person. This not only caters to the specifics of whatever aspect is at issue by trying different routes to a solution, but it also allows for failures or setbacks to take place outside of the formal arena, rather than within it. This then broadens the possible options and routes to peace that can be utilised by the clan.

The special role of business people as mediators

Business people have a special role as mediators as they have resources and broad connections across clans generated from mutual economic ties. They are drawn on in the same way that any mediator within the clan is called on. That is, when they fit the profile needed for a particular type of issue or conflict between groups where their social leverage is particularly high due to having strong networks and existing relationships. A large part of society functionality and family survival involves credit with business people. Economically, success in business is primarily dependent on having clients from the same clan, then more distant clan affiliations; blood relations in different sub-clans, 'uncles' and extended family. These relationships depend on trust, which must be protected at all costs. A third layer represents more distant relationships in other clans. Trust embedded in this layer comes from community recognition of integrity and philanthropic character. Investment in the public good, perhaps by building and supporting madrassas, mosques, hospitals and other community services, raises their status above that of the clan, earning them trust and respect across a deeper network which can then be used as social capital to leverage for peace and stability. Success at this level means they and their businesses are considered clan 'assets', tied through kinship, reciprocity and symbiosis, to be drawn on for the broader good. They may be increasingly 'lost' to the clan as individuals but elevated to a broader societal asset.

Participation in dialogue and mediation

While the *role* of mediator and dialogue participant is different, those taking these roles are generally drawn from the same pool of people within each clan or sub-clan depending on the circumstances and nature of the conflict. This is part of the blurring and interwoven nature of the two approaches found in LPI's programme areas. This pool can also access a broader web of possible interlocutors (for mediation) if needed. The choice of mediator or dialogue participant is critical for success.

Who takes part in dialogues: This depends on the scope, scale and stage of the dialogue process. For instance, discussions within clans in preparation for inter-clan dialogues may involve the broader community, including men and women as well as youth. In public forums men and

even male youth are able to participate and are likely to have the
confidence to speak out. Some areas (such as Middle Shebelle and Kis-
mayo) are more open to deeper women's participation than others, but
generally women's influence is confined to the individual and *informal*
realm behind the scenes, perhaps by influencing their husbands who
may be senior elders. Even if there are women participating in public
forums, they will generally not be very outspoken. Decision-making
and formal dialogues between clans in particular are usually exclusion-
ary and will generally only involve senior influential male clan elders
from both sides. This creates a legitimacy issue for any agreement.
Those excluded often do not feel ownership and may not adhere to the
terms agreed upon and in a worse-case scenario they may even actively
undermine them. The role of women and youth is often limited to
disseminating within their communities the terms of agreements, and
as they were not involved, they may also disseminate incorrect informa-
tion affecting its efficacy.

Who takes part in mediation: Specific elders, religious, or business leaders
(see box on the previous page) or, in serious and intractable issues,
higher-level clan leaders in Somalia or residing in external countries,
are likely to serve as mediators. The core group of male elders that lead
dialogues might also be used as mediators both within, or across clans
depending on the situation.

Promoting inclusion through different forms of dialogue and mediation

Cumulative interactions through these multiple layers of dialogue and
mediation have resulted in increased trust between parties, as well as
recognition of the challenges and inadequacies of current responses that
exclude women and youth. Elders are increasingly frustrated with hav-
ing peace agreements fail and being blamed for this failure, recognising
that this is a consequence of not including women and youth in the
process and these groups having little to no ownership.

As elders' roles become less central in Somali society, women and youth
are gaining informal power.[7] LPI and partners are supporting this and
working to increase inclusion through the development of parallel
dialogues and separate sessions. Women also have increasing agency and
are taking the initiative to engage in peace dialogues. For instance, the
women's Kismayo platform, developed through women-to-women
dialogues and supported by LPI and partners, has been able to transcend
clan differences (by being composed of women from multiple clans)
and enter the male-dominated space due to their collective agency.

They have also been able to become mediators, developing good relationships with male elders – the key negotiators for clans – and so are viewed as genuine and impartial, engaging both clans and providing a conducive environment for the parties to enagage in dialogue. Respect for women has increased as they have developed negotiation and conflict analysis skills (through LPI and partners) and a deeper understanding of the context in which the conflict erupted. They have also been able to exert pressure, through their access and close links to their respective clan members involved in conflict.

The experiences of LPI and partners in Somalia suggest that it is critical to develop different avenues within dialogue and mediation processes that increase the possibility of broader inclusion and therefore potentially greater adherence and success in the maintenance of peace agreements. Inclusion is an incremental process that requires both direct engagement with clan elders and authorities on the need for inclusion of and the importance of contributions from, marginalised groups in the arenas they control.[8] In conjunction with these top-down efforts, creation of increased bottom–up opportunities need to be developed for excluded community members to participate in other alternative aspects of the dialogue processes. For instance, the creation of parallel public meetings for women or for youth enables these groups to voice their concerns and articulate them more clearly. The results of these meetings and deliberations may then be able to feed into the main dialogues, either formally or more usually informally. This approach can also be supplemented through increased involvement of marginalised groups in the public validation of agreements and their dissemination and popularisation. The idea being that the more one normalises their participation in as many different aspects of dialogues as possible, the greater the degree of acceptance and subsequent success of the peace processes at stake. However, it is not yet clear whether or not improved inclusion has indeed led to improved and more sustainable peace outcomes. This remains to be seen still, and LPI and partners are hoping to explore the evidence on this score in their programmes in the coming phases.

Inter-clan dialogue in the Mataban District on the payment of diya. The equivalent of US$ 42,000 (100 camels) was paid, April 2019.
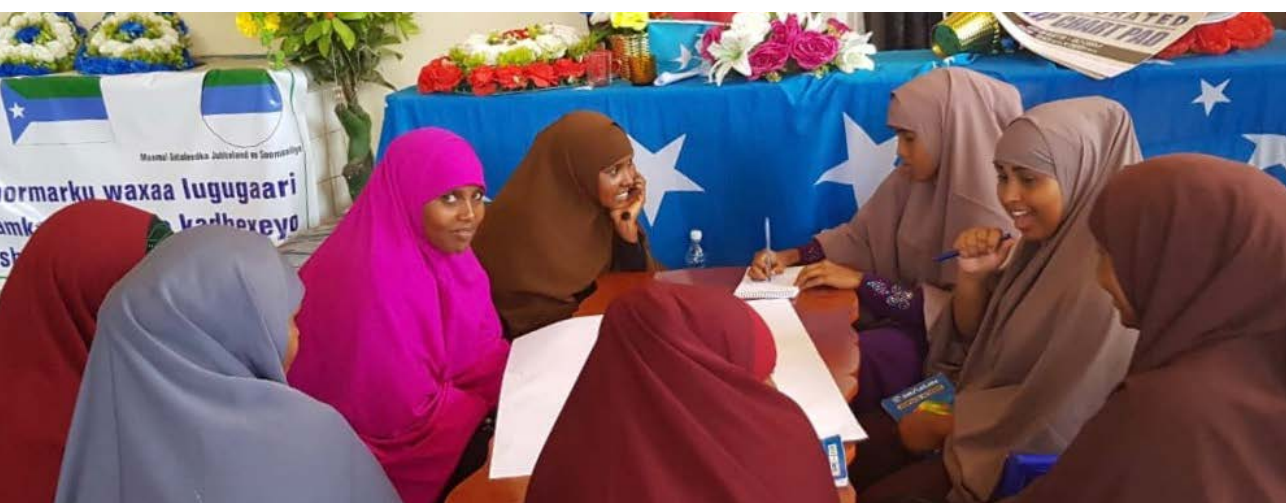
Young women leadership training in Garbaharey, Gedo Region, February 2019.

The Hiran Platform and religious leaders address community members in a village between Mataban and Bergadid on the sharing of joint resources (water and pasture), June 2019. Photos: Life and Peace Institute

Conclusion

In the complex context of Somalia and the multiple community conflicts that are prevalent, dialogue and mediation processes are as critical as ever for finding solutions to conflicts and in achieving some justice in the absence of functioning justice systems. It is important to recognise how the formal and informal dimensions of mediation and dialogue operate in different circumstances and how they interact with each other. They may be used simultaneously or alternately interwoven throughout a peace process to achieve success and to prevent the break-down of discussions between conflicting parties. Those who take part as mediators and as senior representatives in intra- and inter-clan dialogues are drawn from the same pool of people, but depending on circum-stances and the parties in conflict, different mediators may be used at different times depending on their relationships, networks and social capital in terms of being perceived as able to rise above clan interests. At present, dialogues can be exclusionary and reliant on senior elder men, but the power dynamics are changing in Somalia and both youth and women are increasing their informal and formal power. Mechanisms for inclusion are being tested – both through strengthening their roles in existing openings within dialogue processes as well as the development of unique parallel spaces. This is slowly broadening and normalising their inclusion in peacebuilding dialogue processes.

Despite this start, a deeper understanding is still required of how dialogue and mediation operate and complement each other to inform more intentional peace strengthening and targeting. In conjunction, the broader inclusion and participation of marginalised groups could lead to success in developing and reinforcing multiple pathways to peace that leverage both dialogue and mediation approaches proactively and with greater intention.

Endnotes

[1] Rural refers here to areas that are not large towns and not in Al Shabab held areas. Al Shabab (AS) held areas do not have statutory courts, but AS will apply sharia law to cases that are brought to them by the community. There are some courts in small towns like Guri'el, Dhusamareb and similar towns.

[2] This is 'in theory' as authorities are rarely able to fulfil their responsibilities in this regard, but having it accepted in a public forum may help acknowledge accountability.

[3] These conflicts are not necessarily always violent in nature but when they are, communities are concerned that these incidents, if not resolved, will escalate from violence involving individuals to broader community violence involving groups of young men.

[4] Diya may be a uniting factor across divides, because it resolves an issue and allows for closure so that retaliation or revenge does not happen (which can then escalate the conflict) but is complex as there is the positioning of self-interest within this mechanism too. On the one hand the recipient wishes to maximise their benefit and on the other, the compensator wishes to minimise it to reduce the financial burden.

[5] It should be noted that from a practical programming perspective on the ground these 'definitions' are irrelevant as the key element for LPI and partners is to support the clans and sub-clans in finding solutions to their issues in whatever way possible through non-violent peace processes.

[6] It should be noted that they also play a role in stimulating or causing conflicts – especially at the clan level; however this paper is focusing on their role in peace processes.

[7] The role of elders is decreasing in relevance for a number of reasons; firstly, because a young man may be the breadwinner in the family which alters power dynamics at the family level, which then translates into changed practices such as young men choosing their brides rather than their fathers. So older males are not required to the same extent in this area. Secondly there are now competing 'elders' within a community due to the politicisation of the positions and so it is no longer clear who represents the community. Thirdly women and youth are increasingly organising themselves with associations and NGOs and, being empowered, no longer need the elders to give them approval for their actions.

[8] The inclusion of women in particular is often perceived and resisted on the grounds that it is labelled a 'Western Agenda' and not valid in their context. It was possible to overcome this particularly successfully with the engagement of Balcad elders and the Ahlusunnah Administration.

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Amplifying polarity for dialogue in Sweden

By Bernard le Roux

It has become increasingly fashionable for local and regional authorities in Sweden to claim that they involve citizens in decision-making through citizen dialogue. The problem, however, is that the term 'dialogue' means different things to different people.

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as the meaningful flow of thoughts, emotions and intentions between two or more parties with differing perspectives – as opposed to a one-way flow of information or a limited or stifled flow that characterises the gradual escalation of conflict – particularly where positions have become or risk becoming stuck.

One-way communication, be it information or consultation, is called 'dialogue', as is discussion and debate. We often see how 'dialogue' is used to try and pacify a frustrated and angry public and how it produces just the opposite effect. For example, during the refugee crisis in 2015, when Sweden took in many refugees from Syria and Afghanistan, numerous meetings held by the authorities to inform the public about the building of temporary housing for refugees were framed as dialogue. Authorities were not prepared for the level of protest at these meetings. In many cases the inability or unwillingness to engage with concerned and angry citizens resulted in an erosion of trust. Besides this diminution of trust, contempt for decision-makers increased markedly. The true meaning of dialogue is more than either

1) meetings seeking to inform people of decisions, or
2) consultation processes where people are asked to share their views.

Dialogues, a small consulting company and development partner with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, follows an approach that is inspired by and closely linked to mediation and negotiation. Dialogue, for us, is about making issues visible and collectively finding a way to deal with them in a way that works for the participants. It is about creating fluidity where positions have become stuck or entrenched. This article aims to explain this approach by elaborating on an example, the ongoing conflict around Sollefteå hospital in the north of Sweden.

Recognising complexity in societal conflicts

In January 2017, the maternity and emergency wards at a local hospital in Sollefteå were closed down, resulting in large protests from local citizens. These protests, now in their third year, include the full-time occupation of the foyer of the Sollefteå hospital. After politicians finally invited activist groups to a dialogue with a regional authority, our organisation was asked to assist.

This situation is a complex problem involving a large variety of issues on many levels: the effect of the closure on patients now needing to travel long and often icy roads to a larger hospital; the policy of centralising healthcare in larger cities; a sense that rural areas are neglected and discriminated against; the way in which decisions are made without consulting or considering those affected by them, to name a few. Every aspect of the health provision in this region of northern Sweden (with its history of intense resistance to decisions by authorities and corporations) seems to be linked to many other related issues, and many people have been actively involved in protests.

The complexity of the problem extends beyond the interrelatedness of issues. Social media interaction has been characterised by aggressive and often hateful exchanges, and death threats against politicians have even occurred. Local citizens have been personally affected, and people have died as a result of long ambulance transport and the absence of emergency surgery in Sollefteå. These deaths have been attributed by local inhabitants to the regional government's decision to close the wards and the deterioration of healthcare provision. This has motivated activist groups to invest time and effort in the widespread protest.

Complex societal problems are often associated with tension and conflict and this case is no exception. Such complex conflicts risk escalating when treated as if they were simple problems. Stakeholders' trust diminishes and they become suspicious of the motives for authorities suggesting dialogue. In this case, the issue of closing the maternity ward is only a symptom of a deeper conflict around the centralisation of healthcare. Seeing the protest only as a temporary emotional response by uninformed citizens marginalises the many people protesting this centralisation, the broader effects of which have unavoidably contributed to escalating tension.

Preparations crucial

In dialogues involving complex conflicts, preparation is crucial. In this case it involved meeting the activists, the politicians and the officials

in order to establish whether they would meet each other and under which conditions. The parties raised a number of questions: Do we want dialogue? What do we mean by dialogue? What does the opposite party mean by dialogue? Will the dialogue be 'for real' or is it only an alibi? The activists wanted to know who was paying the facilitators and whose side they were on.
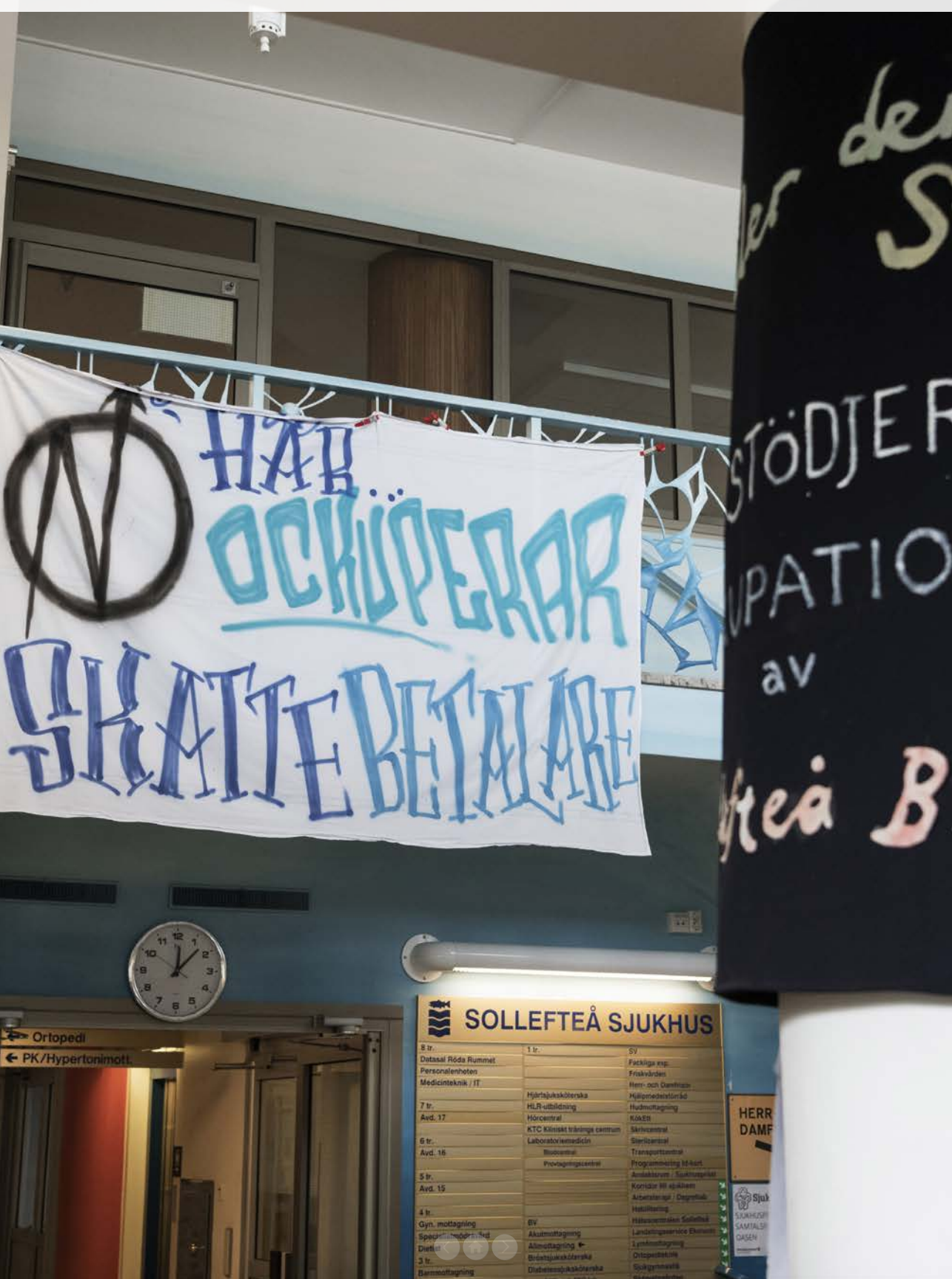
This preparatory phase involved listening, establishing trust and a fair amount of negotiation. Now, negotiation is often considered as something far removed from dialogue and mediation. We have come to realise that this is far from the case. On the one hand, the mediator might try to convince parties that participating in the dialogue process is preferable to not speaking at all. On the other hand, she might assist parties in negotiating the rules of engagement. In both these cases, negotiation rather than mediation skills are used.

Making the invisible visible

What we discovered was that one level of the conflict was visible: the decision to close wards at the hospital, the ensuing protest, the occupation day in and day out by activists in yellow vests and the public response of the authorities. There was a large amount of national and even international media focus and, as mentioned, the debate on social media was acrimonious. There were also aspects that were less visible: the ideology of centralisation; the rural population's sense of being abandoned by the regional government and theories about its efforts to promote one hospital at the expense of the other; the way in which decisions were made and who was influencing them; the use of statistics about costs, deaths and more; the conducting of inquiries by appointed 'experts' into 'solutions', solutions that often represent the bias of those who ordered the inquiry and are perceived by those who hold opposing views as rigged. The list is long.

The visible issues are like the tip of the iceberg and the rest is all that lies under the surface of the water. Authorities are often inclined to speak rationally about the visible issues. The activists are suspicious and demand to speak about issues with evident as well as hidden motives, attitudes, mistakes made but not admitted and more. They wanted to speak about hardships experienced by patients and the complications and even deaths that they attribute to the absence of appropriate healthcare and long transport stretches to the larger urban hospital. So, besides the question of trusting the others' intentions to conduct an honest dialogue, there was the issue of what would be included and excluded in the dialogue.

The occupied maternity ward at Sollefteå hospital, August 2018.
Photo: Anna Tärnhuvud, TT.

Authorities asked how a dialogue on substantial healthcare decisions relates to the political process. The legitimacy of activists as representatives and the role of dialogue in relation to the representative democratic process was also questioned. Activists on the other hand were asking whether the elected politicians or officials were making decisions for the region. Some viewed the conflict as a fight for democracy.

Amplifying polarity

In our work we strive to amplify rather than pacify polarity. We see polarity as an opportunity for a group to attain clarity. This is a counter-intuitive approach. It requires the mediator or facilitator to create a safe space for the conflict to become visible and has been used with positive effects in Europe, South America, Africa and the Middle East. In our first dialogue meeting, after having negotiated and negotiated a number of issues and clarified intentions, we were aware of a tangible tension. The tension was fed by preconceived notions parties had of one another. As polarities emerged and were dealt with through face-to-face exchanges – mediated by the facilitators – the atmosphere became more relaxed and more open. Issues became clearer, misunderstandings could be resolved and differences noted. Above all, people began to relate to each other as people and not as faceless enemies. They recognised in each other the common wish to improve healthcare and they established a clear intention to work towards improvements for patients and residents in the region. Fixed positions were gradually replaced by an attitude of mutual understanding. Accusations gave way to attempts to empathise. The first meeting ended on a high note with the group agreeing that they would embark on a dialogue process.

How did this shift occur? In the first place, parties were encouraged to clearly express their views rather than to try to seek compromise. The expectation of resolution was downplayed and the need for mutual understanding emphasised. As participants expressed themselves more clearly and felt that they were being heard, they relaxed and became more open to understanding the positions of the other side. Openness on one side fosters openness on the other side, and clarity from one party encourages the other to be clearer. The facilitator's task is to remain present and non-judgemental while supporting both parties to reserve their own judgement of the other.

When parties do not express emotions, or when they hold back on issues that are important to them, the dialogue is at risk of becoming bogged down. Polarisation can help break through this deadlock and allow parties to say what needs to be said. Conversely, smoothing over

the underlying tensions often results in the increase of tensions and frustrations in the room.

Including the wisdom of the 'no' or minority voice

The second meeting involved yet another preparatory phase in order to find common ground, in advance of making a decision on where to start a dialogue process. This was no easy task, and while there was optimism that dialogue was, at long last, possible, there were some very clear expressions of doubt. We regard doubt and opposition, the 'no', as an important element in all dialogue. We value it and actively encourage the expression of the 'no', particularly when a group strives for consensus too soon. From Myrna Lewis[1] we have learned that the 'no' includes the critical, the negative, the doubtful or silent voice and the voice of the minority. In it lies wisdom for the majority, those who hold power in a given situation. Its exclusion risks a new spiral of resistance and conflict and its inclusion makes decisions, once made, more sustainable.

In the dialogue between the regional authority and the activists, the fact that it was legitimate to express doubt or opposition to an idea raised by the other side enabled a more honest conversation. In the third meeting between the two groups, having different views was no longer seen as a cause for opposition and strife but rather as a polarity to be explored through future dialogue. This was most clearly expressed by a leading politician who said: 'we clearly differ from each other, but we need to continue the dialogue with each other nonetheless'. The meeting ended with the two groups agreeing to disagree on certain central issues. They have agreed to meet again and to include others who might enrich the conversation. The level of animosity on social media has diminished considerably. Angry opposition has been replaced with mutual respect and a willingness to engage peacefully.

Continued process design

In this dialogue we used three distinct sets of skills: facilitation, mediation and negotiation. Besides this, we needed to design (and sometimes re-design) the different phases of the process. There have thus far been three joint meetings: the first about whether dialogue was possible and how it would be conducted, the second on which topics could be discussed and the third on clarifying common ground and fundamental differences. These joint meetings were interspersed with one-on-one meetings with individual parties and numerous telephone conversations with the parties and even with outsiders. A meeting with a smaller group focused on designing the first dialogue on the one concrete

issue parties identified as a prototype for a new way of solving complex problems: recruitment of healthcare personnel.

From a situation where parties had no or very little communication, we now have two parallel dialogue processes: one focusing on the larger issue of healthcare in the region and one to develop a concrete way of collaboratively working to increase recruitment of healthcare personnel.

Sustainable outcomes can only be reached when the dialogue involves all aspects of a complex problem. This implies not only the diversity of issues, but also the diverse aspects of both individuals and groups. Dialogue is a way to achieve this, but only if it takes into account all aspects of the diversity surrounding a given problem and helps a group to move from stuck positions to a constructive flow.

Since the completion of this article, as is often the case with complex conflicts, the situation surrounding the conflict has changed. While the occupation of the hospital foyer continues, the region made the decision to take full control of the dialogue process regarding specific, concrete issues to be resolved. The mediation-inspired dialogue has been replaced with a consultative dialogue, resulting in renewed protests from activists. While the door is still slightly ajar, the opportunities for constructive dialogue are diminishing rapidly.

Endnote

[1] Myrna Lewis developed the Deep Democracy concept coined by Arnold Mindell. Her book *Inside the No* (2018) explains this idea and its practical application in detail.

Part Three:

Part Three:
Practising dialogue
– thematic perspectives

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currently serves as Team Leader for Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding & Responsive Institutions, within the Crisis Bureau at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in New York. Previous positions include Regional Director for UNDP's Sub-regional Response Facility for the Syria Crisis and UNDP Country Director for Syria, as well as Programme Advisor with UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States. In addition, he has served as Peace and Development Advisor with UNDP in Sudan and prior to that as Conflict Prevention Advisor with UNDP Yemen. Living in Lebanon from 2002 to 2006, Samuel was a founding member and Executive Director of the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue – a regional NGO based in Beirut, working on issues of conflict resolution, community empowerment and interfaith relations in the Arab world. During that time he helped establish and lead the Arab Partnership for Conflict Prevention and Human Security and coordinated its work in relation to the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC).

External support for internal dialogue

By Samuel Rizk

In the context of this article, dialogue is understood as a process where people come together in a safe space to understand each other's viewpoints in order to develop new options to address a commonly identified problem.[1]

With work in a multitude of development contexts, including fragile and conflict-affected areas, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports dialogue processes for conflict prevention and sustaining peace. National and local dialogue initiatives are linked to the larger international framework of the dual Sustaining Peace resolutions of the UN Security Council (SCR 2282) and the UN General Assembly (70/262)[2], as well as the developments towards the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The dual resolutions underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to prevent violent conflict. They call for coordinated efforts to work on a broad range of efforts to address violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and the underlying root causes of conflict, including exclusion, systemic discrimination and marginalisation.

UNDP, together with other specialised UN entities, sees dialogue as an important tool in implementing these frameworks, and initiatives are shaped through a variety of modalities to support dialogue processes: capacity building, technical assistance, financial contributions and the use of UNDP as a platform for dialogue. This work is aligned with national priorities and development plans, which in turn aligns with the various pathways to achieve the SDGs. The mandate and breadth of UNDP's expertise enables an integrated approach that supports the capacities required for dialogue itself, as well as provides knowledge on different thematic areas within a dialogue process. Today's violent conflicts are increasingly complex and protracted. They are often not confined to state borders and are marred by increased fragmentation of non-state armed actors who at the same time represent the same or similar ideological and in some cases criminal interests. This displays the necessity of increased attention to dialogue processes in peace efforts and a continuous focus on preventive measures.

UNDP's engagement in national dialogues for peace

UNDP has supported national dialogue efforts in diverse contexts, including the current plans for a national dialogue in South Sudan, the 2018-initiated Lesotho National Dialogue, the 2013 Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference in Yemen and, for more in-depth consideration here, the 2013 dialogue process in Tunisia. 'National' refers here to an inclusive process at different levels, including sub-national and local, and with a broad spectrum of society, as well as referring to a process coordinated with national governments or counterparts, often in capitals. Processes initiated at a national level typically have different starting points, preconditions for implementation and potential end results. While national dialogues inherently involve state institutions and governments—wherein UNDP's mandate and unique position proves valuable—civil society engagement is necessary and key.

As they do for all external actors, factors that influence UNDP's possible role in a given context include already-established relationships with relevant stakeholders and institutions as well as the proximity to violent conflict. UNDP's mandate to assist the government in achieving the SDGs creates a key entry point for working with state institutions and in providing support for inclusive political processes. Awareness of the way in which different stakeholders in a conflict setting perceive UNDP is also highly important in finding effective ways to support dialogue processes.

In **Tunisia,** four civil society organisations (CSOs), including unions and syndicates, initiated in 2013 the Tunisian National Dialogue (TND), which took place in parallel with the establishment of the Tunisian Truth and Dignity Commission. With a political deadlock in the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), as well as initial attacks on security personnel and increasing protests in the streets taking place in October 2013, the establishment of a dialogue process was one of several measures used to address the imminent crisis. Despite the name, the process had no direct consultations with the wider public and included mainly political parties and the initiating CSOs. The process proved essential in creating a certain political stability in a time of transition. The United Nations Country Team with its specialised agencies assisted the NCA process, for instance with advice and thematic expertise in the incorporation of human rights and children's rights in the development of the constitution. The UN Resident Coordinator (RC) was active in the high-level political conversations, and UNDP assumed the role of supporting the National Dialogue and NCA through a series of capacity-building activities.

UNDP offered training to regional representatives from all gover-norates on facilitation, dialogue techniques and consensus building, a strategic choice based on an analysis of potential impacts, realistic entry points and needs as articulated by the political parties in a consultative process. It was decided to involve these regional representatives in the training because while not directly involved in the negotiations, with a cadre of some 330 people trained, they created a critical mass and were able to influence the highest-level politicians in the National Dialogue. To support a broad cadre and initiate change towards a culture of dialogue there is a need for inclusion and diversity in the group, to reflect different perspectives. For instance, of the 330 trained only 40 were women, which represents progress but is not considered a satis-factory balance and underscores the need for further efforts to deepen inclusivity. The skills training enhanced and strengthened a culture of listening and understanding of others' perspectives, as evidenced in subsequent dialogue efforts. UNDP's ability to create a neutral, inde-pendent space was a prerequisite for this positive impact. The National Dialogue in Tunisia is an example of the transformation from a political culture of 'non-dialogue' into one where individuals increasingly listen and respect other views.[3] The National Dialogue was taking place amidst high risk of violence and political upheaval, and in a process that, from the outset, relied on empowering credible leadership rather than merely an elaborate process design. UNDP's capacity building was one piece of the puzzle in the process, in preventing conflict and mitigating risks.

Building local capacities for dialogues

Even though there is a theoretical difference between dialogue and mediation, UNDP's efforts within the concept of 'insider mediators' includes the use of dialogue processes. 'Insider mediators' are trusted local individuals or groups that act as facilitators or mediators in their local context. Local dialogue processes can be part of a national process or separate local dialogues needed in a local community. UNDP's role is to provide capacity building, platforms for learning among insider me-diators and occasional catalytic financial support to organise dialogues.

In **Peru** in 2011 a state-led multi-stakeholder dialogue was launched, following studies showing that the country had experienced some 200 social conflicts per year with 70% related to extractive industries. These conflicts caused both human suffering and economic losses. The engagement of insider mediators to mitigate conflicts between local communities and the companies of extractive industries in Peru is an example of the use of an open-ended dialogue process while moving

towards a mediated negotiation and agreement. One role of UNDP, as an external partner aligned with the national initiative, was to support insider mediators. The combination of capacity building and accompaniment of the insider mediators, financial support when needed, and a solid partnership with the government put in place preconditions for the dialogue processes. These processes later developed into what are now improved democratic practices, with institutionalised and inclusive mechanisms.[4] A capacity-building platform to support women leaders and groups helped to increase their proactive role in the dialogues. UNDP played an enabling role, while local capacities formed the foundation of infrastructures for ongoing peace and allowed the state to institutionalise the developments.

Within the United Nations system, UNDP, together with the UN Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), has been at the forefront of finding new avenues to bridge the gap between the political conversations needed for establishing peace and the development programmes needed to sustain peace. Dialogue processes frequently serve as this bridge. Established in 2004, the Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme to Build National Capacities for Conflict Prevention (JP) deploys Peace and Development Advisers (PDAs) as part of peace and development teams working with UN country offices. The current support in more than 50 countries provides catalytic efforts and strengthens national capacities for peace, including in planning and facilitating dialogue processes.

In **Ukraine,** the Donbass Dialogue platform uses a secure online service for communication between communities on either side of the conflict divide. A crowd-sourcing technique facilitates the conversations to identify topics of mutual interest. Once a few main topics are identified the actual dialogue is also undertaken in a secure online forum, for instance with participants sharing personal narratives from both sides of the conflict divide. Reflections by external thematic experts are made possible in the platform, though without interrupting the dialogue between the main participants. Even though there are limitations in terms of political space for engagement and to scaling-up, it is a dialogue in its own right to create increased understanding of the realities of the other side. The platform also lays the ground for future dialogue processes when there is a new political climate. Initial UNDP funding created preconditions for the platform along with the PDA's capacity-building efforts on dialogue initiatives, which were adapted to the specific format and technical dimensions of the platform in order to ensure secure communication. The initial investment facilitated the

initiatives' future partnerships and funding from other sources. UNDP, working closely with the PDA, took on the role of external enabler and incubator for local initiatives with a focus on conflict resolution.[5] This created the necessary safe space for dialogue among divided communities and allowed for the inclusion of international expertise, for instance in the dialogue series within the platform called 'Donbass Dialogue – Dialogue Marathon' – an appropriate name for the time perspective sometimes needed for dialogue. In contrast to the support to the dialogue process in Tunisia, where political parties and high-level political conversations existed, the Donbass Dialogue Platform shows how new avenues and techniques can be used when higher-level processes are not in place but there is a need to initiate dialogues across conflict divides.

In addition, within UNDP, dialogue processes transcend immediate peacebuilding objectives into many avenues throughout UNDP's broad mandate. Using dialogue processes goes beyond *direct* peacebuilding. General good practices for local ownership, supporting inclusion in local governance and establishing the needs for early recovery all use or can benefit from dialogue techniques and dialogue process design. Dialogue then becomes an intrinsic part of many different thematic areas of work, contributing *indirectly* to conflict prevention and peace-building in numerous country contexts in the long term.

Conclusion

Just as political negotiations and mediation efforts might not be success-ful, dialogue processes in proximity of violent conflict will need to reconcile with the risk of not succeeding. Dialogue initiatives are often undertaken in highly complex and unpredictable environments, and any process is subject to the risks of diversion, political manipulation and failure. The design of the processes must be conflict-sensitive, principled and flexible.

The described example of Tunisia can be seen as a positive illustration, while other processes, for instance Yemen in 2013, did not create a long-term stable environment, and the planned process in South Sudan in 2019 and onwards is undertaken in a volatile political setting. External actors need always to weigh the risks against the potential positive impact on peace. However, the Donbass Dialogue Platform shows that initiating a dialogue process is possible even in difficult circumstances if adjusted to the realities of the context. Risk awareness and risk mitiga-tion is vital for any external actor. UNDP, as part of the UN system and often seen as close to state institutions (which are sometimes part of the

problem rather than part of the solution), uses several risk dimensions for its initiatives, based on both contextual and organisational risk. UNDP's often unique role working closely with government institutions while also supporting local communities can be a strength for national processes as well as for local dialogue processes. UNDP brings in the importance of long-term developmental vision and support, sometimes in the midst of a crisis and high-level political negotiations. Any conversations on how dialogues are designed need to encompass the inclusion of different groups in a society, for instance youth and women, although the mechanisms for inclusion might differ.

Key lessons from the UNDP experience on the role of international actors in dialogue processes include the following: engaging in and supporting dialogue processes in conflict contexts must accept (and therefore mitigate) higher risk thresholds; conflict-sensitive engagement by international and national actors is critical in the design and implementation of dialogue processes; dialogue processes must yield sustainable democratic values and principles such as acceptance, inclusion, pluralism, representation and peace. As shown by example, UNDP is one actor among several in any country context. Finding your role in the plethora of actors is an important part of the equation to support peace efforts through dialogue.

Endnotes

[1] Definition for this article only; UNDP has no endorsed specific definition of 'dialogue'.

[2] UN General Assembly (UNGA), 'Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture', (resolution, A/RES/70/262, UNGA, 12 May 2016), https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/262 ;
and UN Security Council (UNSC), 'Resolution 2282 (2016)',
(resolution, S/RES/2282(2016), UNSC, 27 April 2016).
https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016)

[3] Rikke Hostrup Haugbølle, Amine Ghali, Hèla Yousfi, Mohamed Limam, Nina Grønlykke Mollerup, *Tunisia's 2013 National Dialogue – Political Crisis Management*, (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, February 2017).

[4] UNDP, 'Engaging with Insider Mediators – Sustaining Peace in an age of turbulence', Brussels: UNDP-EU, forthcoming 2019, p 32.

[5] Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, Annual Report 2017, UNDP-DPPA, 2018, p. 27.

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Academic dialogue for peace

By Peter Wallensteen

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as organised person-to-person encounters across conflict divides – with the explicit purpose of finding common ground, ie dialogue for peace.

Can academics play a role in dialogues – organised person-to-person encounters across conflict divides – with the explicit purpose of finding common ground, and do that as academics?[1] Certainly, many of the well-known mediators, facilitators, peace makers and movement organisers have an academic training in addition to the skills they have refined during their professional lives. This means going beyond the traditional academic seminar but still applying the academic approach of free discussion, provisional positions and critical thinking on an empirical basis. Could this kind of effort have an impact on the course of a conflict? This chapter responds to these questions in the affirmative and presents the idea that the academic seminar can work as a model for constructive dialogue.[2] Support for this idea can be found in a real-world example that is now more than 25 years old, but still provides relevant lessons.

The setting

By the late 1980s, the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours had entered a new phase. The Intifada, the Palestinian uprising to 'shake off' more than twenty years of Israeli occupation, had changed the standing of Israel, made the occupation more visible and contributed to Israeli society moving in the direction of accepting the Palestinians as a distinct national identity. Many Palestinian leaders had, until this point, preferred violent action to achieve this goal, such as hijacking of airplanes and other deadly raids. However, in 1987 the local population on the West Bank and in Gaza started their own, initially spontaneous, resistance that built on non-violent measures that had proven successful elsewhere in the world. These actions required translation into a political strategy in order to have a lasting impact. That is why pre-existing organisations such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) came to have a role, but it also affected the organisation's approach to how peace was to be achieved. Thus, in a path-breaking statement at a press conference in Geneva in December

1988, PLO chairman, Yassir Arafat, made a public declaration that his organisation 'rejects all forms of terrorism'.[3]

This was, in fact, the result of months of Swedish diplomacy. The statement had been carefully crafted. There was prior agreement that sustained diplomatic relations would be established between the US and the PLO in Tunisia if the declaration was formulated in the 'correct' way. Within hours, the US responded favorably which meant that a channel between the US and the PLO had been established. The official end to PLO's support of terrorism was a central element in making this possible.[4]

The breakthrough in Geneva created expectations for a continuation in efforts on both sides to come to peace negotiations. Indeed, that was a critical reason for the PLO's willingness to entertain the idea of issuing a statement. More challenging was the position of the Likud government in Israel. It was strongly opposed to the idea of talking, even to 'former' terrorists. Swedish diplomacy persisted, however, and that is how a university department of peace research came to play a significant role.

The PLO was defined as a terrorist organisation and thus contacts were difficult and provocative to both the Israeli public and to the authorities. Also on the Palestinian side, such contacts were controversial and thought to undermine Palestinian unity against the occupation and Israeli policies. In addition, there were strong asymmetries to be overcome between the parties. The diplomatic approach meant that the two sides, in a way, were equalised: although not equally strong or equally democratic, the two sides had the equal right to be heard and taken seriously. That is the starting point for any dialogue. This is also the academic way of relating to new topics: every view has the right to be formulated and debated but also to be evaluated in terms of logic and empirical support. At that time, in the late 1980s, this was an unusual approach to apply in this long-standing conflict and there was very limited scholarly literature on such dialogues. From that point of view, what happened in the years 1990–93 was formative in strengthening dialogue at all levels of society. By the end of the decade there was no questioning of the right to pursue efforts to promote dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians from different segments of the population.[5]

Following the PLO statement, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) considered possible routes forward. In early 1990 the Foreign Minister, Sten Andersson, approached the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University to explore a possible role for

academics in supporting the dialogues that were planned. The intention
was to allow for participants to suggest the direction as well as the
substance for discussions. The theory was simple: if they meet, the
participants themselves will know what to make of it.

In moving ahead with this effort there were three phases to consider:
pre-dialogue concerns, the dialogue itself and the the post-dialogue
phase. It is a simple way of describing the process, where the first, initial
phase is primarily focused on how the parties enter into such a
dialogue. In this case there was a combination of factors: the Swedish
government's interest in finding an appropriate channel; the Depart-
ment of Peace and Conflict Research appearing to be relevant, able
and willing at the right time; and a format that could be acceptable to
the parties.

Pre-dialogue phase: creating a format

Contact with the MFA resulted in agreement on an approach in which
an academic seminar was to be held on the situation in the Middle East
with participation from the different sides. Israeli legislation at this time
prohibited direct contact between Israeli citizens and the PLO. Howev-
er, Israel encouraged its citizens to participate in international scientific
conferences. Thus, Israeli participation would be made possible if the
Department and Uppsala University organised an academic seminar.

It was important to the Department that participants had academic
credentials, a necessary element for maintaining academic credibility
and integrity. The seminar was not to be a public affair, but a low-key,
'ordinary' academic activity. It was also important to have a balanced
composition among participants: Palestinians from the occupied ter-
ritories as well as from the diaspora, including those in Tunisia; Israelis
with political as well as academic backgrounds; and a group of 'neutral
participants', that is, Swedish and American academics, including Jewish
personalities who had been important forces in achieving the break-
through in 1988. I was to chair the seminar.

There was also a significant issue in managing the costs and hosting
arrangements. Security provisions and the conference were paid for
directly by the MFA, but all logistics relating to seminar activities and
participants were handled by the Department and by the offices of
Uppsala University. It was important for the integrity of the Depart-
ment to ensure that it was acting in its own capacity. Obviously, it
was also important for the participants to demonstrate that they were
participating in a legitimate academic seminar.

Starting the dialogue

Invitations were sent out in May 1990. At the end of the month a
terrorist attack was carried out on a beach outside Tel Aviv by an Iraq-
based group, the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF). When Arafat finally
released a condemnatory statement, it was general and bland. The
United States was not satisfied; they wanted clear proof that the PLO
really had rescinded terrorism and violence against Israel. The PLF was
part of the PLO and Arafat's vagueness led President George Bush (Sr.)
to break off contacts with the PLO on 20 June, just a week before the
planned seminar in Uppsala. This left the Swedish initiative in a twilight
zone: if the US did not have contact with the PLO, why would Israel?
Many of the invited participants did not personally reason that way.
Rather, they considered it now even more important to connect.

On 27 June, participants arrived in Sweden. When the seminar started
in the afternoon the atmosphere was tense. The Israeli participants
seemed to be faced with the most acute pressure. Upon his departure
from Tel Aviv, Knesset member Dedi Zucker had told media that he
was going to a seminar where Palestinians would also be present, argu-
ing that this was legal since it was in an academic setting. In response,
a spokesperson for the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm commented that
Zucker's assertion would have to be assessed after the event. This left
grave uncertainties as to what would happen to the Israelis when they
returned.

The Palestinian participants were in better spirits; this was an important
event to them. Many of them had been involved in official or private
meetings in Europe but those events had been arranged by various sol-
idarity movements. This was a seminar with high-level participants and
was being held at a crucial time. The composition of the meeting was
balanced and had a clear academic profile. There were a few Swedish
diplomats in attendance but they kept a low profile and were seated at
the back of the conference room. The delegates had intellectual creden-
tials, spoke good English and had considerable polemical capabilities,
which were going to be put to use repeatedly in the following days.

The dialogue itself: finding focus

A number of special measures were instituted to ensure that the Israeli
participants would not have problems with the authorities on their
return. All delegates were assigned seats at the table and no Israeli was
placed next to someone connected to the PLO office in Tunis. To
avoid the creation of opposing camps, the participants were seated in
alphabetical order, as much as possible with the 'neutral' participants

distributed strategically so as to complete the mix. The idea was that the seminar would lead to an open dialogue among all participants; this was not a formal negotiation between two opposing 'sides'.

As the chair, I reinforced that everybody at the seminar was present in their private capacity and that nobody could be quoted outside the conference without their explicit permission. I emphasised that this was an academic seminar, which meant the right to test ideas freely and to exchange proposals without necessarily being tied to them – this was the essence of having 'provisional positions'. The purpose was to present possible visions for a solution to the Palestinian conflict and to suggest concrete steps for the immediate future.

To lighten the atmosphere and to create some personal connections, participants were asked to introduce their neighbour to the left rather than introducing themselves: 'The solution is about getting to know your neighbour'. This message created some confusion in a group of strong personalities so accustomed to eloquently presenting themselves. However, all followed the instructions, which resulted in intensive discussions from the outset of the meeting. Some carefully noted personal facts about their neighbour, which they could present to the audience when their turn came up. In fact, the presentations came to include surprising information and led to a lot of laughter around the table.

One of the key contributions was by political scientist Yohanan Peres who had investigated changes in public opinion in Israel during the Intifada. The Palestinian uprising had started in December 1987, surprising Israel as well as the PLO in Tunis. With graphs and tables Peres demonstrated that the largely peaceful revolt had strongly affected public opinion. Increasingly, Palestinians were seen as human beings and a national grouping – someone Israel could negotiate with. His presentation gave rise to a host of comments with other Israeli participants concurring with his conclusions. Palestinians were no longer seen by Israelis as weak and subdued nor as highly dangerous terrorists. To several Palestinian participants this was hopeful and they suggested that the impact of the Intifada was the giving way of the 'demonisation' of Palestinians. To maintain this more nuanced Israeli view of Palestinians, many felt, would be important for peace negotiations.

However, the dialogues during the seminar also made clear that there were limits. Palestinian demands that peace-oriented Israelis reject soldiers serving in the occupied areas received strong protests. 'This is interference in our internal affairs!' one Israeli shouted. 'If you come with such

demands, we have no chance to carry them out, but if we raise them by ourselves they have a greater chance', said another, once the situation had calmed down. There were political dynamics on each side that needed to be understood in order to avoid hurting the prospects for peace.

The seminar ended with a whiteboard full of ideas on possible ways forward. Economic benefits, not the least for the Israeli side, were recognised as making a two-state solution more acceptable. The costs of occupation would be replaced by the gains of economic cooperation, and with the income gap between the two populations reduced, so too would political tensions. Thus, the seminar discussed the opening of transportation routes, harbours, airports, shared free trade zones, etc.

At the core was a mutual recognition of Israel's existence and the Palestinian people as a legitimate partner. The Palestinians were prouder and Israelis were less comfortable in their role as occupiers. The enthusiasm at the end of the seminar was remarkable and contrasted dramatically with the initial hesitations. There were expectations of additional meetings as many issues had been discussed, which was important in itself, but no solutions had been worked out. Confidence had been created and telephone numbers exchanged. In that sense, the dialogue had succeeded: there was a good chance that it would continue among the participants or even include additional actors.

Post-dialogue challenge: keeping momentum

During the month following the seminar the participants were in touch with each other and the circles of people involved in dialogue widened. There seemed to be momentum. At the same time, the political situation in Israel remained in a stalemate: the government was dissolved, but the Labor Party could not form a government on its own.

However, Iraq's occupation and annexation of Kuwait in August 1990 proved to be a disaster for continued contacts. On top of this the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, declared that this was the beginning of the liberation of Palestine. To the consternation of many seminar participants, young Palestinians were celebrating, seemingly missing that the Iraqi leader had not only acted like Israel by occupying territory that belonged to someone else. He had gone one step further by annexing the territory of another country. How could this be described as the beginning of the liberation of Palestine? The PLO faced a political dilemma. While most of the Arab world was against Iraq, the PLO found itself in a small pro-Iraqi camp. It lost support, economically as well as politically and became weakened by its own actions.

The negative image of Palestinians once again grew in Israeli public opinion. A new wave of 'demonisation' gripped Israelis as young Palestinians were seen celebrating when Iraqi missiles hit Israeli cities in 1991. The PLO lost space for negotiations. The American–Soviet conference convened in Madrid in 1991, however, contributed to a process of 'de-demonisation' in international and American media, if not in the Israeli public. Many of those who had been at the academic seminar in Sweden now appeared as articulate spokespersons. The Swedish efforts may have helped to convey a more nuanced picture to some American decision-makers.

In September 1991, there was a change of government in Sweden which put an end to Sweden's role in the secret dialogue. Instead there were confidential meetings in Oslo from late 1992, initially following the same model of using academic dialogues as had taken place in Uppsala. The first agreement between Israel and the PLO was concluded in August and signed in September 1993, changing the dynamics of the conflict. The Oslo Process became the main track for peace in the Middle East for the remainder of the 1990s. 'Oslo' became synonymous with dialogue, but also with a set of agreements that were not fully implemented and a loss of further momentum towards peace. This gives evidence to the reality that the post-dialogue phase cannot be controlled by those engaged in the dialogue itself.

Lessons for dialogue

There were many lessons that could be drawn from this experience and applied to future dialogues. The academic seminar proved to be a useful umbrella for direct talks. It served as a way to enhance confidence among the parties and gave an opportunity for free and safe interaction. This proved to be a lasting positive experience.

However, for a protracted conflict with many interlocking and inter-blocking interests, academic input and human dialogue is not sufficient. There also has to be an interest among the major actors (the political leadership, their supporters and funders, the population at large) to move in the same direction. Facilitators (such as the dialogue organisers or even official mediators) cannot get warring parties to make concessions beyond their own parameters. Dialogues can shed new light on known situations. Providing comparisons with other peace processes can stimulate thinking and generate new ideas. In the end, however, the political leaders have to take responsibility for making peace.

The academic dialogue seminar in Uppsala as well as the Oslo Process began at an appropriate moment. They seized the window of opportu-

nity created by the first Intifada. The second Intifada that broke out in October 2000 did not have the same impact as its less violent predecessor. On the contrary, it actually divided Palestinians more than Israelis and also strengthened Israeli forces who were opposed to dialogue and contact. The Israeli-built separation wall that has since been erected demonstrates a preference for a relationship without contact, and where the temptation of ending occupation through annexation has become a legitimate option on the Israeli side, with tacit support from outside powers. Over the years the framing has changed, with religious elements having become more pronounced. Any peace process today must be pursued in a different way. Nevertheless, there could still be space for dialogue, and academics can play an instrumental role in making it possible.

Endnotes

[1] For a longer description of this process, see Peter Wallensteen, *Peace Research: Theory and Practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), chapters 16-18.

[2] P. Wallensteen, chapters 16-18. (See endnote 1.)

[3] Susanne Palme, *Tyst Diplomati* [Quiet Diplomacy], (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag AB, 1993).

[4] S. Palme. (See endnote 3.)

[5] Rabah Halabi (ed), *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue: The School for Peace Approach*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2004); and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 'Conflict resolution, culture, and religion: Toward a training model of interreligious peacebuilding', *Journal of Peace Research*, 2001, 38(6), pp. 685–704.

Stories from a global network of young peacebuilders

By United Network of Young (UNOY) Peacebuilders

The United Network of Young (UNOY) Peacebuilders is a global network with more than 100 member organisations in over 50 countries. Our members are locally grounded youth-led civil society organisations working in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Like peace practitioners more broadly, young peacebuilders often use dialogue as a tool to promote conflict transformation before, during and after violent conflicts. According to the Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security[1] mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)[2], young people want more opportunities to exchange and learn from each other and other peace actors. When given the space and tools to lead processes of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, they contribute to bridging social, cultural and religious divides and support the integration of migrants and refugees into their communities. Dialogue is also used by youth during and after violence as a mechanism to promote reconciliation, disengagement and reintegration of ex-combatants, sometimes years and decades after violence has taken place. In our network, 18 out of 53 members who contributed to our annual impact review for 2018[3] are actively engaged in intercultural and/or interreligious dialogues and many others employ alternative approaches such as arts, culture and sports to bring groups from different sides of a conflict together. This work often tackles social tensions and prevents violence, while fostering social cohesion.[4] At the heart of this work is the important task of building trust across communities and among community members, both youth and non-youth, and providing them the space to deal with conflict in peaceful ways. These spaces also strengthen youth ownership and leadership in deciding what youth participation and leadership should look like and how it should operate rather than allowing authorities to dictate this process.

As young peacebuilders, our members face a number of challenges, from lack of recognition and support to shrinking spaces and persecution from political and non-state armed forces. Despite this, their valuable work addresses issues often ignored by authorities and includes those left out of formal dialogue processes, such as youth, women and
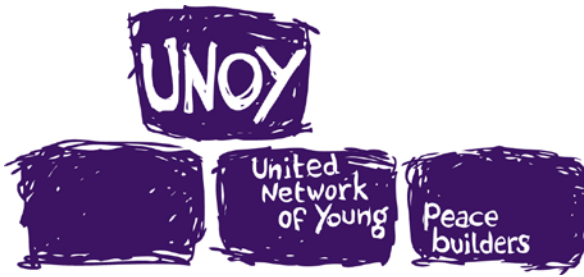
minorities. This is the case of Mother of Hope, an organisation in Cameroon that builds the capacity of youth and women in mediation and dialogue to support the resolution of disputes, preventing violence and fostering a culture of peace.

The Afghanistan New Generation Organization (ANGO), an Afghanistan-based organisation, uses dialogue to create an alternative narrative to those available to young people: that you are either a democracy supporter or a sympathiser of violent extremism. ANGO proposes a narrative that brings both sides of the conflict together and allows them to coexist in peace. The two following contributions by UNOY member organisations present their experiences and perspectives on promoting dialogue in their communities. Many of these experiences are shared by our other members and emphasise the need to promote youth inclusion and leadership in community dialogue as a key step to sustainable peace.

Endotes

[1] For more information on the Progress Study, including the Security Council and full versions of the report, see: https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy
An interactive version of the report can be found at https://www.unfpa.org/youth-peace-security.

[2] UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) is the first of its kind to recognise the positive role young people play in building sustainable peace and to lay out the need for governments and other stakeholders to support young people in this role. The resolution has five pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnership, disengagement and reintegration. Read the full text of the resolution: http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/SCR-2250.pdf

[3] UNOY Annual Review 2018 available at: http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/Annual-Review-2018.pdf

[4] Data on the impact of youth-led peacebuilding in general, and youth-led dialogue in particular, remains limited. For this reason, more research is recommended by different actors in the Youth, Peace and Security field, including UNOY.

Sirri Cynthia Wakuna Ngang

is a young, dynamic and passionate gender and peace activist from Cameroon. She is the Programs Director at Mother of Hope Cameroon (MOHCAM), a women's- and youth-led organisation which advocates for human rights and peace. Cynthia holds a bachelor's degree in Women and Gender Studies and Law from the University of Buea.

Her zeal to ensure that young women live and thrive in their communities led her to peace activism at an early stage in her career, as she began to advocate against all forms of violence against girls in schools and communities. Cynthia Wakuna's work in peace activism took a new turn with the outbreak of the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon as she underwent several trainings on peace advocacy, nonviolent communication and dialogue. She has most recently been involved in a series of projects aimed at enhancing dialogue within conflict-affected communities.

Young women participating in dialogue

By Sirri Cynthia Wakuna Ngang

Dialogue, in the context of this contribution, entails creating a safe space where opinions, grievances and narratives can be shared without prejudice and in the hope of being heard and considered.

The Republic of Cameroon has, over the past two years, been characterised by violent acts of terrorism in her two English speaking regions of the north- and southwest. The current socio-political crises in Cameroon can be traced back to late 2016, when English-speaking lawyers and teachers of both regions organised a peaceful protest, born out of frustrations arising from the fact that the government had for several years under-mined the anglosaxon educational and legal systems which had been a cause for concern for English-speaking teachers, lawyers and students.

English lawyers and teachers, arguing the government was attempting to undermine, marginalise and dissolve English systems, organised a protest which received a negative reaction from the state and was subse-quently usurped by separatist groups demanding for the independence of the two regions to be called the 'Sovereign State of Ambazonia'. The crisis has gradually turned into an armed conflict. As the conflict intensifies, it has led to untold suffering and misery as millions of people continue to lose their lives while others lose their property and livelihoods and the number of internally displaced persons increases. The realities of the crisis are especially real and specific to young women who bear the brunt of it. Young women in the two conflict-affected regions have been exposed to sexual exploitation, rape, early and forced marriages, teenage and unwanted pregnancies and prostitu-tion. The realities of the crisis for young women have continued to be a cause for concern as they have in recent times been recruited as fighters in separatist camps. Later in 2017, government and other stakeholders started several dialogue processes with separatist leaders to find lasting solutions. These dialogues failed because they did not consider the narratives of all parties. These interventions conspicuously failed to take into account the perspectives of young women, who had their own stories and pain to tell, and ignored their existence. With the failed attempts to find a solution to the crisis, the Anglophone crisis is at a deadlock and worsening as time goes on.

Strengthening young women's participation in dialogue and peace processes in local governance

Recognising the specific ways in which young women are affected by the conflict and yet the lack of engagement of young women as peacebuilding actors, Mother of Hope-Cameroon (MOHCAM) identified the need to mainstream a young women's perspective into the peacebuilding process. This narrative has not been given much attention to in the struggle to find ways of initiating dialogue by the state and other civil society actors. Most interventions also failed to take into consideration the intersecting dynamics of gender and age in contributing to exclusion, as they tend to treat women and youth, respectively, as homogenous groups. Both United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1325 on Women Peace and Security and 2250 on Youth Peace and Security do not adequately recognise the unique challenges faced by young women. To this effect, MOHCAM implemented a project based on two main activities: training young women within the conflict-affected region on dialogue and organising a storytelling workshop for young women affected by the crisis.

This project, through skills building in negotiation, conflict resolution and leadership, was aimed at empowering young women to participate in peacebuilding and community dialogue. Most importantly, the project highlighted the important role of young women in shaping the narrative of dialogues to include their specific experiences and needs during conflict, as well as post-conflict.

Designing a dialogue process

To promote understanding, tolerance and solidarity within conflict-affected communities of the role of young women in conflict resolution, it was important to implement the project in collaboration with local municipal councils, civil society organisations (CSOs) and community representatives. This in turn provided a safe space for young women to contribute to peace processes and local governance in the advancement of resilient communities. Developing such a safe space proved challenging and required separate dialogues with community members and government officials.

Participants were selected in collaboration with local organisations, from church groups to community youth centres. Community members were wary of the effectiveness of dialogue in resolving community issues and conflicts. MOHCAM worked with local community members and organisations to reach and connect with

Participants in MOHCAM programming take part in a demonstration calling for greater participation of young women in dialogue.

As part of its trainings sessions, MOHCAM organises trust building exercises to address tensions that may exist between participants and to create a safe space for dialogue.
Photos: Mother of Hope-Cameroon

Training sessions include a few young men, recognising that the inclusion of young women cannot take place without the participation of their male peers. Photos: Mother of Hope-Cameroon

GUNS DON'T TALK PEOPLE DO

Young women participate in a sit down mourning ceremony, calling for a ceasefire to the conflict in the north and south-west regions of Cameroon and inclusive dialogue.

communities and convince them of the importance of this work. The role of secessionist leaders in putting pressure on or influencing community members' actions also meant that our dialogue initiative exposed us to threats and harm from warring factions. Managing these security concerns entailed mass sensitisation and lobbying with stakeholders to ensure the security of our team and participants.

The organisation also required government legalisation papers authorising the implementation of the project. Due to the crisis and the subsequent distrust between state and non-state armed groups and between state institutions and civil society, the project initially faced a lot of bureaucratic bottlenecks from state officials who claimed not to understand the project's agenda. Through separate conversations and meetings with government officials, MOHCAM worked with these officials to create a better understanding of the need for dialogue in the north- and southwest regions of the country.

Implementing the dialogue initiative

A total of four training workshops were organised, targeting all conflict-affected areas within the region. Each workshop was comprised of 30 participants with young women ranging from the ages of 18 to 30. These training sessions included a few young men and boys to ensure a gender balance, also recognising that the participation of men is important to engaging young women in a context where men take most decisions. This balance in gender was further intended to enable the men to understand why it was mportant for young women to be regarded as partners in finding a solution.

In a bid to bridge the widening rift and tension that exist between citizens, separatists and the government, and to establish favourable grounds for eventual dialogue, these training sessions were carried out within state council premises with state officials present. Trust-building exercises at the beginning of the training helped to address some of the suspicions that existed between government officials and community members and to create a safe space for dialogue. During these sessions, participants were allowed to share their experiences on the effects of the crisis and also heard from state dignitaries. Participants were also separated into working groups and each given a topic of dispute particular to the crisis in their communities, which they were tasked to resolve through dialogue. These working group sessions were facilitated by a moderator whose role it was to ensure that the dialogue space remained open for people to share their views and for participants to listen first. In our experience, having a third-party facilitator helped

to promote a more constructive dialogue, as well as greater consensus between participants. Each group was given a chance to present resolutions arrived at in their individual groups. Through dialogue, participants were able to learn from each other and change their own perspectives on the role of young women.

By including men in the discussions, the dialogue sessions were able to promote a constructive conversation on the role of young women in society. The men represented in these trainings, many of them leaders of traditional councils and church groups, were initially of the opinion that women could not be very good agents of dialogue. They held on strongly to socially constructed norms that women were more vocal and had the tendency to incite disagreement instead of meaningful dialogue. However, female participants took it upon themselves to highlight the role that women are already playing within families and communities in enhancing a culture of dialogue and peace. At the end of the session, there was unanimous agreement by the men and the women to continue to engage in discussions and work together to change the way in which communities view the role of women in dialogue.

Building on training to promote continued dialogue

These group exercises revealed that most of the non-state participants had been direct victims of the crisis. They had either suffered from the loss of loved ones or had themselves been raped or assaulted, lost property or were internally displaced persons seeking refuge in the bush. As a follow up activity to the training, MOHCAM organised a two-day exchange workshop in Yaoundé between victims of the crisis from both regions who had participated in one of the training workshops. During this conference, these victims, including young men and women, had the chance to share their stories with state stakeholders. This dialogue session touched on the underlying conditions which had generated grievances between the state and civilians. Through anonymous forms, participants were able to air their views on the underlying causes of the crisis. The answers collected through these forms served to kick off the discussion in a larger group. Participants felt neglected and abandoned, underscoring that their needs in and perspectives on the crisis had never been sought by decision-makers. They also underscored the role of cultural norms in limiting the inclusion of a young woman's perspective.

Following the trainings, MOHCAM also created dialogue units attached to the municipal councils of each targeted council area, aimed

at creating a safe space for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. These dialogue units are facilitated by community moderators. These moderators were nominated by community representatives based on the criteria of the level of trust within a community and a record of community service and peacebuilding. The dialogue moderators consist of two young men, two young women, two older women and two older men.

Conclusion

Given the ongoing challenges in Cameroon, inclusive and meaningful dialogue remains an important tool in efforts to build and sustain peace. Enhancing dialogue as part of continued peacebuilding efforts will go a long way to constrictively engage with judgements, assumptions and conflicting viewswhile building peaceful and resilient communities.

Ilias Alami

is one of the founding members and the
Executive Director of Afghanistan New
Generation Organization (ANGO), which was
established in 2011. As a youth empowerment
advocate, Ilias has developed and executed several
high-level, countrywide youth initiatives and civic
campaigns, among them the Society of Youth
initiative. Society of Youth's volunteer network of youth leaders now nurtures more
than 200 active members in different provinces of Afghanistan. Throughout his career,
Ilias Alami has been a staunch promoter of a just and safe society for every Afghan to
live in. He was a recipient of the Kennedy-Lugar Youth, Exchange & Study (YES)
scholarship in 2009 and a Seeds of Peace GATHER Fellow in 2016. Ilias is an Inter-
national Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) alumni and holds a Bachelor's in
Political Science and Public Administration from the American University of
Afghanistan.

Young leaders promoting conversation rather than agreement

Interview with Ilias Alami

Dialogue is the ability to express yourself to different people and being able to freely share your ideas – without fear of what others think – and to resolve challenges or issues through common discussion in an open setting.

For the past forty years, Afghanistan has seen violence and conflict in the form of a series of proxy and civil wars, in which external powers supported either government or rebel forces, monetarily and/or through military force. In September 1996, the Taliban, a predominantly Pashtun, Islamic fundamentalist group, overthrew the incumbent government and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The United States launched in 2001 a series of aerial attacks and provided financial support to the Northern Alliance, a local group who had fought to remove the Taliban throughout the 1990s. The Taliban government collapsed in December 2001, and a presidential election was held in 2004. Today the situation in the country remains extremely unstable, with increased levels of attacks and suicide bombings. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan recorded an estimate of 3,804 civilian deaths in 2018, with an additional 7,189 injuries, at the hands of various parties to the conflict.[1] The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded almost 360,000 internally-displaced individuals within Afghanistan during the same period.[2]

Today's youth in Afghanistan, approximately 63.7% of the country's population[3], have never known anything other than war. Despite this, many young people are working to promote peace in the country. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation spoke with Ilias Alami of the Afghanistan New Generation Organization (ANGO), a grassroots organisation that works to help young people become agents for social change in their communities. He shared his reflections on how dialogue sessions between groups, often facilitated by youth, have allowed people with opposing views to connect on a more personal level and understand each other's points of view while seeking common ground. Ilias further explained how this dialogue has contributed to peace efforts in Afghanistan.

Why do you work to promote dialogue in Afghanistan?
Every Afghan citizen dreams of living a normal life, one in which
they know they will be able to return home at the end of the day. We
have been at war for so long and it has taken a very big toll on human
life, both in terms of the number of deaths but also the psychological
impact. Good days here are those in which there are no sounds or news
of explosions and attacks – quite rare these past few years. On bad days,
we either wake up to the news of an attack or halfway through the day,
we hear the sound of an explosion. In response to an attack, everyone
rushes to pick up their phones and dial the number of their loved ones.
The phone calls either go through, providing relief to the caller, or
gives a 'busy' signal, and the caller attempts again. A sense of panic and
tension pervades throughout every corner of the city.

The staff working at ANGO are no strangers to this. I live this experi-
ence when I see fear and heartache in the faces of my colleagues, who
just like myself move on in bewilderment, working towards a better fu-
ture for ourselves and the generations after us. These bad days are what
drive us at ANGO to instil a sense of hope and inclusion. We do this
by bringing young Afghans from different parts of the country together
to talk and share their stories in a constructive manner. We believe it is
very important to use dialogue as a means or a tool to move beyond
violence; in engaging in such discussions these youth will be able to
strengthen their own ability and that of their peers and future genera-
tions to seek a more peaceful path in solving disagreements.

Why is dialogue needed in Afghanistan?
There is a lack of ability and courage to engage with people who
have different views in a conversation, and this has contributed to the
drawn-out conflict in Afghanistan. Political leaders in particular are
unwilling to meet with opposition leaders and to engage them in a
dialogue to find common ground.

The many conflicts in Afghanistan have revolved around clashes
between those who support traditional and religious values and those
who support a more liberal society based on democratic ideals, seen by
traditionalists as enforced by Western society. ANGO does not oppose
either of these opinions. What we say in our sessions is that differences
will always exist, but these differences do not need to lead to violence.
Coexistence should be more important than these opposing views,
even if they cannot get fully resolved.

Problems arise when urban and rural youth are encouraged or pushed by both conservative and liberal interest groups to challenge each other's beliefs through violent means rather than engage in dialogue to learn what the life of a person their age in a different part of the country looks like. Young people in rural areas, many of whom are more conservative, often get labelled by society as extremists. This kind of labelling actually makes them more likely to join violent movements because they feel that they do not belong in more liberal urban communities. The violent movements showcase violence as the only 'rightful' option and give a sense of belonging and community. Supporters of democratic values on the other hand tend to promote initiatives aimed at countering violent ideologies instead of promoting alternative solutions. This fuels tensions.

At the very beginning of every dialogue that we implement, our focus is on breaking the ice between these two groups, allowing them to get to know each other as people, learning about each other's hobbies. We do not engage directly on the issues, but instead work to inspire them to find common ground. Once they have established this relationship, we take it to the next level where we facilitate more targeted discussions.

Why is it important that young people are part of dialogue efforts?
What is critical is how the present nurtures and helps the younger generation to become future leaders. These young people have become the direct victims of violence in Afghanistan. Youth, disillusioned with the current status of conflict and the country's leadership, are more likely to gather around people who present a solution to the challenges of the day, even if that solution involves violence. If we do not give them a good present, then they will not have a good future. This young generation needs to have the tools and the ability to become engaged in their communities now, as youth.

To what extent do inequalities in Afghanistan
affect dialogue and peace efforts?
Divisions that are broadly present in Afghan society can also be seen in the youth population, and have been made worse since 2001 by international development assistance and government spending focused on urban areas. Youth who live and interact in urban areas often have greater access and exposure to education and the internet compared to those living in rural areas and are able to access different resources and information which allows them to learn about other cultures and ways of thinking. Conflict has also become more prominent in the provinces

Ten years old Aryan, who used to sell chewing gum in the streets of Kabul, now attends a private school supported through the Sarak-e-Awal initiative. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2018. Photos: Afghanistan New Generation Organization

A group of ANGO's civic volunteers sort through clothes they collected in a clothes drive, which they distributed to needy families across Kabul in 2018. Kabul, Afghanistan.

where there are fewer development projects. This has contributed to a growing sense of grievance by those living in the periphery (the provinces) against those living in the centre (urban areas).

For instance, when we put out a call for applications to participate in our programmes, we do not have resources to promote it in person in each province, so we use social media. This means that it is more accessible to those who have access to internet, and access to internet is much better in Kabul than in the provinces. So, in that sense, those in urban areas have a better chance and opportunity to participate in these kinds of programmes.

ANGO is working to build up a network of volunteers who can run camps in different provinces because we want to have a stronger presence in those areas. The only way to establish a presence is to find these role models who have the means and opportunity to come to Kabul and go back to their provinces and take what they have learnt and share it with others.

What kinds of activities does ANGO have to
foster dialogue in Afghanistan?
ANGO engages youth from different parts of the country to be able to talk about their similarities and differences in a dialogue setting and move beyond the idea that 'anything that is against them is wrong'. You do not have to look at everything from the perspective of right and wrong, but instead can look at it from the perspective of differences and similarities. When we think of something as right or wrong, then we get into a conflict with others. What ANGO strives for is peaceful coexistence; in this way we work to promote a non-violent culture.

For example, we organise a civic activism camp called 'Society of Youth' where we bring university students from different backgrounds and studying different fields together for a two-week programme. During these two weeks, these students talk about civic activism, civic education and about current challenges to their society. Discussions centre on a variety of issues, including the role of youth in peacebuilding, the importance of dialogue, the power of storytelling and engaging youth, and peace mediation and the meaning of peace. For each session we try to find different facilitators. Some are facilitated by ANGO employees, some by young role models from the community including students, civil society, academia and the private sector.

The camp is meant to showcase Afghanistan as a single country in which different ideas can coexist. No matter where they come from, when participants get to the camp they are only known by their name and as a young person, and the whole idea is for them to find commonalities between themselves and their peers. Somebody who comes from the north may come in with different views and opinions from someone living in the south, which can prove challenging. However, with time and as participants find common ground the discussions become friendlier. In 2014, for example, when the pilot programme was launched, one of the participants, a university student from a northern province who studied Sharia Law, did not get along with other participants who had studied liberal arts, especially the female participants. Later on during the camp when he listened to his peers and their opinions and had the chance to talk about his ideal society, he slowly became interested to engage more in discussions and to make friends.

How do participants use what they have learnt
during the camps in their own communities?
There are different stories of participants using what they have learnt in these camps in their own communities. Our network of volunteers in the western and eastern provinces started their own civic activism camps based on what they had learnt in the civic activism camps (with certain differences based on limitations they faced in their provinces) in which they engaged in discussion about specific topics related to issues they face in their communities. By holding these camps and adapting them to the different provinces we are also able to expand our network of volunteers. It is not just an opportunity for them to come to the capital, but for them to take the knowledge and experience and lessons learnt back home.

Our different programmes have created friendships that have remained beyond the period of the project and which, in the long term, reduce hostility. These initiatives have taught us as an organisation how important it is to open up inter-connected discussion platforms in different schools, universities and communities where young people are able to sit around the same table and share their personal stories in a positive environment, learning from their peers and identifying similarities and differences in the challenges they face. We at ANGO believe that our job is to take the first initiative to bring people together, but to give it a lasting impact, communities must also become involved. Through such open dialogues, we will close the gaps and mend relations between people.

Endnotes

[1] *Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018*, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, February 2019.

[2] https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

[3] United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) – Afghanistan

Sarah Dolah

is the Program Manager of Young Peacebuilders – a mediation and conflict resolution project at Fryshuset, Sweden's largest civil society organisation for youth. By supporting young people's conflict resolution skills this project contributes to the implementation of UNSC 2250 and sustainable peace in Sweden. Before working at Fryshuset, Sarah was the Project Manager of Young Leaders Boot Camp (YLBC). She studied political science and war studies at the Swedish Defence University and international affairs at the Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. She also has a Bachelor's in Political Science.

The 'Dialogue for Peaceful Change' methodology

By Sarah Dolah

Although Sweden has historically been understood as a peaceful country, there is a great need for peace work that prevents polarisation and marginalisation of youth and that empowers them to understand and prevent conflicts in their communities. Unfortunately, we witness many conflicts in various parts of young people's lives, ranging from bullying, sexism, honour-related conflicts, internet-based conflicts, racism and deadly gun violence. In its work, Fryshuset[1] focuses on young people who do not feel like they are a meaningful part of Swedish society – who feel like outsiders – and create opportunities for them to feel included and valued in society. In marginalised areas, whether it is in the suburbs of the bigger cities where a majority of young people have non-Swedish heritage or in small towns in the Swedish countryside where young people are mostly of Swedish descent but feel ostracised from mainstream society, we see how tensions and violence take root.

In the context of our project Young Peacebuilders, we work with dialogue as a skill that can be learned and that makes it possible for people to listen empathetically to each other as well as to feel heard and understood. Ultimately, dialogue is the tool we use to facilitate mediative conversations, which range from daily interactions to formal mediations that follow a certain structure.

In 2018, Fryshuset started working with the method Dialogue for Peaceful Change (DPC) with the aim of strengthening the conflict management tools that youth in Sweden have access to, and their understanding of what conflict is and what their role can be in transforming it. The project contributed to the development of a national network of young people across Sweden who have undergone the DPC training, through which they can find support and advice from each other and pitch ideas for initiatives on how to make Sweden a safer and more inclusive place for youth. This work is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth Peace and Security, which sees it as pivotal to include young people from all parts of society in creating a safer and more peaceful world for all.

'Dialogue for Peaceful Change' methodology

The DPC methodology[2] was developed by Colin Craig during the resurgence of the long-standing violent sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland, based on experience gained through the work of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland.[3] There were at that time no methodological blueprints or university courses on peacebuilding and conflict management, so the work, in the midst of increased divisions and violence in the country, was developed through trial and error and over time a methodology evolved.

In developing the method, some principles on what is needed for peaceful change were agreed upon. The name 'dialogue for understanding' was initially suggested, but the argument was raised that it is entirely possible to have a dialogue which leads to full understanding of each other's standpoints, while still coming to the conclusion that it would be best to inflict violence on each other. Understanding in itself will not necessarily support peaceful change unless it is coupled with a serious effort to enhance empathic communication through active listening and constructive dialogue on ways towards positive change. Additionally, it was agreed that sustainable peaceful change needs to be initiated by the parties in conflict so that they have full ownership over the solutions, and that they must be the ones communicating that a positive change has been made to the wider community affected by the conflict.

In Colin Craig's words, all change is conflict. The trick is how to prevent it from fracturing further and becoming violent. DPC is a highly adaptable method because of its unique focus on human nature in conflict. It draws on neurological and biological research on human behaviour, and thus recognises that just as all humans experience conflict of some sort during their lifetimes, all humans are also biologically wired to react to conflict in very similar ways as part of our instinct to survive.[4] DPC purposely introduces these scientific explanations to help individuals understand why they react in a certain way, a first step towards them being able to develop a more constructive approach to navigating conflict.

The method also delves deeply into the social aspects of conflict and explores how we are often driven by social perceptions of what determines success and the subsequent fear that we will not achieve this 'success': affluence, power, freedom, being a part of a community, etc. Being aware of the existence of these social influences and fears opens another possibility for change and transformation. DPC suggests that

success could instead be a deeper understanding of human needs – interdependence, equity, transcendence and diversity – and that looking beyond our fears to potentially find something more meaning-ful can also contribute to peaceful and lasting change.

Figure 1: Iceberg Model, 2018 edition
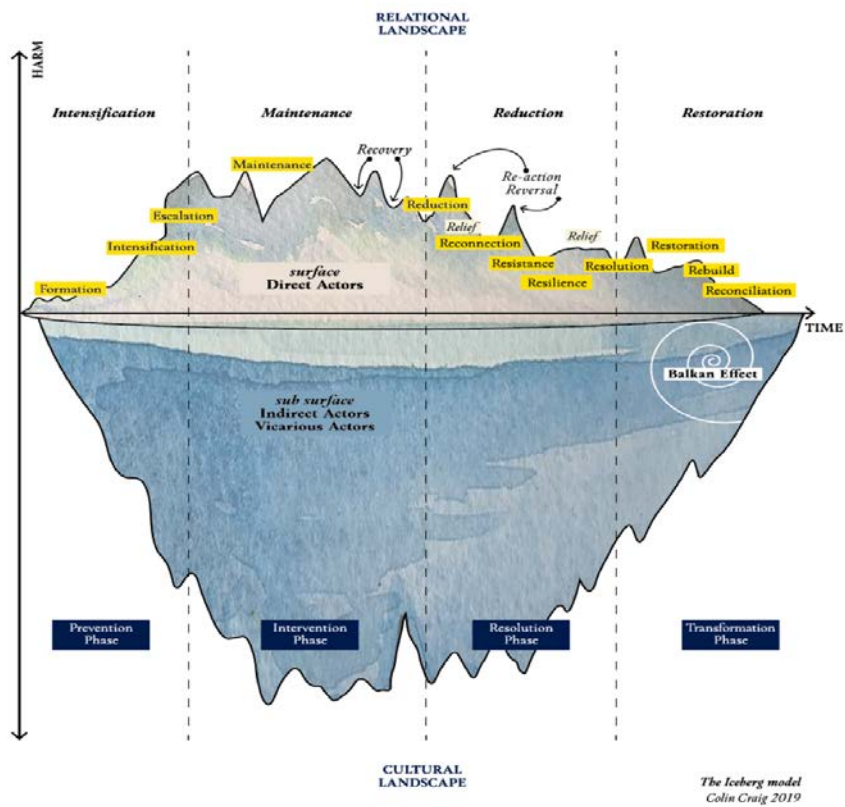
At the heart of DPC lies the Iceberg Model for understanding and analysing conflict (See Figure 1). The Iceberg model helps to demon-strate how, in addition to the direct actors in a conflict, indirect actors are vicariously involved at all times, influencing and cementing the storyline and underlying tensions of the conflict. The fire might die, and the guns might be put away, but at any time a small spark can draw on the deep-seated history of conflict stored at the bottom of the ice-berg and rapidly support an escalation and rekindling of violence. What is needed is a deeper understanding of, and ways of dealing with, the underlying causes and progression of the conflict. In DPC, participants are taught through practical exercises how to do this and

get to experience first-hand the effects and benefits of approaching a conflict through the DPC methodology. If they can learn to appreciate how this mechanism works and how it can be countered, then they can be empowered to prevent conflicts from escalating.

The concept of mediation

Ideally, mediation is not necessary to solve a conflict. Instead, parties to a conflict are able to solve their issues by themselves without involving a third party, by engaging in dialogue and finding a way forward. However, the conflicts that we and our participants work in have often reached a point where parties are unable to find a solution by themselves and the conflict only continues to escalate. Mediation as a tool to solve conflicts only enters the picture when and if both parties have expressed that they welcome a third-party mediator to facilitate their dialogue. Mediation as we define it differs from, for example, negotiation, where a facilitator would present solutions to the parties of the conflict, diminishing the parties' ownership in the process. In mediation, the facilitators never present a solution; they merely facilitate the process by which parties are able to come up with and discuss their own solutions. This is key to real mediation in our view – and places the ownership of the solutions and the change in the hands of the parties, leading to more sustainable and long-term positive change in conflicts.

Applying DPC in Sweden

Fryshuset tested the DPC method with a network of local young leaders from Järva and Bro, two marginalised suburbs of Stockholm that also suffer a disproportionate amount of violent crime. As a result of state agencies and police failing to create trust with the community and intervene in a meaningful way, young leaders in youth centres, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and schools are working tirelessly to prevent, intervene in and mediate conflicts that arise. Their driving force is to save young people from ending up in destructive environments and in the worst case scenario, be subjected to deadly violence. They are very passionate about this cause, but our experience tells us that without being able to get away from the intensity of the conflicts and without support and recognition they are at high risk of burn out.

The training focuses mainly on prevention, where mediative dialogue and behaviour play an important role in finding better ways forward. However, the method also provides tools for how to approach a conflict as mediators once it has already erupted. Importantly, it also teaches at what point it is better to take a step back for your own individual safety

and when it is more appropriate that other actors in society handle the conflict.

Fryshuset facilitates a five-day DPC training composed of two modules. Module 1 focuses on the main principles and models of the DPC methodology outlined above. It also goes through how different people tend to react in conflict situations, and tools for how to map out conflicts and the actors and relationships in them. In Module 2, the participants are divided into pairs and are given two conflict scenarios each, one to mediate and one to play out as conflicting parties. This initiates the two-and-a-half day practical mediation skills training, where they learn a 6-stage formal mediation process (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The 6-stage mediation process

01 **Individual storytelling**
Listening actively to a party's version of what has happened, using listening and paraphrasing skills

02 Joint storytelling

03 Framing the issues

04 Creative problem solving

05 Formalising the agreement and follow up

06 **Melting the iceberg**
Diffusing impact of the legacy of the conflict with indirect actors in the conflict

Youth from Järva participate in the Dialogue for Peaceful Change workshop outside of Uppsala, Sweden. Photo: Fryshuset

The idea is not that everyone will eventually facilitate a formal six-stage mediation process in real life. But, learning the logic, both mechanically and emotionally, of the six-stage process and how it can affect the attitudes and behaviours of the parties in conflict provides a good framework to draw on when dealing with daily situations at work, in school, on the streets or in the family. We often talk about *mediative behaviour* versus *mediation*, where mediative behaviour is a practice and way of approaching a conflict inspired by the logic of mediation without having to enact the six stages per se. It is possible that mediative behaviour involves a version of *individual storytelling*, for example, which can be as informal as having a phone call with a friend who is calling to ask for help in a conflict situation. The idea is that both mediative behaviour and mediation reduce tensions by encouraging empathetic listening and a sense of being heard, which can help prevent or reduce the heat in a conflict and lead to positive change.

In applying DPC at Fryshuset, we have placed a great emphasis on the selection of participants. Our colleagues around the country carefully select young leaders in their local communities, based on their ability to positively influence others. We prioritise getting the right people involved rather than maximising the number of participants, with the aim of creating networks of formal and informal youth leaders who will use the training to kickstart work throughout Sweden, and possibly connecting with similar efforts abroad. We also train the staff at Fryshuset so that they can use the method in their daily work, such as in our schools, youth groups and youth centres.

The young people we brought together for this training expressed great appreciation for the chance to meet and exchange with one another, according to our interview-based evaluation. They believe that maintaining the network will allow them to deal hands-on with real scenarios that they face regularly, asking each other for help, ideas and support, whilst trusting each other that it is a safe space to share and be heard. They hope that through the network they will better be able to give advice to policymakers and other actors such as the police and social services on how to understand the underpinnings of the conflicts in the area, and to affect both local and national politics that is trying to deal with violence and antisocial behaviour in youth.

Conclusion

Policymakers in Sweden and internationally should truly recognise the richness of knowledge and experience that young leaders, both formal and informal, have when it comes to understanding the root causes for conflict and preventing violence in their communities. Young leaders are often the ones who hear about conflicts first and can reach youth that no one else can thanks to the trust they have built up over time in their neighbourhoods, especially in areas where there is little trust in other community actors such as the police. As such, we see examples of how youth step in to support entire families who have been affected by deadly gun violence and lost family members, because these families do not trust anyone else to help them. We have heard first hand of cases where young leaders have prevented retaliatory shootings and persuaded young people to choose a more peaceful way forward by applying their mediation skills, both self-taught and those provided through DPC. Policymakers should work to ensure sufficient funding of initiatives working to strengthen the potential that young civil society in Sweden has to prevent violence and shootings as well as other forms of destructive conflicts. We wish to see more support for the kind of work that NGOs do to harbour space and trust for youth to get engaged in peacebuilding. Sweden must invest long-term funding into implementing a plan for implementing Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security that is inclusive of young people's views of what needs to be done to create a peaceful and safer Sweden for everyone.

Endnotes

[1] Fryshuset, headquartered in Stockholm, is Sweden's largest civil society organisation for youth and has been working in several locations in the country for 35 years. The main focus is on young people and their chances to grow and develop, regardless of ethnic, religious or social background. Supporting the realisation of young people's passions is at the heart of our work.

[2] For more information about DPC see: www.dialogueforpeacefulchange.org

[3] Founded in 1965, Corrymeela is Northern Ireland's oldest and largest peace and reconciliation organisation.

[4] Colin Craig, *Navigating Conflict and Change: DPC Handbook*, Dialogue for Peaceful Change, 2019, p. 16

Rafael Tyszblat

is a consultant, programme designer, mediator, facilitator and trainer in the fields of conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue. Based in Paris, France, he is the Innovation and Design Specialist at Soliya, an online-based NGO promoting the field of Virtual Exchange (online intercultural dialogue) within the Virtual Exchange Coalition, which offers a cross-cultural experience to an ever increasing number of youth as part of their education.

Taking dialogue online

By Rafael Tyszblat

Dialogue: a type of group conversation that allows for the exchange of ideas, opinions, feelings and personal experiences in an authentic way and through a non-confrontational process, better ensured by the presence of facilitators, in order to foster deep mutual understanding between participants.

In the past decades, the fields of peacebuilding, conflict resolution and education have steadily increased and enhanced their interactions through original programmes, inviting young people to engage in meaningful dialogue to build bridges between political, religious, cultural or national divides. Facilitated dialogue borrows its methodology from mediation and conflict resolution processes. As a preventive tool, it engages people in a pre- or post-conflict context to restore broken or heated relationships between identity groups. The aim of dialogue is to engage diverse and potentially divided communities in a constructive exchange in order to break down stereotypes and build or rebuild trust. Just like mediation, the intended result of dialogue is that participants, enriched with enhanced understanding of their counterparts' way of feeling, thinking and expressing themselves, will develop empathy towards each other and become agents of positive change.

Virtual Exchange (VE)[1], a field recently established to formalise and institutionalise the transposition of such dialogue programmes online, was pioneered by Soliya and a few other organisations[2] to massively scale up the number of young people benefitting from a meaningful cross-cultural experience as part of their education. In these virtual spaces, they engage in the same type of dialogue processes as described by Bohm[3] over topics of mutual interest, some of which can be divisive: politics, culture, religion, international relations, gender relations, the environment, migration or social and economic inequality – to name a few. Since 2017, VE has gotten traction as the European Union adopted its implementation in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region through its ERASMUS+ Virtual Exchange programme.[4] VE, and particularly its Online Facilitated Dialogue component as implemented by Soliya, are now deemed to provide a meaningful contribution to mutual understanding between identity groups[5], as well as the acquisition of certain competencies commonly designated as '21st century skills': critical thinking, collaboration, intercultural sensitivity and

communication skills, media literacy, technology literacy and conflict resolution.[6] Incidentally, most recent reports also show that the ability to communicate effectively in a multicultural environment is a skill that is lacking, and more and more sought after by employers.[7]

In an age where public discourse is becoming more and more polarised, especially via social media, VE gives a new dimension to dialogue by expanding its reach while preserving its depth. Most online interactions happen between people who have similar backgrounds or think alike on certain issues. As a result, very little learning takes place. These are called 'silos' or 'filter bubbles'.[8] Reversely, when people express disagreement, the exchange can rapidly become confrontational, as is easily observed in social media interactions. VE programmes avoid those two pitfalls and provide a way for people to engage online in a constructive manner, even when they disagree. In order to achieve this, VE requires the right combination of *pedagogy*, *facilitation* and *technology*.

Pedagogy

Dialogue can be designed in many different ways and combine various tools, depending on its objectives. However, it is usually distinguished from other types of discussions, namely debates. For while debating can be valuable in testing our rhetorical skills, dialogue, with its unique process, is the only process that can truly lead to mutual understanding between identity groups and, eventually, sustained peace. Among the main differences are:

1. The threatening and aggressive atmosphere of debates versus the safe and respectful spirit of dialogue;
2. the fact that debates involve competing parties to prove a point against each other while dialogue seeks learning through cooperation;
3. the fact that debates invite participants to speak as representatives of their group, making positions firm and generalised, while dialogue invites participants to speak for themselves, allowing individual views to evolve and differ from that of the group; and
4. the tendency of debaters to constantly find ways to respond to their opponents while dialogue participants make efforts to listen and understand where differences may be coming from.

Through the right curriculum, dialogue changes the rules of the conversation by adopting certain values such as autonomy, collaboration, inclusion, cross–cultural sensitivity, multipartiality and freedom of expression, as well as certain basic ground rules such as authenticity, respect and confidentiality. The structure needs to follow commonly

identified stages[9]: engaging constructively over heated topics cannot happen without sufficient preparation and a proper transition from a humanising effort (through ice breakers and exchange of personal information) to a transformational stage of mutual understanding and empathy. Participants to these dialogues learn to be vulnerable thanks to the safe space established by the process and facilitation. They are constantly invited to identify common ground as well as understand not just *where* but *why* they disagree on certain things. They engage in critical thinking to examine their assumptions. Through a meta-cognitive effort, they learn not just about the topic discussed but also about the way they engage with those topics and how it impacts their understanding of the topic. Pedagogy should also incorporate the notion of spaced learning, which means engaging participants in several sessions and inviting them to reflect on the conversations in between sessions, confronting their learning with their local contexts and experiences.

Facilitation

Facilitating is the art of helping participants avoid the pitfalls of debates and make conversations constructive. To avoid those pitfalls, live discussions make a difference, as explained above. However, the determining factor for a good quality and depth of dialogue is the presence of trained facilitators. Preventing confrontation and disrespect, or conflict avoidance and inauthenticity, as well navigating identity dynamics and power imbalances, require not just resilient personalities but thorough skills acquired through training, practice and ongoing supervision.

Teams of facilitators need to reflect the diversity of participants and show constant multipartiality to the expression of all, thus refraining from making their own point of view prevail or favouring a particular opinion during the exchanges. Their role is to enhance the quality of communication, ensure equal participation, manage destructive dynamics and facilitate mutual learning between participants, including through a reflection on the content and process of the conversation, as they perceive it. Through a learner-led process, participants are able to adapt a pre-set curriculum to their own needs and interests and progressively engage in collective facilitation. The curriculum has to allow several options and, while certain activities can be required, free-flowing discussions should take most of the airtime. Nevertheless, the presence of third parties is indispensable throughout the engagement to safeguard the collectively agreed upon rules, such as confidentiality, non-judgement, avoiding interruptions or personal attacks of others. Lastly, online dialogue probably requires facilitators to pay even more

attention to facial expressions and tone of voice since some of the other non–verbal cues such as whole–body language can remain invisible (although we now know that online dialogue can be just as effective as face–to–face dialogue in fostering empathy and positive relations between participants).[10] Online facilitation mostly requires additional technical training since the support role of facilitators obviously extends to that of basic tech support, for the comfort of all users.
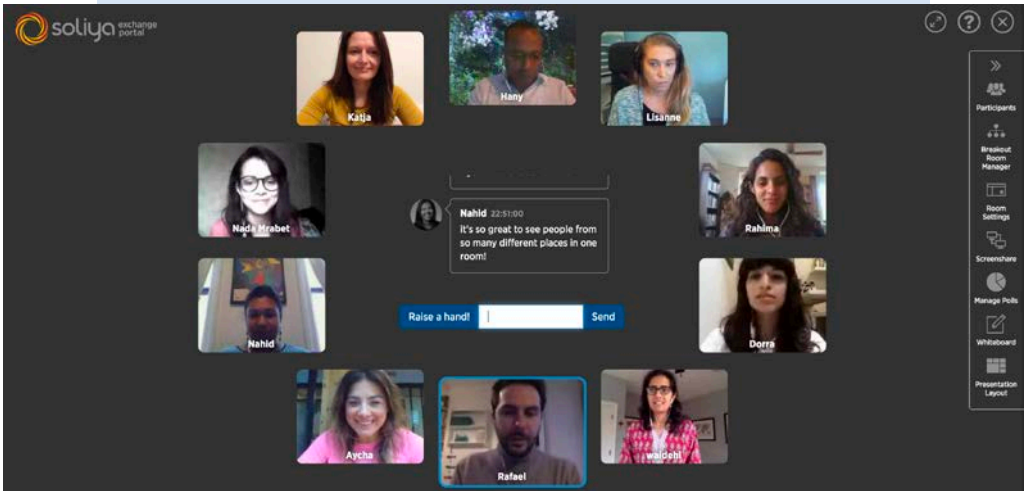
Technology

The main value of using technology for intercultural dialogue is the possibility to provide a cross-cultural experience to a much higher number of people, for a fraction of the cost of any physical exchange – not to mention a much smaller carbon footprint. It also allows certain individuals to feel safer to speak, whether it is because they are too shy in face-to-face settings or because they live in societies where free speech can be repressed. However, using online technology alone is not a guarantee that the experience will be optimal. Throughout the years, Soliya has identified lessons learnt on adapting technology to the philosophy of dialogue and created online platforms and Learning Management Systems that allow more meaningful conversations online.

- To start with, online exchange can consist of conversations that happen synchronously or asynchronously, orally or in writing. While asynchronous exchange through posts and written comments can be a useful complement to synchronous, oral conversations, they cannot replace them. Any observer can verify that asynchronous conversations on social media rarely lead to deep conversations. That is in part because an essential piece of dialogue is hidden in that set up: non–verbal cues like body language, facial expression and tone of voice for instance. Lack of face–to–face interaction deprives us of a huge part of understanding, and one can easily mistake a neutral comment for an attack. Moreover, it reduces the spontaneity in answers (since it allows more time to respond) and therefore allows our rationalising brain to control our expression more easily. Finally, because their counterparts are not directly visible, participants to asynchronous communication tend to feel safe from a violent escalation, and therefore authorised to commit abuse. Asynchronous exchange can facilitate the sharing of concise information but live, synchronous verbal talks should be prioritised when seeking deep learning and constructive dialogues.

Photo: Adobe Stock Images

Soliya's Connect Program

Soliya is an international non-profit organisation in the field of Virtual Exchange. It provides high quality global education that combines the power of dialogue with the reach of new media technologies to empower young people to develop critical 21st century skills and establish more effective and cooperative relations within and between their societies.

Since 2003, Soliya has brought together over 14,000 college-aged students, hailing from 233 institutions in 33 countries through the flagship VE initiative, the Connect Program. During the programme, university students are connected via a custom-designed video-conferencing platform, a rigorous curriculum, and the latest in international pedagogy. Over the course of a semester, students engage online in face-to-face small group dialogue and collaborate with peers across the globe, under the guidance of Soliya-trained facilitators. The experience offers young people the opportunity to voice their opinions on a global scale, critically explore pressing issues and be exposed to different perspectives in a safe environment.

- Second, the visual aspect of the platform matters. Roundtable-shaped displays of video streams favour a collaborative mindset and stimulate more fluidity in the exchange. A chat box at the centre also works better than aligned windows with a side chat box. Since Virtual Exchange involves participants from different countries and languages[11], but must use one for most of the conversation, the central chat box allows facilitators to transcribe key contributions of participants in writing, supporting non-native speakers to follow the conversation more easily.

- Third, accessibility is essential to the inclusive power of technology. The quality of online video-conferencing applications is often affected by poor connections. An adaptable WebRTC-based system allowed Soliya to guarantee optimal access and high-quality sound and video experience, even in low bandwidth environments. Proactive technical support to solve computer and software issues are also needed to ensure all participants can navigate the platform comfortably.

- Finally, a safe environment highly depends on the security of the platform. If participants fear a risk of hacking or government control, as is often the case with online communication tools, they might not be authentic and the group discussions will suffer.

A well-designed online platform is undoubtedly an asset in allowing more and more people to experience constructive dialogue across differences. Facilitators also report that they can work more easily thanks to some practical tools like the 'single speaker mode' where only one person can speak at a time. As more tools are designed to improve the user experience, Virtual Exchange could soon be replacing physical exchange as a preferred channel for intercultural encounters.

The inclusive power of VE has yet to be fully unleashed as many improvements are still on the way, including live multilingual translation, lighter platforms and better access to users living in even lower bandwidth environments. Longitudinal studies and academic research are still needed to fully assess the multiple attitudinal and behavioural ways in which online dialogue transforms participants. Nevertheless, by allowing thousands of young people to experience a deep and sustained online exchange, it is now becoming an essential tool for education. Through the multiplication of university partnerships, Soliya observes that more and more teachers are now seeking to use dialogue as a pedagogical tool for their classes for any purpose related to civic education (gender relations, race relations, bullying, etc.) or humanities and social sciences, for instance. Neuroscientific and sociological studies should be able to show soon that while classic top down, non-participative education is more and more challenged, facilitated classroom conversations often stimulate and motivate students to learn more, explore assumptions and entertain multiple perspectives. With the advent of Virtual Exchange, dialogue is not only a prominent tool for any conflict prevention effort, it has also become a central piece of global learning. Providing opportunities for more and more students to get a deep cross-cultural experience as part of their education, Virtual Exchange, through its massive reach combined with facilitated dialogue processes, can make significant and lasting contributions to sustainable peace.

Endnotes

[1]VE is a practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology. https://evolve-erasmus.eu/about-evolve/what-is-virtual-exchange/

[2] http://virtualexchangecoalition.org/

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[5] https://www.soliya.net/sites/default/files/pdfs/SoliyaImpactAssessmentTools.pdf

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[9] Bruce Tuckman, 'Developmental Sequence in Small Groups', *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal*: 71–72 (Spring 2001). Archived from the original (PDF) on 2015-11-29. https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_D_Sustained%20Dialogue.pdf

[10] https://www.soliya.net/sites/default/files/pdfs/SoliyaImpactAssessmentTools.pdf

[11] At this time, Virtual Exchanges are offered in English, French or Arabic.

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Women for conflict transformation
Perspectives from South Asia

By Salma Malik

In the context of this article, dialogue is understood as the sharing of diverse experiences during conflict, and learning about alternative ways of looking at emerging scenarios. It has the potential to contribute to greater empathy and comprehension of others' perspectives, breaking traditional stereotypes.

With a history rich in folklore and storytelling, passed down through successive generations, South Asians are famously a highly communicative society who indulge more in verbal expression, often manifested through highly animated and emotive public debates. The ancient city of Peshawar in the northwest of Pakistan has a traditional marketplace by the name *Qissa khawani bazar*[1], (the storytellers' market) where historically the men would gather and share stories and anecdotes over endless cups of *Qahwa* (green tea) into the wee hours of the morning. The same bazaar and its orators became an integral part of a historic non-violent movement, popularly known as the *Khudai Khidmatgar Movement*, against the British occupation.

The harrowing experiences that resulted in the separation and birth of two independent states, India and Pakistan, in 1947, are some of the stories that are still shared in these bazaars and elsewhere. The meta narrative and symbolism of partition of South Asia has been that of the 'motherland' being divided, looted and truncated, which needs to be preserved and protected by its 'sons'.[2] Unfortunately, this oral memory and narration continues to influence and shape public perceptions on the conflict, reflected in the deeply-entrenched trust deficit between the two countries as well as efforts to resolve the conflict that often exclude large segments of the population, including women.

Many dialogue processes related to peace and security continue to contain largely male-dominated decision-making mechanisms, as these subject areas have been termed by society as more masculine. Women's contribution to these processes is often viewed as negligible. Against this backdrop, this essay will examine the importance of including women in dialogue, as part of endeavours to seek lasting peace and non-violent social change.

Dialogue in South Asia

Peace and security in South Asia remains hostage to the acrimonious relationship between India and Pakistan. More than seven decades of adversarial relations between the two countries have led to an environment in which conflict is part of the daily narrative, as well as a spiralling arms build–up, where nuclear weapons serve as a negative guarantor of peace. This notwithstanding, there have been multiple dialogue opportunities and fora between the two countries, ranging from bilateral to the multilateral.[3] While some of these initiatives sprung out of crisis situations, many were deliberated during peace time, focusing primarily on the symptomatic problems rather than underlying issues of the conflict.

These official as well as multi–track channels of dialogue and connectivity were encouraged, necessitated and driven either by circumstances or by a third party seeking crisis diffusion and management. Official channels predictably remain confined to established government positions. While informal channels of engagement used to be less rigid, more receptive to alternate viewpoints and more accommodating, if not necessarily inclusive, the 2008 Mumbai terror incidents and the subsequent rise of ultra–nationalism in India has created less space for these informal channels, further stinting overall growth, development and security in the region. In order to transform and resolve this conflict, the inclusion of additional actors – civil society organisations, major and minor religious actors, marginalised groups, women representatives and even youth leaders – other than the traditional government or military institutions is needed.

What is inclusivity?

In South Asia, traditional patriarchal social values and norms contribute not only to gender inequality but reinforce gender stereotypes. Despite being directly affected by violence and armed conflict in many parts of the region, women are not considered as active stakeholders in deliberations on peace, security and conflict. Several South Asian countries, including Pakistan, have 33% reserved seats allocated in the legislature for women. While this in itself is a major achievement, one needs to assess to what extent these 33% of women are able to proactively engage and influence security and peace dialogue. According to a study conducted by the Geneva based Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 'inclusive processes have a far higher likelihood of agreements being reached and implemented. However, this only holds if additionally–included actors had significant influence on the process'.[4] Besides mere inclusivity it is important to consider these entities as active partners in peace and development.

Inclusive dialogue has been further defined as 'structured and facilitated conversations on an issue of concern by representatives of the various groups and institutions who are affected by or can affect the issue positively or negatively'.[5] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek the inclusion of all sectors and levels of society, including those most marginalised. In particular, SDG 5 on Gender Equality underscores the role of women in promoting peace and development and the importance of empowering women and girls. Building on the Agenda, those most marginalised, including women, are seeking commitment from primary stakeholders in development, humanitarian and security sectors to ensure inclusivity in all practices.

Women and dialogue

Traditional approaches to conflict resolution have always been androcentric in nature, where the meta-narrative is driven by men – as conflict resolvers, drivers and enablers. In this perspective, women are, by and large, considered a liability and collateral that need to be secured, taken care of and protected as and how the conflict progresses. Women tend to bear the direct burden of war: they face possible displacement, childhood marriages, physical and mental abuse and harassment on a regular basis; lack access to education and basic health facilities; and some of them may spend their lives as half-widows, their husbands having disappeared during conflict. Several reside in widow villages, with no males to provide for them; this can expose them to harassment, manipulation and abuse from (male) law enforcement agents on a regular basis.

When women have been members of official dialogue processes, they tend to represent their respective government agencies. They are often not themselves affected by the conflict and are unable to represent the needs and perspectives of women in conflict when participating in such negotiation processes. Given cultural sensitivities, society also tends to either overlook or deliberately ignore women as conflict actors. A woman's role and image are invariably portrayed as compassionate, motherly, altruistic, in contrast to gun-yielding, combat-soldiering women, some of whom may participate in mass killings as suicide bombers, or in the least support radicalised militant elements. Including women in bilateral or plurilateral communication helps add a much-needed different perspective to traditionally male-centric dialogue. Such engagement may not initially be results-oriented – it may commence through the sharing of women's diverse experiences during conflict and learning about alternative ways of looking at emerging

scenarios. It has the potential to contribute to greater empathy and comprehension of others' perspectives, breaking traditional stereotypes. More importantly, it can create space for women's perspectives to contribute to decision-making, eventually leading to possibilities for finding common ground for mediation and conflict resolution. This is admittedly an arduous journey, but continuous dialogue at the least ensures that channels of communication remain available.

Whenever and wherever women have been included, a gender lens is applied to the traditional security narrative, highlighting the many roles and diverse perspectives of women. More importantly, such experiences carry the potential to create and evolve movements or establish networks of women experts. Organisations such as the Delhi-based Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP)[6] have done immense work on transforming conflict at the community level, especially in conflict areas such as the Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir, Guajarat and Indian North East, etc. Similarly, Paiman Alumni Trust[7] and Sabawoon[8], women-led non-governmental entities working on de-radicalisation and demobilisation of suicide bombers in the Swat valley of Pakistan; the Women's Parliamentary Caucus; South Asia Women's Network (SWAN); South Asian Women's Leadership Forum; South Asian Feminist Alliance for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (SAFA); Women's Regional Network (between Afghanistan, Pakistan and India); as well as Islamabad-Peshawar based Peace Education and Development (PEAD) Foundation[9] are just a few of the select bodies working on peace and security from a female-centric perspective. The Women Action Forum of Pakistan which dates back to 1981 was founded to protect and promote women's rights and voices when the military regime of the time used Islamic edicts to suppress and limit the social and political rights of women. Organisations have faced immense domestic opposition and censure to create a space for themselves in a typical patriarchal and securitised environment.

Women, through their inclusion in conflict negotiation, have been most instrumental in educating and transforming conflict societies at the micro level. From de-radicalising[10] violent youth and potential suicide bombers to implementing programming aimed at economic empowerment of women, to leading alternate dispute resolution institutions, women have been highly effective conflict transformers, often offering a different perspective from the masculine militaristic approach. In traditional societies, women are and have been engaged as peace mediators and many times have been instrumental in ushering long-standing peace agreements. Soliciting and including women as

important stakeholders to peace at all stages of conflict mitigation may prevent social conflicts from intensifying. As conflicts become more internalised or protracted, women need to be included as active part-ners in dialogue and conflict mitigation, or else there may never be holistic and sustainable peace.

Endnotes

[1] Kazi Sarwar, 'Qissa Khwani's tale of tear and blood', The Statesman, 20 April 2002.

[2] Gita Viswanath and Salma Malik, 'Revisiting 1947 through Popular Cinema: A Comparative Study of India and Pakistan', *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. XLIV No 36, 5 September 2009, pp. 61-69.

[3] At the official level, India and Pakistan have over the decades held several rounds of bilateral official dialogues related to Jammu & Kashmir, the water dispute, terrorism issues, arms control and strategic issues besides other minor conflicts. Besides the official channels, there have been Track 1.5 and Track 2 initiatives such as the Neemrana dialogue, Chopraya dialogue, Ottawa process, the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace & Democracy (PIPFPD) and several others.

[4] Thania Paffenholz, Nick Ross, Steven Dixon, Anna-Lena Schluchter and Jacqui True, *Making Women Count - Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations,* Report by the Geneva Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and UN Women, April 2016.

[5] Becky Adda-Dontoh, *Inclusive dialogue in practice. What is inclusive enough and how do we measure inclusion? – The case of Malawi, Practices from Peace and Development Advisors,* Issue Brief No. 01, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs, 2017. https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Global%20Policy%20Centres/OGC/Inclusive_dialogue_Malawi.pdf

[6] New Delhi-based Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) is a peacebuilding initiative in South Asia, which was established in 1999, to put women's leadership at the forefront in the areas of peace and security, non-violent social change and promote cultures of pluralism and coexistence in the region.

[7] The PAIMAN Alumni Trust (PAIMAN) has for more than two decades been engaged with women and youth primarily in the conflict-ridden region of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, and conflict-affected and conflict-prone districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through awareness of the impacts of radicalisation and extremism on their lives and the role they can play in combating it.

[8] Launched in 2009, Sabawoon by Fariha Paracha, is a de-radicalisation programme using therapy and education to reverse extremism and violent tendencies in young militant fighters through vocational and other trainings as a means for social integration.

[9] The Peace Education and Development (PEAD) Foundation focuses on training and educating youth groups, teachers, community peacebuilders, and clergy throughout Pakistan, focusing on the conflict-affected Khyber Pakhtunkwa province and FATA to promote tolerance and nonviolence, respect for cultural diversity, and interfaith harmony, as well as conflict resolution skills.

[10] Organisations such as the WISCOMP, Sabawoon and Paiman Alumni trust have engaged with and de-radicalised many such females in the Indian-occupied Jammu & Kashmir and Swat Valley respectively, who genuinely believed in local radicalised and militant groups and therefore supported them in their capacities and motivated their menfolk to join these violent actors as a service to the community or religion.

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Founded in 2013, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers builds
bridges between grassroots peacemakers and global players in order to strengthen the
work done for sustainable peace. The aim of the Network is to improve the effective-
ness of peacemaking and peacebuilding by collaboratively supporting and strengthening
the positive role of religious and traditional actors. The long-term impact envisaged is
thus more resilient and inclusive peace processes that lead to more sustainable peace.

Bridging faiths and worldviews through dialogue

By Edla Puoskari and Alessandro Rossi

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as an exchange of views between two or more parties with the aim to build trust. Dialogue in itself does not often aim for a solution but aims to create enabling discussions that have positive impact in transforming conflicts and ensuring peaceful communication. Dialogue often requires the support of action-orientated approaches. This contribution focuses on dialogue within, between and across different faiths and worldviews with examples from across the globe.

A growing number of current conflicts are characterised by religious, ethnic or other 'worldview differences'.[1] At the same time, approaches to mediation, dialogue and peacebuilding often fail to recognise the diverse influences that religious and traditional actors and differing worldviews can have on conflict and peace. Nearly two-thirds of the conflicts that took place in 2015 worldwide can be identified as having a religious dimension.[2] Recognising the influence of religion or other fundamental worldview differences is critical to understanding current conflicts and approaches to sustainable peace. The potential role of religion or religious actors in promoting intra-and interfaith dialogue can be particularly important considering that 84% of the world population claims a religious affiliation[3], with that percentage probably even higher in conflict-affected countries.

In some cases religious differences may not be the cause of conflict itself but can have an impact by being used as identity-markers, with parties aligning themselves according to religious lines, such as Protestants and Catholics during the Northern Ireland conflict. Differences in worldviews can also form the core of the conflict itself, such as disputes about having a secular or Islamic constitution; how the rights of minorities should be ensured; the right to visit holy sites; or other aspects defining how to coexist in society.[4] Classical approaches to mediation, dialogue and peacebuilding can miss critical elements in advancing peace in these contexts, resulting in setbacks to peace processes. For example, if a conflict analysis and subsequent peacebuilding strategy is focused primarily on the political interests of the parties it can overlook tribal or clan-based structures and traditional values that shape the functions of a society and therefore the success or failure of any political proposition for resolving conflict.

In addition, the roles of religious and traditional actors in conflict contexts have not been given sufficient recognition by many international policies and actors trying to implement peace processes. Common assumptions have included that religious actors in conflicts negatively influence the conflict; they either do not have direct interests in the outcome of the conflict or influence on the key conflict actors; or that their interests of gaining power or resources are stronger than their worldviews. Sometimes internationally-led mediation or peacebuilding efforts fail also to recognise that by not taking into account that local actors may have different worldviews, mediators can de facto end up imposing their own worldview. This can be experienced by local counterparts as a form of violence[5], particularly in the historical context of colonialism. According to Nudler[6], this challenge threatens the deep security of a community that shares the same or a similar worldview. If the community feels that its way to relate to political and social developments is challenged, it can also take a defensive and sometimes hardened position towards its core ideas and values, which in turn may further challenge dialogue and peace efforts.

A response to these complex dynamics often requires using various dialogue[7] approaches as part of broader peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (hereinafter referred to as the Network), launched in 2013, has since its inception regarded dialogue within, between and across groups holding different religious traditions and worldviews as being at the centre of its work. This was one of the fundamental realisations that brought together the Network's core partners, including the UN Mediation Support Unit within the Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA/MSU) that spearheaded the effort, along with other UN agencies and offices (including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Alliance of Civilizations, UN Women, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, and the UN Population Fund); faith-inspired organisations like Finn Church Aid, Religions for Peace, and the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) Center; as well as governmental stakeholders like the Government of Finland. The Network was established to bridge the gap between the secular approach of international organisations and the realisation that achieving sustainable peace requires the involvement of religious and traditional actors on the ground.

Multiple dimensions, multiple dialogues

Appropriate approaches to dialogue need to take into account different dimensions in a given conflict context and analyse the extent to which religion or other worldview dimensions play a role.[8] The advancement of dialogue and peace processes in such situations often requires a multi-layered approach, including intra- and interfaith approaches, and needs to be supported by specific actions that help to build trust between conflicting parties.

Challenges that differences in worldviews can pose to these conflict resolution efforts include, for example, when distinctive worldviews form the core of a conflict; when it is difficult to find language and concepts understood and accepted by people with different worldviews; and the phenomenon of people 'sanctifying' the conflict, deeming it untouchable for resolution.[9] The challenges of deep-rooted value differences are visible, for example, in the debates around abortion and the extent to which states should be governed by secular or religious laws. The mediation and dialogue approaches, such as mediation space[10] and civic fusion[11], designed for engaging on such challenging topics are focused on preparing the ground for mediation or dialogue without asking the parties to modify or change their beliefs.

While religious literacy is an important skill for actors involved in dialogue and mediation, it is particularly important to understand religion as 'lived religion' in its specific localised context; belonging to the Anglican Church in London differs to the everyday reality of belonging to the same church in South Sudan.[12] Engaging in conflict resolution efforts in these contexts requires paying attention to new actors who can act as legitimate interpreters of their communities' worldviews and sometimes as insider mediators within their communities. These actors, also referred to as Tradition- and Faith-Orientated Insider Mediators (TFIMs), can often advance critical issues due to their social positions, functions, and/or motivations, as well as the ability to develop peace-making methods that are shaped by religion or tradition.[13]

The role of religious and traditional actors can be important in advancing dialogue in any context where a worldview is depicted in conflict parties' narratives around identity, emphasising divisions between 'us' and 'them'. This can be seen in such contexts as the Central African Republic (CAR) between Christian and Muslim communities, in Myanmar between Buddhist majority and Muslim minority groups, and in Somalia between the so-called 'Muslim resistance' and the 'West-led crusade'. In these conflict contexts a positive counter-

Multifaith actors from the Central African Republic gathered in Lindau, Germany, for the 2019 Religions for Peace World Assembly.

An inter-faith fellowship programme workshop facilitated action-orientated conflict analysis and planning with participants from 10 different countries across South and Southeast Asia.

Photos: Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

narrative for peace would often need to start from intra-faith dialogue efforts. This has been one of the focus areas in the Network's interventions and in the support given to local partners in CAR, Myanmar and Somalia as outlined below.

Religious and traditional actors, respected by local communities can, using a shared set of principles and concepts, reach out more effectively to those who share their value systems and who could be attracted by extremist narratives. Intra-faith dialogue can thus prepare the ground for later efforts to reach out to the 'other', whether groups professing another religion or institutions seen as the embodiment of Western secular values. Effective dialogue in such contexts means also sharing knowledge and approaches with key religious actors in a way that remains respectful to their contextual, cultural and religious knowledge. In Somalia, the Network's support to reconciliation processes has focused on facilitating the inclusion of local traditional and religious leaders in designing culturally-based principles and methods for a National Reconciliation Framework, while striving to make sure that local and national authorities do not feel their prerogatives are being questioned by this inclusive approach.

In CAR, the intra-Muslim dialogue process that the Network led alongside core global partners[14] included a training for rural imams on peacebuilding messages inspired from the Islamic tradition. This required a theologically-grounded approach acceptable to the local religious leaders, an important effort of shuttle diplomacy between religious leaders from different theological standing points, and delicately navigating relationships with the broader community of believers in the country, as well as with other actors (such as international actors and national government).

As a third example of intra-faith dialogue, Network partner organisations in Myanmar engage Buddhist Sangha who are susceptible to extremist views. The process has been particularly successful due to a deep understanding of Theverada Buddhism and its religious values, both regionally and nationally, and the ability to slowly develop realtionships built on trust. An organisation or individual coming from the same value background is often able to better build this trust and address potential challenges in an intra-faith context.

Intra-faith dialogue can be a crucial element also when addressing issues linked to broader participation of women, youth and minorities in dialogue and peace processes. For example, imposing norms related

to gender and women's participation can be perceived as a threat to the core existence of a group, particularly in deep worldview conflicts. Rather than promoting gender issues from the outside, approaches focused on empowering progressive voices on the inside have proved strategic. In this respect the role of women and youth of faith should not be underestimated or disregarded in efforts to support dialogue, mediation and peacebuilding. Even in volatile contexts such as Libya in 2015 and 2016, concerted and culturally-sensitive efforts have managed to incorporate women and youth into the delegations of tribal leaders engaging in dialogue with key international counterparts.[15]

Intra-faith dialogue often needs to be complemented by *inter-faith dialogue*, as is the case with the Network's work in Southeast Asia and is also planned for in Africa. The combination and sequencing of the respective steps in dialogue and mediation requires careful analysis of the context. In some cases both inter- and intra-faith dialogues have been meaningful to conduct at the regional level since religious or traditional allegiances often transcend national borders and the validity or legitimacy of intra- and inter-faith dialogue could be contested by the believers of the same faith in a neighbouring country. Such action could in turn have the knock-on effect of undermining the very legitimacy and positive impact in the country where dialogue has initially taken place. This is particularly visible as hate speech spreads through social media and conflict more easily travels and escalates beyond borders. The regional approach does not undermine the realisation that key to the success of dialogue efforts is that they are rooted at the local level and led by actors who in spite of the circumstances, have commitment and moral grounding to stay and build sustainable peace in their communities.

Another critical consideration in conflicts characterised by deep worldview differences is that for dialogue to contribute to sustainable peace it is necessary to build confidence between parties through agreed joint practical actions addressing shared needs. This method can be referred to as *diapraxis*.[16] It highlights that instead of focusing dialogue just on general principles, values, theories and ideas – which can easily be misinterpreted by conflicting parties – the focus should be on how parties explain their positions with reference to practical matters. This can lead to developing and implementing joint practical activities that simultaneously enhance common ground and trust to engage in further dialogue. For example, in the inter-faith dialogue processes in northern Kenya it has been beneficial to work on projects that address core livelihood issues such as joint utilisation of natural resources, that at the same

time end up advancing intercommunal peace. Dialogue alone does not respond to the pressing issues and root causes of conflicts. Feedback by communities involved in the inter-religious efforts in CAR confirm also the need to make a link with development projects, a request particularly strong from women and youth. All these processes and forms of dialogue require long-term commitment and investment.

Across the tracks: entrenching multi-faith dialogue in international policies

While the key to resolving conflicts through dialogue is rooted in the local context, it is important to ensure that cross-track dialogue processes also inform policymaking and the agendas of international organisations. A global dialogue-facilitation process involving 232 religious actors from 77 countries over a two-year time frame led to the forming of the UN Secretary General-endorsed *Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes*. This achievement came as the result of dialogue among leaders and actors from different faiths and worldviews through regional-level consultations on how to identify the priorities of the Plan, as well as engagement with civil society actors, non believers, parliamentarians and governmental institutions. The initiative was led by the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect in partnership with the Network, the World Council of Churches and KAICIID Dialogue Centre. It created a platform from which religious actors can promote one voice against the incitement to violence and thus opened up new spaces for action and peacebuilding.

One of the long-term results from the process of developing such a multi-faith-supported document at UN level has been the formation of a Global Steering Committee where many religious leaders and actors can engage in dialogue on the prevention of violence and its incitement. Its work is accompanied by Regional Steering Committees, as well as by a Group of Friends comprised of 17 governments. The 11 lines of action identified by the Plan are structured along three key areas (prevent, strengthen, build) and some of them directly refer to the need for a holistic approach in the prevention of violent extremism, now embodied in Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) UN policies, such as the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Implementation workshops pertaining to the education aspect of the Plan of Action have already been conducted in a few countries.

These initiatives build on and are inspired by the work of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development that has been active for over a decade with the aim to further enhance the connections between faith actors and all UN agencies. The space for ongoing dialogue between faith groups and the UN has recently been enhanced by a UN Faith-Based Advisory Council composed of 38 globally-renowned faith-based leaders. In addition, nomination by the UN Secretary-General in 2017 of a High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation which includes religious leaders such as the Archbishop of Canterbury is further confirmation of this trend.

To contribute towards increased knowledge and provide tools to address religion and secularity in conflict, the Network has together with the Center for Security Studies/ETH Zurich, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, collaborated on tailor-made trainings with UN DPPA/MSU. This close cooperation has provided tools to address conflicts with religious dimensions and led to the realisation by professional mediators involved in UN-led mediation efforts that a dialogue between international mediators and local religious and traditional actors is key for a mediation to contribute to sustainable peace. The Network, together with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, also supports the Religion and Mediation Course organised annually in Switzerland by the the Center for Security Studies/ETH Zurich and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. This course aims to equip peace practitioners, diplomats and religious and traditional peacemakers from around the world with the knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant for mediating in conflicts where religion plays a role.[17]

Bridging different actors across levels – from global to regional to national to local – is only one of the aspects that effective peace work needs to be built on. In addition, the work needs to harvest and advance diverse collaborations between different actors working in this field, enhanced by exchanges and innovative approaches to dialogue. In all these multilayered approaches to peace, dialogue – as exchange focusing on increased understanding and trust – is a cornerstone in the path towards sustainable peace.

All photos this page: implementation Meeting of the Plan of Action for the Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that could lead to Atrocity Crimes, paving the way for joint implementation of inter-faith actions for the future. Photo: Lilia Jimenez-Ertl/UN Photo

Endnotes

[1] Worldview is used in this article to describe a collective framework of making sense of events and guiding the actions of a group. A worldview can be aligned for example with religious ideology, secular views of the world or indigeneous or ethnic understandings of the world. It often also forms a matter of fundamental security for a community. Worldview is often specific to certain contexts. When the article refers to worldview the term is used in the more general sense in line with the above definition. The article also makes some references to religion or religious beliefs specifically, when the emphasis is on how in certain contexts religion is considered as a key defining worldview for a certain community.

[2] In 1975 (earliest available data) there were 11 religious-identity conflicts, and 1 religious-issue conflict, while in 2015, there were 4 religious-identity conflicts, and 33 religious-issue conflicts. Isak Svensson and Desirée Nilsson, 'Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2017.

[3] 'The Changing Global Religious Landscape', Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2017,
https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/

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[5] Oskar Nudler, 'In Search of a Theory for Conflict Resolution: Taking a new look at world views analysis', Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, ICAR Newsletter, 1993.

[6] Ibid.

[7] In this article, dialogue is an interaction that does not presuppose conflict(s) between the interacting groups/traditions, and it is not centered or limited to issues relevant to solving conflicts. Mediation can be defined as a more focused form of dialogue. It is a process that brings conflict actors together to reach a mutually acceptable outcome. It requires consent by the parties and is usually supported by internal or external mediators.

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[14] A project implemented in collaboration with Finn Church Aid and KAICIID Dialogue Centre, and in consultation with multiple other actors.

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[16] Jean-Nicholas Bitter, 'Diapraxis in Different Contexts: A brief discussion with Rasmussen', *Religion in Conflict Transformation, Politorbis No. 52,* Swiss FDFA, 2011, pp. 65-68. http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/Politorbis-52.pdf

[17] For more information on the Religion and Mediation Course and many of the concepts referred to in this article, please see: www.rmc.ethz.ch

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Insider reconcilers
Dialogue for sustaining peace

By Antti Pentikäinen

Learning from the failing reconciliation process in Northern Ireland

In the context of this contribution, dialogue is understood as a necessary part of a reconciliation process in which communities affected by conflict can seek practical solutions together to address the root causes of conflict and underlying grievances. Such dialogue efforts may be most effective and sustainable when they are led by insider reconcilers.

For many, the murder of award-winning journalist, Lyra McKee, by a group called the New Irish Republican Army (IRA), was a wake-up call. The assassination took place in April 2019, but the signs had been there all along. Lyra's last story had been about the increase of suicide rates among young people after the 1988 Good Friday Agreement. Her friend said: 'Once she got hold of something she really didn't give up.' [1] Lyra had found the dark side of the failing reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, and this eventually took her life as well.

Earlier, on 19 January 2019, a car bomb had exploded in Derry leading to the arrest of four men belonging to the same dissident republican group, the New IRA. Ireland's Foreign Minister, Simon Coveney, immediately suggested that the attack was an attempt to drag Northern Ireland back into violence and conflict. Within the context of Brexit, it was becoming apparent that despite the 1988 Good Friday Agreement, EU integration and a period of unprecedented wealth, the country was not succeeding in sustaining peace. Twenty years after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland remained a deeply divided society in many aspects of daily existence, including education and housing. Recent efforts to build so called peace walls, lack of further progress with desegregated schools and the suspension of the collaborative government [2] suggest that the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland is currently facing significant challenges. These events reveal in part the complexity and urgency of improving the effectiveness of reconciliation processes and sustaining the impact of community-based dialogue.

Northern Ireland has been referred to as an example of how peaceful co-existence is possible and sufficient in preventing future cycles of

violence without addressing past atrocities.[3] Steven Sampson even argued that leaving past grievances unaddressed would be a better route to peace and coexistence than relying on mechanisms of truth-telling and justice that may not be reliable or available.[4]

However, statistics reveal that violence continued although it moved into more private spaces. During the first ten years after the Good Friday Agreement 272 people, primarily youth, were shot and 523 otherwise assaulted in 'paramilitary style' attacks.[5] At the same time, suicide rates show an increase after the Agreement. Unreconciled conflict re-emerged also in the form of violence against women.[6] The number of reported domestic abuse incidents in Northern Ireland increased nearly every year from 2004 to 2016[7], underscoring again the necessity to address conflict-related trauma, intergenerational pain and re-emerging cycles of conflict.

Two prominent scholars, Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly, conducted extensive research on the process.[8] They found that the disconnect between grassroots efforts and the political process affects the impact of reconciliation processes: 'although there has been significant work done at a community level, and a number of reconciliation-orientated policies have been put in place at the political level, these have often operated on different tracks.'[9] Some of the world's best practitioners had developed and led community-based reconciliation efforts and significant financial contributions had been made by the UK and the EU, but this was not enough to prevent the re-emergence of violence. This has even led to criticism of the overall concept of reconciliation.[10]

Hamber and Kelly proposed that the reluctance of political leadership to adequately address the past and the segregation of communities were the main reasons for the failing reconciliation. In their view, the political leadership in Northern Ireland 'failed to fully champion a cross-community vision for a reconciled society…and [therefore] the new stressors such as Brexit and the questions it raises for the Irish Border and the peace process more broadly, it appears that this limited approach is inadequate. The inability to transform the underlying social and political divisions in society and the ongoing reluctance to address the past in a holistic way, continually undermine progress'.[11] Political leadership in Northern Ireland, as well as within the British and Irish governments, therefore opted for 'peace without reconciliation', which means that power-sharing arrangements between Unionists and Nationalists were continuously prioritised over reconciliation.[12]

Also Hamber and Kelly recognised that despite their efforts to create a new working model, fundamental questions on how to make reconciliation more effective remained unresolved.[13] Their observations on the interconnectedness of national policies and community-based action are helpful when striving to design more effective reconciliation processes, recognising that reliance on political will remains a challenge. Elite resistance usually grows over time, which underscores the importance of siezing historical opportunities, such as the Good Friday Agreement, to launch multi-track reconciliation processes, paying careful attention to reconciliation process design, and ensuring that national policies are supported with complementary efforts to heal community relations and address personal trauma.

Dialogue at grassroots level is a necessary part of reconciliation

Hamber and Kelly developed a working definition of reconciliation with the intention to enable other societies to build on the experiences of Northern Ireland when designing reconciliation processes.[14] That working definition rests on the assumption that building peace requires sustained attention, suggesting five interconnected strands of activity to reconcile broken relationships and to address underlying grievances.[15] These include:

1) developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society,
2) acknowledging and dealing with the past,
3) building positive relationships,
4) supporting significant cultural and attitudinal change, and
5) implementing substantial social, economic and political change.

Divided communities have complex grievances, which no outsider can fully understand or resolve. Effective reconciliation must include community-based dialogue on the root causes and jointly-developed resolutions that address past grievances. These dialogue efforts are closely linked to other community-based peacebuilding efforts, including reconciliation practices such as restorative peace circles and storytelling and are typically best led by individuals from within these communities.

In Finland, the government and the indigenous Sámi people agreed to complement the work of a proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission with support for insider reconcilers.[16] The author and a prominent Sámi activist Anne Nuorgam, who later became chairperson of the UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous People, developed an academic training course for these insider reconcilers. After basic
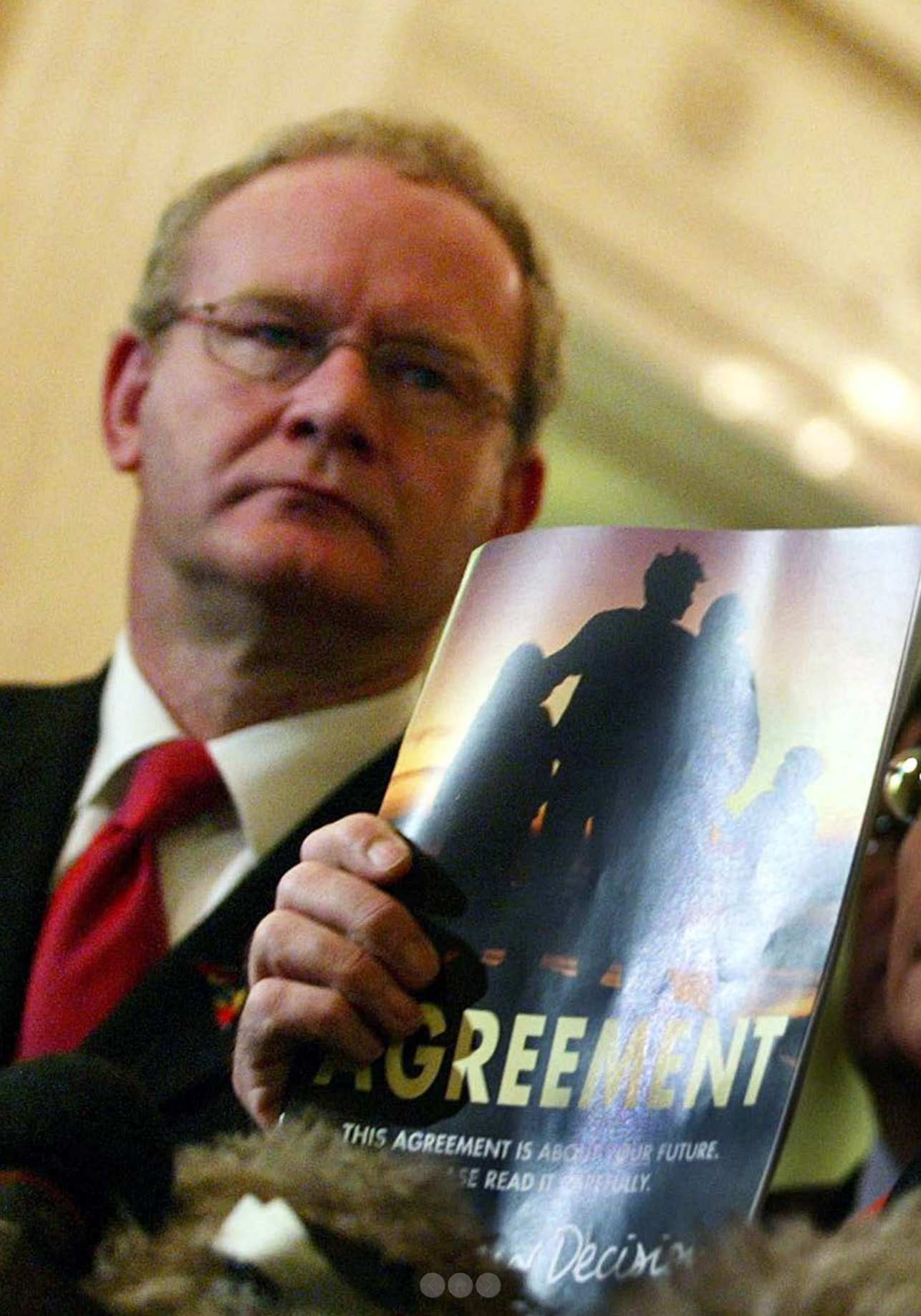
AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT IS ABOUT YOUR FUTURE.
SE READ IT CAREFULLY.

Decisi

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams (right) holds a copy of the Good Friday agreement with Martin McGuinness (left)
as they speak to journalists in the Stormont parliament building in Belfast, October 14, 2002.
Photo: Darren Staple, Adobe Stock Images/Reuters

training on peacebuilding and reconciliation, participants apply these methods in their own cases, aiming to resolve underlying grievances. Using reconciliation practices and dialogue, parties were introduced to the process and brought closer together in a search for practical solutions. After solutions were formulated, reconciliation practices continued to be used to invite broader communities into the process. The first cohort of insider reconcilers called for continued support and suggested the government of Finland establish a Center for Indigenous Reconciliation Knowledge (CIRKLE) on Sámi Land. Implementation is still pending and has been hindered by disagreements on several legal issues and a deep sense of distrust by the Sámi towards the state.

In addition to providing support for insider reconcilers, Sámi experts on psychosocial support were asked to develop a programme to address intergenerational trauma.[17] Their key recommendations included using a collection of culturally-sensitive healing practices and permanently improving capacity for psychosocial support in Sámi Land. Insider reconcilers in the Sámi context also viewed healing practices as an essential part of their efforts and benefitted from basic training on restorative justice, peace circles and the 'Healing of the Memories' methodology.[18]

Several experts have promoted integrating healing practices into the reconciliation process, including Olga Botcharova who highlighted the necessity of addressing personal trauma in preventing the cycle of aggression and revenge based on her experience of grassroots reconciliation in the Balkans. In her view, acute trauma, often linked to fear, anger and feelings of betrayal, can lead to segregation based on identity, disrupt community relations, promote resentment and increase the risk of renewed violence.[19] Botcharova's model does not, however, include the necessity for dialogue as continuation in the path for reconciliation.
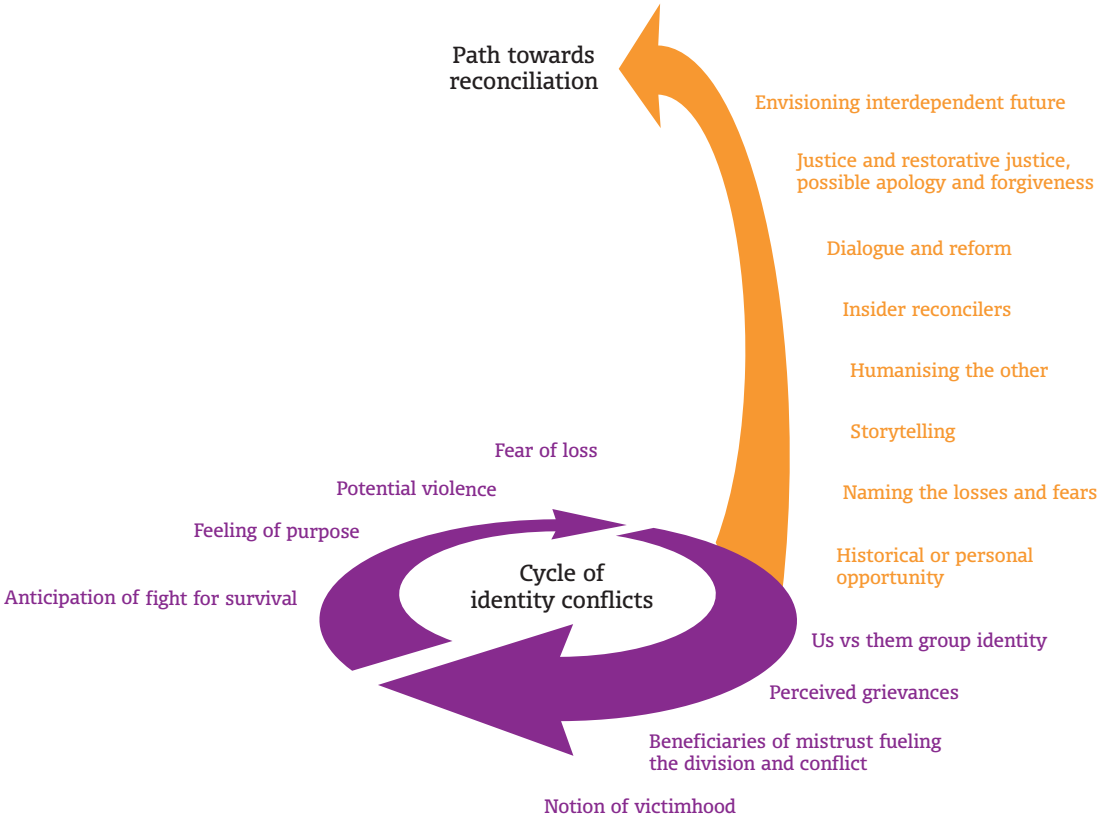
Practical experiences suggest that a combination of the Hamber and Kelly model and Botcharova's approach is very effective. The figure on the next page visualises the factors that perpetuate cycles of identity conflict and suggests a series of reconciliation practices to support a path towards reconciliation. This includes space for dialogue that allows individuals and communities to share their experiences and ideas for resolving root causes and practical grievances, which helps further to transform relationships and generate a shared vision of a peaceful future. The figure illustrates how dialogue is an important part of insider reconcilers' efforts but suggests that it can be more effective after

applying trauma-healing practices. In addition, it highlights that dialogue has to be coupled with reforms and efforts that address the need for justice. Restorative justice and practices of apology and forgiveness can complement the process when found appropriate by the involved communities (especially victims). Without dialogue and reform, root causes of conflicts are likely to remain, and communities' perceptions of each other may not change.[20]

Figure 1: Cycle of revenge and path towards reconciliation

Path towards reconciliation

Envisioning interdependent future

Justice and restorative justice, possible apology and forgiveness

Dialogue and reform

Insider reconcilers

Humanising the other

Storytelling

Naming the losses and fears

Historical or personal opportunity

Fear of loss

Potential violence

Feeling of purpose

Anticipation of fight for survival

Cycle of identity conflicts

Us vs them group identity

Perceived grievances

Beneficiaries of mistrust fueling the division and conflict

Notion of victimhood

Insider reconcilers can help to improve impact of reconciliation and sustain peace

Approximately 50% of all peace processes currently fail during the first five years.[21] Learning how to better support reconciliation is essential for communities and states but also for the United Nations (UN) in its efforts to sustain peace. Of United Nations Security Council mandated missions, 75% aim for some form of reconciliation, but little substantive guidance has been given on how to achieve this.[22]

Insider mediators have been recognised as essential actors in peace processes, both in theory and in practice, for decades. Surprisingly, a similar approach has rarely been applied in reconciliation processes even though the transformation of community relations requires the involvement and leadership of insiders within these communities. Identification and involvement of relevant insider reconcilers can help to collect best practices and to design effective processes, strengthening the complementarity between grassroots reconciliation efforts and state-based processes.[23] Such reconciliation process design can be essential in seizing often rare historical opportunities to end cycles of violence.

Effective reconciliation process design could benefit from a similar multi-track approach as traditional peace mediation. In such processes state level commissions (Track I) searching for truth and justice would be complemented with community-level dialogue and peacebuilding efforts (Track II) led by insider reconcilers on root causes and resolving practically underlying grievances. These efforts would be combined and complemented with opportunities for individual and community-based healing (Track III), improving likelihood of ending the cycles of conflict and sustaining peace.

Insider mediators and reconcilers are, however, often vulnerable and can be scapegoated, threatened and even killed amidst violent conflicts. Therefore, involvement of insider reconcilers has to be developed with appropriate support mechanisms. Even in peaceful environments, facing mistrust, hatred and the trauma of past atrocities is exhausting. Counselling, peer support and spaces for rest and planning are therefore essential as part of these support structures. Insider reconcilers should also be supported by a community of international reconciliation practitioners. Together they can help states and communities in planning and designing reconciliation processes that are likely to have a lasting impact on their communities, to improve relationships within them and to build an interdependent future.

Endnotes

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https://www.jstor.org/stable/24358014?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

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[16] The author was Independent Advisor for the Government of Finland and the Sámi indigenous people on initiating and designing the Truth and Reconciliation Process. Negotiations on the mandate of the Commission were still pending while this article was published. An account on these efforts is published (currently only) in Finnish at: https://sielunhoidonaikakauskirja.fi/ahdistuksesta-sovintoon/etsimassa-totuutta-sovintoa-ja-mahdollisuutta-tervehtymiselle-yhdessa-saamelaisten-kanssa/

[17] 'The fate of the Sámis reveal the depth and multidimensional nature of social and personal traumatic experiences involved in inter-generational pain. This means extreme losses by Sámi communities and individuals resulting in experiences of helplessness, persecution and illness caused by another group or identity and humiliations caused by this other group or nation. These experiences are passed from one generation to the other until a generation becomes able to face and process these inter-generational traumatic experiences. As a result each generation, conscious and unconscious, defines their identity through these traumas and passes on their wounded identity that was already pierced by the traumatic experiences of the previous generations'. (Psychotherapist Pirkko Siltala, 2016).

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The exercise and practice of dialogue can be traced back thousands of years, perhaps even to the beginning of civilisation. In more recent times there has been a surge of interest in dialogue, with the use of the term and its application proliferating within the disciplines of peacebuilding and development, but also in other fields such as education and public policy. This perhaps in part can be attributed to the growing and deepening polarisation that exists in many communities across the globe and both manifests itself in and is further fuelled by strong and adverse geopolitical interests. Many thus recognise the need for more space and means to engage in genuine dialogue, among and between communities, between political parties and within global multilateral bodies.

This Development Dialogue aims to deepen understanding and awareness of dialogue as a critical aspect of and tool for peacebuilding and for strengthening social cohesion. It features articles by practitioners and scholars, who share their experiences, including successes and challenges, in working to promote listening and greater understanding between groups.

The contributions testify to the different ways in which dialogue can be defined and the multiplicity of ways in which dialogue is and can be applied to address conflict and to strengthen peacebuilding efforts. It looks at contexts ravaged by ongoing armed violence like Afghanistan or Somalia to situations of seemingly intractable conflict like Israel and Palestine, as well as in countries and communities typically described as peaceful like Sweden. The authors also explore various thematic issues that emerge in relation to dialogue: methodologies used to facilitate a discussion; the participation of women; the engagement of youth; and the roles of the religious and traditional leaders.