Accord

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an international review of peace initiatives

CONCILIATION RESOURCES

Pioneering peace pathways

Making connections to end violent conflict

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Cate Buchanan

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

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Contents

Acronyms

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ARCSS	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
AU	African Union
BBI	Building Bridges for a New Kenya Initiative [Kenya]
BGF	Border Guard Force [Myanmar]
BRN	Barisan Revolusi Nasional [Southern Thailand]
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro [Philippines]
COCE	Central Command [see ELN]
CR	Conciliation Resources
CSO	Civil society organisation
DAG	Dialogue Advisory Group
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DRG	Dialogue Reference Group [Kenya]
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation [Myanmar]
ELN	Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional/National Liberation Army [Colombia]
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna [Basque Country]
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia/Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FPD	Framework for Political Dialogue [Myanmar]
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
HLRF	High-Level Revitalization Forum for South Sudan
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IVC	International Verification Commission [Basque Country]
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation [Myanmar]
KNDR	Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation
KTM	Kenya Tuitakayo Movement
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [Sri Lanka]
MARA Patani	Majelis Amanah Rakiyat Patani [Southern Thailand]
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front [Philippines]
MSU	Mediation Support Unit
MPC	Myanmar Peace Centre
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement [Myanmar]
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team [Myanmar]
NCYBU	Nakuru County Youth Bunge Association [Kenya]
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRPC	National Reconciliation and Peace Centre [Myanmar]
NUG	National Unity Government [Afghanistan]
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front [Somali Regional State, see SRS]
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PNV	Basque Nationalist Party
PP	Partido Popular [Basque Country]
PULO	Patani United Liberation Organisation [Southern Thailand]
PYD	Democratic Unity Party [Kurdistan]
SD	Self-determination
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SPF	Sasakawa Peace Foundation
SRSG	Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General
SRS	Somali Regional State
Tatmadaw	Myanmar Armed Forces
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNSMIS	United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria
UPDJC	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee [Myanmar]
YPG	People's Protection Units [Syria]
YPJ	Women's Protection Units [Syria]

Introduction

Pioneering peace pathways

Cate Buchanan is a mediation support and process design specialist. She works for the UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General – Yemen as a Senior Adviser and in advisory roles for Conciliation Resources, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, UN Mediation Support Unit (MSU), International IDEA and UNFPA Myanmar. In 2018 Cate was a member of the UN MSU Standby Team of Experts. Previously she was a Senior Peacebuilding Adviser to the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation in Myanmar and the armed groups it works with. She also supported the Alliance for Gender. Inclusion in the Peace Process in Myanmar as an Adviser. Cate was Chief Editor of *Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery* (2014). From 2001–2013 she worked for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue on violence reduction and prevention, and supporting peacemaking initiatives in Asia and the Pacific, before establishing Athena Consortium, a feminist advisory service, in 2013.

This *Accord* publication incubated during an exceptional period in international peace and security. Given the dramatic start to 2020 it could not be more apt. Covid-19 has shaken up the business model of mediation and peace process support. As this edition goes to press in August 2020 there has been an 'innovation explosion' in the space of a few months with significant parts of peace processes moving online. The embrace of technology that otherwise might have taken many years to realise is one fascinating development. A stark focus on tackling violence has also been spurred by the UN-led global ceasefire campaign, alongside communication and collaboration between some conflict parties to halt spread of Covid-19. How long these positive features will last remains to be seen. Conversely, the pandemic has provided further opportunity for authoritarian governments, and many armed groups and gangs, to tighten their grip on populations and impose extensive restrictions in the name of public health, exacerbating repressive public security and the reach of militarism. In other contexts, it has created a security vacuum for communities pre-exposed to violence and who otherwise had some degree of public security provision which is now redirected to enforcing Covid lockdowns and physical distancing.

Early and pre-formal phases of peace processes
What does it mean when we say that *Accord* 29 concentrates on 'early' and 'pre-formal' phases of peace processes? It means initiatives spanning years, often decades, to engage conflicting parties – typically armed groups, resistance movements, state militaries

and governments – in dialogue and negotiated political settlements. These are not neat phases. Instead they are decidedly non-linear and exemplify the 'messiness' of efforts to move to dialogue and the fine balancing act before formal discussion, mediation or facilitation takes hold or gets back on track after stalling. The terms are not perfect. 'Early' is in fact invariably 'too late' because violent conflict and repression is often well established and contesting perspectives deeply entrenched.

> ## 'Early' is in fact invariably 'too late.'

The articles variously touch on the necessary 'ingredients' to forge peace dialogue, and how early peace efforts set the course for subsequent phases, establishing path dependencies regarding inclusion, accountability and transparency that can be hard to change. Not all early phase efforts will result in formal peace processes and agreements. Some efforts are less tangible or visible, but no less crucial for ordinary people trapped in zones of conflict: opening routes to market, enabling access to health services, bringing more women into governance and decision-making systems, and creating an 'enabling environment' for peace. Sensitivities over disclosure of information on some processes profiled in this publication underscore the difficulties with focusing on early or formative dialogue, which remains under-researched and poorly understood.

Peace support group
Tap here for group info

Former armed group member
Where do wars end? Where does peace begin?

Peace scholar
'Early' phase work...it looks like nothing is happening when everything is happening?

Process design adviser
There is a misfit between unconventional wars and conventional peace processes

Peace scholar
Peacemaking looks more and more like early phase work because of the stop-start nature of peace processes

Former government negotiator
Let's be clear

The intention of a peace process is to weaken the other side

Peace activist and local mediator
Pre-formal initiatives take an incredibly long time. In Northern Ireland, the 'early stage' lasted 25 years!

This messaging-style discussion is a nod to the focus on information technology in this *Accord*. The quotes are drawn from discussions in 2019 convened by Conciliation Resources to reflect on the pre-formal phases of peace processes.

Peacemaking and global politics

Contemporary peacemaking is impeded by tense and increasingly toxic geopolitics, proxy wars, 'nested conflicts', and information warfare. Populist nationalist governments are proliferating concurrent to shrinking space for nonviolent movements and civil political mobilisation. Peace processes are becoming more elusive, more complex, and certainly more compartmentalised as they lurch back and forth with multiple collapse points. Despite international efforts over successive decades to secure semi-sequential phases, the non-linear, 'messy' and fragmented nature of contemporary peace processes represents a distinctive challenge.

In the few processes that reach agreements, these rarely result in smooth implementation. Rather, they appear

to open a hornet's nest of new negotiations. 'Grand bargain' processes have largely been consigned to a bygone era, replaced by stasis, posturing, exclusion and dysfunction. This roiling complexity demands innovation, collaborative cooperation, risk-taking and flexibility. Yet policy and legal frameworks around the globe are tightening in pursuit of anti-terrorism agendas and militarised public security – which, in many settings, are increasingly privatised. Furthermore, multilateral institutions continue to weaken and are often insufficiently agile for pre-formal peace processes, and non-government entities (NGOs, private sector actors) abound in the peace support space, demanding unprecedented levels of coordination. Positively, peace organisations and movements are looking for fresh ways to kick-start and nurture dialogue, and work smarter, more effectively. This *Accord* aims to contribute by looking at the volatile contemporary conflict context alongside peacemaking practice and innovation, and how more established methods and principles can be enhanced.

" We needed to know who 'us' is. "

Embracing diversity
Accord 29 builds on Conciliation Resources' *Accord Spotlight* publication of September 2019 (see further reading), which provided a launch pad for further exploration. To 'walk the talk' on inclusion editorially, we issued a multilingual call to create opportunities for newer analysts to contribute and accompanied some less experienced authors to help document their insights. A wide array of peer reviewers also helped to hone ideas. Themes and country-specific content are cross-referenced across articles.

Who is this *Accord* relevant for? Diverse audiences should find it useful: from members of armed groups, to diplomats, donors, mediators, analysts, and journalists. We have tried to make it accessible, avoiding jargon where we could. Regardless of your background, role or location, we hope there are insights and 'little gems' across the publication that resonate with your experiences and interests.

Structure of the publication

The edition is organised around three elements:

Part 1 – Setting the scene

Part 2 – Perspectives on peacemaking practice and case studies

Part 3 – Testing new approaches

Each part is described further below.

Part 1. *Setting the scene*

Part 1 looks at key trends and developments in early peacemaking: 'actors and factors'; incentives and disincentives to continue fighting or engage in dialogue; how asymmetries between and within conflict parties affect their pathways to peace talks; the potential of nonviolent movements to prepare the ground for peacemaking; and funding trends of third-party peace process support.

These scene-setting articles provide a stock-take of the increasingly hostile context in which contemporary peacemaking is trying to progress. Arguably, peacemaking has struggled to keep pace with developments in warfare and geopolitics. Systems and policies are slow to adapt to this fast-moving landscape, though adjustments to Covid-19 do suggest faster learning curves are possible. The articles catalogue tensions and asymmetries in the early and pre-formal phases and the peace pathways that are starting to be laid down.

Actors and factors

Sophie Haspeslagh, independent analyst, and **Andrei Gomez-Suarez**, co-founder of Rodeemos el Diálogo, explore the factors that have propelled belligerents in **Colombia** to the negotiating table, what kept them there and, at times, made them step away. Navigating asymmetries is a core feature of early phase peace processes. The authors note that governments, not just armed groups, lack preparedness for peacemaking and negotiation. Conflict parties seldom speak with 'one voice' as hawks and doves jostle for primacy and relevance, and both state and non-state parties benefit from mediation support to build 'pro-peace' internal coherence ('We needed to know who "us" is', as a Colombian government official once remarked to me). The authors also explore peacemaking 'drag factors' such as the limiting effects of proscription regimes.

> " **Peace support organisations undertake winding journeys with armed groups to encourage dialogue and negotiation preparedness.** "

International peacemaking has historically privileged militarised – primarily male – actors. But this is changing with a growing focus on the power of **nonviolent movements**. **Jonathan Pinckney**, research lead for the Program on Nonviolent Action at the United States Institute for Peace, argues that such movements are often best placed to pressure armed actors to prepare

the ground for a peace process. Breadth of connections with communities, political parties, business groups, student and youth movements, and feminist constituencies can give them greater social and political legitimacy and leverage. Yet these actors are frequently marginalised by both conflict parties wary of widening negotiations, and some peacemakers who may underestimate their potential. Pinckney acknowledges the increasing personal risks involved for nonviolent activists but suggests that peace support entities can change their analysis and approach to better include them.

Alexander Ramsbotham, *Accord* Director at Conciliation Resources, drills down into the journeys out of violence taken by some opposition groups and their perceptions of negotiations. Drawing on discussions with members of past and current **armed opposition groups**, the article links with others in this *Accord* looking at the Basque Country and Myanmar, focusing on two sticky areas (among many) that such groups struggle with: moving beyond security arrangements to political dialogue; and managing internal cohesion as dialogue and its attendant demands and compromises kick in. The article concludes with a vital reminder that peace support organisations undertake winding journeys with a host of conflict parties, including non-state armed opposition groups, to encourage dialogue and negotiation preparedness. This can be convoluted and hard to quantify but worth the investment in providing essential advice, fresh ideas and a myriad of support to transition to negotiation mode.

Funding shifts and peacemaking practice

Sebastian Kratzer from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and I look at the context in which private diplomacy and peace process support organisations are operating and how they are funded. These bodies have proliferated in the past 20 years alongside dramatic changes in the nature and efficacy of peacemaking. **Funding trends** have an impact on the means and effectiveness of independent peace support. We explore some of the perceptions, priorities and grievances of practitioners and donors alike. We identify recurring concerns, particularly around projectisation and an over- or misdirected emphasis on tangible results: how these can have a deleterious impact on pre-formal peace initiatives when discretion is paramount, and the need for flexibility to navigate the hurdles described above. We suggest some practical steps that could be taken to overcome obstacles cognisant of the constraints many donors are operating within.

Part 2. *Perspectives on peacemaking practice*

This section reflects on current peace practice and some of the more effective ways to initiate

peacemaking in contemporary armed conflict. Perennial themes explored include the quest for collaborative coordination – playing to peacemakers' respective strengths and weaknesses; and how different international approaches to peace support affect local civil society – positively and negatively. It includes analyses of formative peacemaking in Southern Thailand, Afghanistan, the Somali Regional State (Ethiopia), South Sudan and Myanmar. Articles on Myanmar and Afghanistan profile 'insider mediators' (or 'peace whisperers') – people from conflict-affected countries or associated with conflict parties who can play often unsung roles to bridge divides and foster dialogue in pre-formal phases, and who often go on to undertake key roles in more formal phases.

> **" Effective insider mediators combine social, cultural, and political insights seemingly magically. "**

The section also looks at the contribution of peace secretariats in an era of peace process relapse and collapse. It further explores different approaches in early peacemaking, including: accompaniment and 'critical friendships', and the ability to speak hard truths to conflict parties and civil society; reframing stuck conflict narratives and logic in order to cultivate connections between antagonists or revitalise stymied peace processes; and 'widening the tent' through inclusion of civil society, young people, religious and ethnic minorities, and of course, half the population – women. A thematic analysis of self-determination and peacemaking accompanies contextual case studies where self-determination is a central focus in addition to the articles on Southern Thailand, Myanmar and the Somali Regional State. A dedicated focus on the theme unpacks misnomers and problematic assumptions and provides suggestions on how international actors can more effectively support parties and communities in conflicts with self-determination at their core.

Insider mediation

Ja Nan Lahtaw, Director of the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, pauses to take account of her unique facilitation position in **peacemaking in Myanmar**. Lahtaw poses personal reflections from a protracted conflict with multiple levels and layers, and part of a multi-pronged, tumultuous political and economic transition that has followed six decades of authoritarianism. We come to see that effective insider mediators combine social, cultural, and political insights seemingly magically, and use charisma and personality type to navigate uncertain spaces. The article also explores gender variations in

facilitation and mediation, and the qualitative differences that some women bring to peacemaking, informed by their own experiences of marginalisation.

Khalilullah Safi, an independent peace activist and analyst, recounts his experiences of trying to 'join the dots', and of missed opportunities in **supporting pathways to peace in Afghanistan**. Safi has been an informal broker between the UN and the Taliban, using his networks with government, armed opposition, and the international community to help prise open opportunities for peacemaking. Safi provides the reader with food for thought on the potential of local, 'bottom up' peace initiatives, and the elasticity and synergies necessary to connect initiatives at different levels. The article prompts reflection on how to best realise multi-level approaches, particularly in contexts that eschew formal international mediation.

Institutional peace process support

Independent consultant **Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka** examines how peace secretariats can help sustain fluid dialogue tracks in peacemaking efforts. **Peace secretariats** typically feature in more formal phases of peace processes. Yet given how many processes are cyclical and prone to collapse, peace infrastructure is a core investment by the international community in process continuity, and potentially has a much greater informal role to play in fostering connections for peace. Secretariats can be part of conflict prevention and resolution efforts, but work best with consistent empowerment through workable mandates, adequate resourcing, and personnel with diverse skill sets who can spot and seize opportunities to connect people.

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

Self-determination in the modern era
Self-determination lies at the heart of many conflicts, and the desire for autonomy, self-governance or independence is a central concern for case studies in this *Accord* on Myanmar, Southern Thailand and the Somali Regional State. **John Packer**, Professor of International Conflict Resolution at the University of Ottawa and **Sally Holt**, Conciliation Resources' Editorial and Research Manager, identify five persistent peacemaking challenges related to self-determination: managing fears and anxiety that self-determination always leads to secession; fostering understanding of the balance of rights and claims; navigating terminology and status mine-fields; encouraging greater representation and inclusivity; and leveraging, or otherwise, the influence of the 'neighbourhood' of states. They argue for enhancing knowledge about self-determination among conflict parties, insider mediators and influencers at national and sub-national levels, as well as the need for astute, informed, and inclusive political analysis.

Peace process accompaniment
Alex Shoebridge, Oxfam Peacebuilding Advisor, reflects on abiding tensions in providing **support to civil society in early peacemaking in South Sudan**. Coordination, intentionality, context and conflict sensitivity, and unintended consequences loom large. Conflict insensitive support can displace essential national and sub-national expertise and leadership. Much smarter and strategic division of labour can maximise collective strengths and mitigate such local displacement. The article identifies some weak areas of international support to implement normative agendas such as Women, Peace and Security. Carefully diversifying beyond urban centres and those well versed in UN-INGO-donor discourse is highlighted in the article. The author advocates shifting funding beyond activity or project level, providing longer time horizons and unearmarked funding flexibility to enable local civil society to maximise opportunities and adapt to shifting circumstances.

A case study of peacemaking in the **Somali Regional State in Ethiopia** by **Aden Abdi**, Horn of Africa Programme Manager at Conciliation Resources, details the glacial and painstaking work to secure a negotiated solution to the protracted conflict in the region with CR's support to the main armed group and the Kenyan facilitation team. This little known, and frankly rare, success story helps us to understand some of the necessary elements in accompanying conflict parties to get to the negotiating table, and to keep coming back: time, patience, presence and relationships. These foundations helped the Ogaden National Liberation Front to embrace the large dose of serendipity that came with a sudden change of federal government, and a comparatively younger reform-oriented

leader assuming power in Ethiopia in 2018. With stark asymmetry between the conflict parties, the article plots out the style of accompaniment required, the creation of dialogue spaces, and support to engage the diaspora and constituencies to build support for a negotiated settlement. Effective accompaniment here included an adaptive resource stream, confidence to offer and deliver timely support to conflict parties on demand, and willingness to keep working under the political and media radar.

> ❝ **Peace processes increasingly turn in dramatic directions on a tweet or a Facebook post, a development we can no longer ignore.** ❞

Finally, in this section, **Maho Nakayama** and **Akiko Horiba** from the Asia Peace Initiatives Department in the Sasakawa Peace Foundation give their perspectives on international peace process support in **Southern Thailand** from the viewpoint of a philanthropic donor that also engages as a practitioner. Their work mixes funding of third parties, alongside efforts to encourage the Thai government and military and an elusive armed group to commit to sustained dialogue and consider inclusive processes and outcomes. The article draws to a close with thoughts about complementarity from international actors and how this might be maximised in the years ahead as more entities become interested in playing a role.

Part 3. *Testing new approaches and ideas*
Part 3 turns to emerging strategies and innovative practice to advance conflict prevention, resolution, and management. These are imperfect 'works in progress'. This section covers some big themes: advances in digital and information technology; operationalising inclusion; ecosystem and non-linear thinking for peace and policymaking; young people claiming space in conflict-affected contexts; and alternatives to contentious issues in peace processes such as disarmament and demobilisation.

Social media and information technology
Digital innovations abound in peace and security. These have been accelerated latterly by the Covid-19 pandemic, and some are more promising than others. Technology can be a positive tool to better understand relationships and influence, and conflict and peace scenarios. Articles on social media and digital analysis here variously touch on associated risks: of confidentiality and security, creating new hierarchies – the 'digital divide' and access to the internet, class, language – and the reinforcement of pre-existing 'analogue' biases such as those relating to gender, age and location.

Information technology is certainly affecting the long-standing practice of 'constructive ambiguity' in peace processes. Articles on this theme alert us to the fact that social media and technology is changing this and that peace processes can turn in dramatic directions on a tweet or a Facebook post, a development we can no longer ignore.

Katrin Wittig, post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Cambridge, and **Sausan Ghosheh**, communications specialist, explore the role of **social media in early peacemaking**. Both authors previously contributed to the development of the 2019 UN Secretary-General's 'Toolkit on Digital Technologies and Mediation in Armed Conflict'. Exacerbated by fake news and populist manipulation of media, information warfare is a major feature of contemporary armed conflict. Social media has transformed the tools available to conflict parties, civil society, third parties and the public to both lend support to, and tear down peace efforts. It can also compound information leaks, and perpetuate bias, assumptions, hate speech, and mis- and disinformation. Peace practitioners need to harness the potential of social media to expand inclusion and shift narratives in favour of dialogue, while finding ways to mitigate risks.

Moving beyond static approaches to political analysis through use of inclusive digital methods and data visualisation is the focus of **Andreas T Hirblinger** from the Graduate Institute in Geneva, and **Maude Morrison** and **Helena Puig Larrauri**, Deputy Director and Director of Build Up. They argue the case for more dynamic **digital approaches to political analysis**, pointing to its potential to better understand relationships, influence and scenarios, and to identify entry points to future dialogue – for example involving more different groups. This touches on the perennial challenge of political analysis in peacemaking: is it comprehensive? Is it inclusive? Is it used? Too much analysis remains patchy and inconsistent for a number of reasons: as a result of being 'projectised' – generated once for a funding proposal; due to concerns about confidentiality and leakage, particularly if the analysis includes scenarios; or because of time lags between *needing* and *receiving* analysis. The writers urge that new digital approaches to analysis need to integrate human and machine capacities, guarantee diverse human oversight, and produce outputs of direct benefit to a given peace process.

Digging deeper on inclusion

A decisive feature of the past two decades has been the realisation of inclusion as a core peacemaking objective. Two articles in this section focus on four core questions for inclusion: who, when, how and why? Inclusion presents tough conceptual choices and practical hurdles for incipient peacemaking. It is far from a settled norm. Inclusion initiatives also result in unintended consequences and dilemmas.

Analysts of Middle Eastern politics **Aviva M. Stein** and **Adam H. Beek** reflect on an experiment to create an **inclusive governance system in north-east Syria**, concurrent to the horror of the Syrian civil war. This article up-ends the notion that pathways to peace are always associated with a formal peace process. The governance system established in Rojava has committed to a radical approach since 2014 to establish 'democratic confederalism' with an emphasis on dismantling gender inequality. The analysis highlights the potential of women's inclusion in early phases of institution building and policy implementation at all levels of local governance. However, it also exposes some of the contradictions that have arisen in realising one group's inclusive ideology in a multi-ethnic context, and in practice its application has raised accusations of ethnic and other bias among some communities.

Young people are making positive contributions in advancing digital peacemaking and peacebuilding. **Irena Grizelj**, co-author of 'We are Here,' the UN global policy paper on youth participation in peace processes, **Michael Frank Alar**, consultant specialising in peace processes in the Philippines and **Ayak Chol Deng Alak**, Research Head at the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board in South Sudan, offer an assessment of where young women and men are frequently found 'outside the room' of conventional peacemaking, and how they create alternative avenues to exert influence, including through using information technology to affect peace processes in South Sudan, the Philippines and elsewhere.

Unconventional approaches

This section shifts to profiling third-party risk-taking and innovation to secure disarmament and demobilisation in the Basque Country, a conflict prevention-resolution-management ecosystem to address political crisis triggered by elections in Kenya, and an incremental community-based 'camel walk for peace' that all unsettle preconceptions of neat peace process phases. These articles provide much-needed food for thought about the shape of peace processes and how international, regional, and national and sub-national actors can interact and play to their strengths.

Vlad Corbu, Chief Programme Manager at the Dialogue Advisory Group, provides a clear-eyed account of its steadfast contribution to ending a long-running conflict in the **Basque Country** in the heart of Europe. He dives into the innovative ways in which Euskadi Ta Askatasuna unilaterally disarmed and demobilised, sustaining momentum for peacemaking with dignity, and which was accepted by many states, although excluding Spain. Corbu details a thought-provoking example of what nimble,low-key, and unofficial third-party peace support can achieve in a limited operating environment – especially important given the scale of global failures in disarmament, and that so many contexts are allergic to official international involvement. The article illustrates the high-risk nature of contemporary peace support and the critical need for bespoke approaches and agility to ride out immense media scrutiny, navigate proscription regimes and legal constraints, and provide buffers between state and non-state actors. It also highlights the impact that sub-national regional governments can have when national authorities are absent or resistant.

Three practitioner-scholars describe a **violence prevention 'ecosystem' in Kenya** to stem election-triggered crises through a non-linear and multi-layered process that is a departure from the well-known multi-track hierarchy. It profiles indefinite process phases with cyclical bouts of negotiation to prevent political violence, and the need for continuous renegotiation of formal and informal governance at different levels. The article provides a timely overview and practical options ahead of the forthcoming general election in 2022. Authors **Prisca Kamungi**, Kenyan National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management, **Florence N. Mpaayei**, Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations-Kenya, and **Thania Paffenholz**, Director of InclusivePeace explore initiatives seeking to link informal, formal, vertical and horizontal dialogue spaces, and the role of civil society in trying to delegitimise violence and create a web of alternative approaches and credibility.

Moving to northern Kenya, **Malih J.N. Ole Kaunga**, Director of local human rights organisation IMPACT Trust, and **Tim Bunke**, manager of Weltfriedensdienst Kenyan Civil Peace Service Programme, recount an **annual peace trek with a difference**. The Camel Caravan exemplifies the value of taking the long view – in both time and space – and the peace potential of regular encounters between ethnic groups sharing a vital and threatened river system. This annual walk helps break down barriers, bringing communities together to showcase their cultures. In the process they endorse a shared approach to managing a natural resource under threat. It is a subtle yet powerful example of informal local spaces enabling formal and state-acknowledged political agreements.

Conclusion

The conditions for peace and what makes it 'stick' are unpredictable, context dependent and subject to variation and disruption. A rapid change of leadership; a disaster or global pandemic that causes people to stop in their tracks and question their approach; a powerful tweet that dislodges stuck conflict narratives: all such shocks can derail nascent peace efforts. But they can also provide the necessary jolt to change course away from violence or reinvigorate a moribund peace process. The question is, who is ready to seize the initiative?

This *Accord* edition concludes with a set of suggestions responding to the recurring concerns across the publication, so that peacemakers can be better prepared to grasp opportunities when they arise. Regardless of your vantage point and on behalf of the Editorial Team and authors, we hope this edition piques your interest in the many paths, avenues, cul de sacs and side streets necessary to forge dialogue to end violent conflict.

SECTION 1
Setting the scene

Building political will for dialogue

Pathways to peace talks in Colombia

Sophie Haspeslagh is a scholar-practitioner who investigates conflict resolution and the transition of armed actors away from violence. Sophie teaches at the American University in Cairo and is a Programme Associate at Conciliation Resources, where she was also head of policy until mid-2012. She has worked for various organisations including the International Crisis Group and the United Nations in Colombia, Algeria, Rome, Tunisia and Brussels. Sophie holds a PhD from the International Relations Department of the London School of Economics and Political Science and an MA in International Relations from SAIS, Johns Hopkins University.

'No peace process can be understood in isolation, and in each process the previous ones appear: as light or as shadow.'

Vera Grabe, co-founder of the former Colombian M-19 movement

The peace agreement between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – FARC) and the Colombian government was reached after four years of official negotiations in Havana. Preceding this were two years of secret talks leading up to the signing of a Framework Agreement between the parties on 26 August 2012 that set the stage for Havana, as well as 60 years of protracted armed conflict and multiple attempts at peace negotiations. In parallel to the recent FARC process, efforts were also made to launch peace dialogue between the government the National Liberation Army (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional – ELN), which have since stalled.

The latest peace process with the FARC has unfolded in an era when space for peacemaking has been shrinking, in Colombia and globally. It has become much harder to distinguish when war ends and peace begins. Increasingly, conflict parties talk, reach limited agreements, and stop and resume combat, again and again. Conflict parties' interest in pursuing war is seldom constrained by their external allies, who sometimes even encourage and embolden them. Hawkish strategies have been further

bolstered by populist politics and terrorist labelling of armed groups, while governments embroiled in armed conflicts are increasingly reluctant to embark on dialogue processes.

To understand the pathways from fighting to peace talks for parties to armed conflict, it is essential to look at both non-state armed groups and the state. International peace and security policymaking often over-emphasises armed groups, asking how to nudge them towards the negotiating table, or how to 'talk to terrorists'. Yet equally important is understanding the push and pull factors for governments, which can be the most reticent about entering into dialogue, fearing giving an armed struggle legitimacy or credibility. There are often few incentives for governments to shift strategies away from warfare, especially when their enemies have been designated as terrorists.

This article explores early peace dialogue in Colombia, to develop understanding of the elusive notion of 'political will', and what moves conflict parties towards a tipping point to engage in dialogue. It looks at how Colombian conflict parties made strategic calculations to move towards dialogue and have sought a political exit from the battlefield, and how each party has struggled to build and sustain cohesion and commitment for peace. The investigation of the forces and factors that lead governments and armed groups to talk to each other provides clues as to what to look out for, what questions to ask and what other actors can do to help.

Strategic calculations towards dialogue

How do governments and armed groups understand the shifts in their status and resources when deciding whether to continue violence or explore dialogue? William Zartman's notion of a 'mutually hurting stalemate' is a seminal influence in understanding why parties enter negotiations – when the cost of continuing the struggle exceeds the benefits, and both parties feel enough 'pain' to prioritise dialogue. But pain is subjective, thus *perception* of pain is key to strategic decision-making. In Colombia, governments and armed groups alike have denied they were experiencing battlefield 'pain' as a way of resisting dialogue.

International support can help to insulate conflict parties from feeling the political pain of the armed confrontation. As discussed in more detail below, international support for classifying the FARC as terrorists helped to demonise them and reduce pressure on the government to seek dialogue. The increased legitimacy and the financial and military support that the Álvaro Uribe administration (2002–10) received from the United States also greatly reduced its inclination to shift from a war strategy and helped convince large sectors of the population that the war could be won militarily.

The change in leadership with the arrival of President Juan Manuel Santos in 2010 was pivotal. As the former Minister of Defence, Santos had already come to the realisation that while the state might have the upper hand on the battlefield, the war could not be won by either side: the advances by the Colombian military were plateauing, and, however bruised, the FARC remained defiant.

The government became increasingly aware of the political costs of its military strategy. Dubious tactics such as extra-judicial executions committed by the army came into the spotlight. Active campaigning by human rights organisations in Colombia and internationally had negative implications for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) being negotiated with the US. In 2009 the FTA was put on hold and the US started slowly reducing its military support, in part over concerns about human rights violations. This shift by a loyal ally affected the Colombian government's strategic calculations. President Santos was sensitive to these signals and in tune with the global business elite.

> **Once an armed group has been vilified as terrorist, then the idea of dialogue with it appears impossible.**

The Uribe government for many years claimed that the FARC was 'defeated'. It was only from 2008 onwards that the FARC showed signs of recognising its own military limitations – spurred by generational changes within the organisation, as key leaders died and mid-ranking FARC cadres deserted. The FARC leadership also became increasingly aware that the emerging generations were not as ideological, so the possibility of a negotiated solution became more appealing to the FARC as a way of trying to maximise their remaining political capital. But without a political exit they had nowhere to go.

FARC members inform villagers of the status of ongoing negotiations taking place in Havana, Cuba between the Government of Colombia and the FARC, 2015. © Federico Rios

Finding a political exit

Conflict parties need a political exit from their military confrontation – a sense that dialogue with their opponent is possible, and for armed groups that they have a post-war political future. Prospects for dialogue are deeply affected by the intense polarisation that takes root in protracted conflict. The use of the terrorist label heightens this – once an armed group has been vilified as terrorist, then the idea of dialogue with it appears impossible, let alone prospects for a pathway into nonviolent politics. There is no political exit even for the government, which cannot be seen to be talking to terrorists.

In Colombia, the challenge was overcome by a systematic shift in discourse by President Santos, who created space for dialogue to happen through a 'linguistic ceasefire'. This involved recognising the confrontation with the FARC as an armed conflict, instead of a war against terrorism; and stopping calling the FARC *terrorists*, but rather describing specific actions by them as *terrorism*. Santos's new strategy was aimed at multiple audiences in Colombia and internationally to 'de-vilify' the FARC and so make talks possible.

Designating an armed group as terrorists helps to criminalise their political agenda and push them underground. Socio-political and cultural movements associated with armed groups are also often criminalised, further closing pathways to nonviolent politics. For the FARC, sketching out a possible political future was a central issue during initial exploratory talks with the government, and the political participation of opposition parties became a central feature of the 2012 Framework Agreement for formal negotiations.

> **Consensus *within* conflict parties is critical for effective dialogue.**

In September 2008, at a time when no formal contact with the FARC was permitted, a group of civil society activists and intellectuals known as Colombianos and Colombianas por la Paz engaged in an innovative public letter exchange with the armed group in order to encourage some form of discourse. Over the course of three years, some 45 letters were exchanged with the FARC, an important aspect of which focused on getting the FARC to reconsider their use of hostage-taking. The FARC acquiesced, releasing 40 hostages and renouncing kidnapping as a tactic of war in February 2012. This had the double effect of signalling willingness to engage in peace efforts and trying to open up space for a possible political path.

External allies can also influence armed actors and help create political space for dialogue. When President Santos came to power he made proactive efforts to rebuild relationships with neighbouring countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela which had become strained under President Uribe. Left-wing governments in Latin America played an important role in relation to the FARC, which was enthused by the Venezuelan model of revolution achieved through elections. President Hugo Chavez advocated increased political space for the FARC including by asking for their removal from European Union terrorist lists, but he also put pressure on the FARC by saying that the time for armed action was over.

Internal cohesion and reaching 'peace consensus'

Consensus *within* conflict parties is critical for effective dialogue. Many conflict parties admit that the toughest negotiations are often inside their own camp.

> **Dialogue never happens in a vacuum, isolated from other actors or from previous experience.**

A key lesson learned by the Colombian government from the Caguán negotiations (1999–2002) was the need to have the military on board. Failure to have militaries and security services fully under state control poses serious challenges for establishing and sustaining negotiations. In Colombia, the decision not to have a bilateral ceasefire ahead of the Havana negotiations in 2012 was intended to keep military pressure on the armed group, but also ensure the military still felt in control and empowered. It was also a way for the early talks not to be derailed by ceasefire violations.

For the FARC too, internal dialogue and consensus building was essential in bringing about a deep change in strategy. Despite their apparently hierarchical and monolithic structure, there were serious differences of opinion within the FARC about whether to explore dialogue, for example between those who had remained in Colombia to fight and those who had left the country. Leadership in building consensus was pivotal. In the lead-up to the Havana talks, then FARC leader Alfonso Cano led an internal consultation until he managed to secure enough unity around the idea of entering dialogue. He built up enough support that his death in late 2011 did not derail the early phase engagement with the Santos government.

Building and sustaining cohesion within an armed group is not easy, as discussed in the Box on talks with the ELN. For armed groups that are deeply embedded in society,

ELN-Santos early talks: navigating a bumpy road

Formal negotiations between the ELN and the administration of Juan Manuel Santos (2010–18) began on 2 February 2017. These were held in Ecuador until April 2018, when they moved to Cuba. After five months of stagnation and an ELN-led terrorist attack in Bogotá, President Iván Duque (2018–present) ended the negotiations in January 2019.

Pathway to talks

Notwithstanding the difficulties experienced by the formal negotiations, the road to Ecuador and then Cuba was itself bumpy. Secret talks started on 27 January 2014, two years after the Santos government and the FARC had begun their exploratory talks. The ELN dialogue was part of the government's wider peace strategy, which assumed that negotiations with the FARC would establish a similar pathway with the ELN. The government calculated that both sets of talks could eventually merge into a final 'grand peace bargain'.

Conditions for negotiations with the ELN were reached based on two elements. First, the achievement with the FARC of two partial agreements on issues that were also of central importance to the ELN – agrarian reform and political participation. Second, the fact that President Santos's 2014 re-election campaign was based on a 'peace ticket'. The ELN identified an opportunity to negotiate in this context. Santos's decision to announce the negotiations with the ELN in the midst of his campaign arguably contributed to his re-election. Both parties saw formal negotiations as a win-win opportunity.

Dialogue model

The ELN contested the Santos-FARC negotiation model. In October 2010 Nicolas Rodríguez, on behalf of the ELN's central committee (COCE), had announced the group's willingness to negotiate using a model they had been proposing since 1998, which they called the 'National Convention'. They wanted an inclusive process that did not focus solely on bilateral talks but also involved civil society.

The first meeting between representatives of the Santos government and the ELN occurred in August 2012 in Venezuela. During the meeting, ELN commander Antonio García agreed to relay to the COCE and the ELN's directorate the government's invitation to negotiate. But the beginning of exploratory negotiations were delayed when in January 2013 the ELN kidnapped six people. The government made dialogue conditional on the release of these hostages – and kidnapping remained a stumbling block thereafter.

Although the early talks achieved a six-point agenda in March 2016, formal negotiations did not begin until February 2017. The ELN demanded bilateral trust-building gestures from the government, which in turn requested that the ELN take the first steps. Paradoxically, the Santos-FARC peace talks now became an obstacle. The government saw the ELN negotiations as replicating the FARC talks. The ELN, however, distanced itself from the Havana process, seeking to avoid being seen as subordinate or an afterthought.

There were divisions within the ELN leadership during the early talks, but their leadership has since solidified around a strategy of continued armed resistance. This has gained traction in the current climate of discontent in Colombian society caused by the slow implementation of the Santos-FARC peace accord and has seen the ELN grow financially and militarily.

International support

The support of the international community was also vital. Norway, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil and Venezuela helped to build trust. In some cases they hosted secret back-channel talks between envoys of the government and the ELN, until the negotiating table was installed in February 2017. Later, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland and Sweden created the Group of Accompaniment, Cooperation, and Support to the Negotiation Table, sponsoring civil society to engage in the process.

In 2019 when President Duque ended the negotiations, he formally requested that Cuba hand over the ELN negotiation team. The international community was thus faced with a conundrum that could impact negatively on future negotiations, as Colombia was now asking Norway and Cuba to disregard the negotiation protocol they had signed with the ELN.

Civil society

Deadlocks in the early talks encouraged civil society involvement. In 2015 civil society organisations and parliamentarians had formed coalitions such as the 'Complete Peace' campaign to build greater citizen engagement and to craft a more inclusive negotiation model. Organisations launched a 'Social Platform for Peace', and meetings between the government, ELN prisoners, and social groups across the country proliferated. Civil society encouraged the government and the ELN to confront the issue of kidnapping. Trusted individuals became go-betweens, talking to negotiating teams and supporters and even defusing several crises.

Two opportunities for greater inclusion materialised during the formal negotiations, thanks to efforts in the early talks. First, civil society lobbied for an 'early bilateral ceasefire'. This was agreed in September 2017 and lasted for 100 days to January 2018, helping to address the humanitarian crisis in conflict-torn regions. Second, with support from the international community, 224 civil society organisations

as the ELN is, some internal discussions can be more effective when extended to their constituencies.

Committing to peace

Managing commitment problems is a perennial challenge in peace processes. For states, a strategic shift towards peace is likely to require concessions that imply losses, such as of territory or in relation to power sharing. A key reassurance for some state parties in early phase dialogue is to try to situate discussions within constitutional parameters.

The 2012 Framework Agreement was hinged to the Colombian constitution. The FARC accepted and acknowledged the Colombian state and agreed to join the democratic process for the first time. Of course, actions speak louder than words when it comes to commitment. The unilateral and protracted release of 40 hostages by the FARC and their renunciation of hostage taking was an important signal. Conversely, the refusal by the ELN to release hostages indicated a lack of political commitment and became a recurrent stumbling block in the process.

Armed groups' commitment challenges often relate to security and the need to lay down their arms – specifically their concerns about losing their military leverage and jeopardising their own safety. Meanwhile, dialogue never happens in a vacuum, isolated from other actors or from previous experience. Many armed conflicts are protracted and lessons from past peace talks can be both positive and negative.

Talks between the FARC and the government of President Belisario Betancur in the early 1980s led to the FARC's ill-fated attempt at creating a political party, the Unión Patriótica, which proved to be catastrophic. More than 3,000 of its members were killed by right-wing paramilitary groups. This cast a dark shadow over future peace talks, and the decimation of the Únion Patriotica has remained a deep wound. Having the necessary security guarantees was essential to have the first meeting with government negotiators. The International Committee of the Red Cross played a crucial and discreet role in terms of security and logistics.

The presence of multiple armed groups makes commitment problems even more challenging. Demobilised fighters can fall victim to other active armed groups. But there can also be a 'mirroring effect' between peace processes. The ELN saw advances and difficulties in implementing the 2016 agreement with the FARC as indicators of the level of political commitment of the Colombian government, or the lack of it. The killing of 181 FARC members since the signature of the 2016 agreement has compounded ELN mistrust of dialogue with the government, in relation either to adequate security guarantees or their political future.

Conclusion and recommendations

Peace process support needs multiple strategies to engage both state and non-state conflict parties and to encourage coherence within them. The case of the FARC and the Colombian government helps unpack what it takes for parties to shift their approach from fighting to talking.

Understanding when to encourage a move to dialogue requires looking out for key military and political indicators of 'pain' being suffered by the conflict parties. Military costs tend to be more obvious, such as the loss of territory or troops, the killing of key leadership figures or mass desertions. Political costs are sometimes harder to spot but in Colombia have been linked to instances of significant change: shifts in leadership or discourse; allies changing their positions; economic shifts; generational changes within armed groups; and major shifts in public opinion or mobilisation for peace. Security is often paramount, especially for non-state armed groups. It is important to ensure that measures to guarantee security and the implementation of any potential accords are addressed in exploratory phases of dialogue.

FARC members shake hands with villagers in rural Colombia. © Federico Rios

Support for early dialogue needs to help create space for the peaceful expression of a wide range of political views. External actors can play important roles to encourage shifts in strategies away from violence through generating cogent political analysis to inform authentic and effective response strategies. Accompaniment and other forms of peace practice can help to build and sustain pro-peace constituencies within armed actors, for example encouraging cohesion between political and military wings and institutions, and to extend their relationships with wider society.

While peacemaking sometimes struggles to keep pace with new challenges, civil society actors are often innovative in finding ways around them. At a time when peace in Colombia seemed very remote, the Colombianos and Colombianas por la Paz public letter exchange succeeded in convincing the FARC to reconsider their hostage policy. Their subsequent renouncement of kidnapping as a war tactic became an important marker of commitment for

the government, helping to open dialogue pathways. So, encouraging people who open up spaces and platforms to engage otherwise isolated actors is essential.

Similarly, the campaigns led by Colombian human rights organisations to raise awareness of extra-judicial executions committed by the Colombian army were influential in disrupting the FTA between the US and Colombia, which in turn positively affected the Colombian government's strategic calculations regarding dialogue. Thus, support to civil society actors undertaking research and analysis is a critical element of supporting pathways to peace.

Early dialogue between conflict parties needs to be fostered on a range of levels: *between* and *within* each party; and in their relationships with their constituencies, allies and the broader public. In armed conflicts involving a number of armed groups, the path taken with one will deeply influence the pathway with another positively or negatively, as either 'light' or 'shadow'.

PATHWAYS FROM FIGHTING TO TALKING: BARRIERS AND GATEWAYS

▲ Enabling factors
▼ Inhibiting factors

Conflict transformation

▲ **Political and security guarantees**

▲ **Trust-building initiatives**

▲ **Softening of terrorist narratives**

▲ **Enabled, engaged and diverse civil society**

▲ **Viable political exit strategy and internal coherence of conflict parties**

▲ **Third party risk appetite to support dialogue and accompany conflict parties**

▲ **Constructive dialogue spaces**

▲ **Pressure by allies to seek negotiated solutions**

▲ **Recognition of cost of military strategy**

◄ **Pathways to peace** ►

Resistance to negotiations
▼

Military solutions dominating political space and will
▼

Weapon sales and proliferation
▼

Violence and insecurity
▼

Lack of perceived alternatives to violence
▼

Proxy warfare and pressure by allies to maintain military or counter-terror strategies
▼

Third party contact with armed groups criminalised
▼

Scarce communication channels or dialogue spaces
▼

Hardening of terrorist narratives
▼

Fragmentation and weak relationships
▼

Conflict protraction

Setting the stage for peace processes

The role of nonviolent movements

Jonathan Pinckney is a Program Officer and Research Lead for the Program on Nonviolent Action at the United States Institute of Peace and the author of *From Dissent to Democracy: The Promise and Peril of Civil Resistance Transitions* (2020). His research focuses on the intersection of nonviolent action, democratisation and inclusive peace processes, and has been published in outlets such as *Foreign Policy* and the *Washington Post*, and journals such as *International Studies Quarterly*, the *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. He received his PhD from the University of Denver in 2018.

Most peace processes focus on brokering deals between armed actors. However, this often obscures the important role that unarmed groups play in preparing the ground for peace, particularly organisations or movements that engage in nonviolent action or civil resistance to help create an enabling political environment and support sustainability.

Foundational figures such as Mahatma Gandhi highlighted the moral or ethical dimensions of nonviolent action. Today, a more practical definition of nonviolence emphasises the exercise of power by unarmed civilians outside formal avenues of politics and without the use or threat of physical violence, using tactics such as public protest, demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins. Its core rationale is that structures of power and oppression require the explicit or implicit cooperation of subordinate, often excluded and marginalised actors. Strategic use of nonviolent action is intended to bring about the withdrawal of this cooperation, leading to the downfall of the targeted power structure.

Nonviolent movements typically comprise combinations of social groups, individuals or formal civil society organisations. They include hierarchical movements as in the Armenian 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018, which was largely organised by pre-existing political parties, but also much more diffuse movements, such as the current pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. Identifiable nonviolent movements can be traced back to ancient Egypt and Rome, and they have achieved major gains in extremely hostile environments, including Nazi Germany.

This article explores the ways that nonviolent action movements can help to set the stage for peace processes today. It concludes with recommendations to enhance conflict analysis, for targeted capacity building and to help link nonviolent movements to peace processes.

Setting the stage for peace processes
Seminal research by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan found that in the 20th and early 21st centuries, nonviolent movements that sought 'maximalist' goals of bringing down a political regime, ending a military occupation or seceding from an existing state were more than twice as successful in achieving those goals as violent movements, and that countries that had a nonviolent movement were significantly more likely to become democratic and significantly less likely to experience a civil war in the five years following the end of the movement.

Despite claims of political neutrality, many nonviolent movements play a critical and often explicit political role in changing the power dynamics so that conflict resolution becomes possible, such as by engaging directly in transforming the power structures that gave rise to the conflict in the first place. A prominent recent example is the 2019 ouster of President Omer al-Bashir in a primarily nonviolent revolution in Sudan, which has opened space for peace negotiations with several of the country's rebel movements in Darfur.

There has been an explosion in nonviolent resistance movements recently, in places as disparate as Iraq, Algeria and Chile. The reasons behind this are not well understood, but analysts have pointed to increased diffusion of ideas and inspiration across borders through information technology and the rise of social media as an organising tool.

Detailed data has shown that nonviolent action is often used in contexts of the most extreme armed violence. The availability of a rich array of data is a decisive development of the past decade, mirroring the growth in similar datasets curating and cataloguing elements and themes in peace agreements. This has made identifying and analysing the roles and impacts of nonviolent actors much more straightforward (see Table 1 at the end of this article providing examples of databases).

Three types of nonviolent action have been especially influential in setting the stage for peace processes: *mitigating violence*, *pressuring for peace*, and *coordinating with an armed actor*.

Theme 1. *Mitigating violence*

Nonviolent movements may exclusively aim to protect civilians from violence. Local movements often declare themselves to be 'neutral' in the conflict and may try to establish their local territory as a 'peace zone'. Such movements are typically low-profile but can have significant protective effects during periods of intense violence and peace negotiations, helping to maintain the social structures that will subsequently facilitate social recovery during later peacebuilding phases.

The peace communities of Colombia, described in the work of authors such as Catalina Rojas and Oliver Kaplan, typically arose in areas contested between the government, right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing guerrillas. Peace communities declared their neutrality and monitored their members to ensure that none of them supported any of the armed actors in the conflict. This convinced armed actors to leave the civilian population alone in several places, believing that they would not support their opponents. While some incidents of violent repression continued to occur, in most cases the emergence of an organised local nonviolent movement resulted in a significant decline in civilian casualties, and in stronger communities that were in a better position to recover from the conflict when a peace process occurred.

Theme 2. *Pressuring for peace*

Nonviolent movements may also act as a powerful source of pressure for peace. Again, a key *modus operandi* is neutrality and not taking a side on the underlying political issues in the conflict, but actively pushing for an end to the armed struggle. Nonviolent movements can tap popular dissatisfaction with the ravages of conflict and prepare the ground for peacemaking by uniformly pressuring conflict parties to come to the negotiating table.

One of the best-known examples is the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement, whose leader Leymah Gbowee was later awarded the Nobel peace prize. The movement emerged in the later years of the Liberian Civil War as a reaction against increasing violence towards women. They organised public demonstrations, inter-religious dialogue and a national 'sex strike'

People gather to stage an anti-government protest in Beirut, Lebanon, 10 November 2019. © Mahmut Geldi/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

to pressure both Liberian President Charles Taylor and Liberian rebel groups to attend peace negotiations. When negotiations began in Accra, the Women of Liberia group were proximate, at one point blockading the negotiation building and refusing to allow the parties to leave until they came to a peace agreement. Their pressure was a vital element in motivating the warring parties both to attend peace talks and, ultimately, to make a deal.

> " **Nonviolent movements play a critical and often explicit political role in changing the power dynamics so that conflict resolution becomes possible.** "

Theme 3. *Coordinating with armed movements*
Nonviolent movements can coordinate with armed movements – working with them, and sometimes influencing their behaviour. Armed and unarmed movements can have a close, cooperative relationship, functioning as wings of a single underlying organisational structure. They may coordinate violent and nonviolent actions to increase the overall pressure on their opponent, as well as to incorporate the civilian population in the process of struggle. Where relationships between armed and unarmed movements are more collaborative, the distinction between them can be more blurred. But the ability of a movement to deploy both violent and nonviolent pressure can help to advance their cause.

Throughout its long period of anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, alternated between pursuing primarily violent and nonviolent tactics in its attempt to bring an end to apartheid. In the 1980s, the nonviolent scope of the struggle expanded, as the ANC organised action in coordination with other civil society groups to boycott South African goods, establish alternative governance structures in the townships, and increase international pressure on the South African economy. Yet, while most participants engaged in nonviolent actions, they did so while continuing to endorse Umkhonto violence.

When a nonviolent movement is relatively independent of the armed actor, then coordination between the two can help motivate the armed actor to significantly change their behaviour towards nonviolent action. In the 1996–2006 Nepalese civil war, the Maoist rebels by the early 2000s found themselves in a military stalemate with the government – in control of the countryside but unable to challenge the Nepalese army in urban centres. The Maoists

joined with civil society groups and political parties that had been engaging in nonviolent action for greater democracy. Their combined nonviolent protest against the autocracy of the monarchy, known as the 'Second People's Movement', was able to successfully pressure the king to step down. When the political parties subsequently took power, they initiated a negotiation process with the rebels that resulted in a formal peace agreement, ending Nepal's civil war and initiating a transition to democracy.

In all these cases, nonviolent movements are engaged in the exercise of political power. Even when their stated priority is mitigating violence, this involves pressure on armed actors to change their behaviour. Nonviolent movements can be much better placed to impose this kind of pressure than international actors because of their intimate connections to the core constituencies over which armed actors are competing, and their greater claims to local social and political legitimacy. Nonviolent movements can also be influential during formal peace talks. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace did not have a formal role in peace negotiations but were a source of outside pressure.

Conclusion and recommendations
So, how should peacemakers interact with nonviolent movements in the opaque pre-formal phases? First, it is critical to identify existing local peace activism. Often, conflict analysis focuses exclusively on armed actors and the dynamics of violence. Understanding the roles that nonviolent movements are already playing in many conflicts demands close attention to local dynamics, and in many cases a shift in thinking about whose actions matter when.

Clear-eyed analysis and mapping of the goals and intra-group dynamics of nonviolent movements is crucial, as nonviolent movements in a complex conflict environment are unlikely to speak with a single voice. There is no shortcut to intensive study of the local context. Cross-contextual comparative research can provide important pointers on which movements are likely to have the greatest impact for peace. For instance, work by Erica Chenoweth suggests that movements with greater participation by women are more likely both to be successful in achieving their aims and to remain nonviolent. (For more on analysis for peacemaking, see the article 'Digital analysis – Peacemaking potential and promise' in this edition.)

Second, international support can help enhance nonviolent movements' capabilities. There is a growing set of resources available to help nonviolent movements improve their strategic planning, tactical sequencing and political impact. For instance, the United States Institute

of Peace has piloted a comprehensive curriculum with its 'Synergizing nonviolent action and peacebuilding' programme. Training in nonviolent action, particularly in how to think more strategically about deploying the tools of nonviolent action to change conflict dynamics, can help improve nonviolent movements' chances of having a meaningful impact. However, international actors should think carefully, informed by robust political analysis, about the long-term consequences of intervention even with nonviolent actors, doing the crucial work of understanding the local landscape before intervening.

Third, nonviolent movements' involvement in negotiation and dialogue processes should be supported. Nonviolent movements' connections to grassroots constituencies can help to encourage popular buy-in for peace talks and settlements, raise issues of core concern to the general population, and try to pressure armed actors to stay on track when negotiations threaten to break down. The diffuse structure and horizontal leadership of many

" Nonviolent movements are engaged in the exercise of political power. "

nonviolent movements makes involving them in peace talks difficult. Challenges are especially acute in the early stages of negotiation processes due to concerns over secrecy, and reluctance to 'over-complicate' the negotiation process. The specific mechanisms of inclusion need to be adapted to the context, from direct involvement in talks, to multiple negotiation 'tracks' and alternative pathways for more diverse representation.

Nonviolent action is not a panacea for violence nor a guarantee of successful conflict resolution. But two contemporary trends suggest that there is increasingly a key role for it to play in reducing violence and sustaining peace. First, the tendency of increased authoritarian

Table 1: Examples of databases cataloguing nonviolent action

Database	Host	Content
Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) Data Project www.navcodata.com	Harvard University	Several different datasets that examine nonviolent action in various ways. NAVCO 1 contains campaign-level data on nonviolent action from 1900 to 2013, NAVCO 2 contains annual-level data from 1945 to 2013, and NAVCO 3 contains event-level data from 26 countries from 1990 to 2012.
Nonviolent Action in Violent Contexts (NVAVC) www.nvavcdata.org	University of Denver Sie Cheou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy	Dataset of more than 3,000 instances of organised nonviolent action by unarmed actors during civil wars in Africa from 1990 to 2012. The data provides critical insight into the dynamics not just of high-profile actions such as protests or strikes, but also subtler forms of nonviolent action such as formal communication or meetings to coordinate action. This could be relevant to better understand the impact of less easily observed forms of nonviolent action.
Global Nonviolent Action Database (GNVAD) https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/	Swarthmore College	Over 1,000 narratives of nonviolent resistance movements from around the world from Ancient Egypt to 2019, with rich descriptions of movement dynamics and outcomes, as well as sources for further examination. The database is not an encyclopedia of all movements, or a representative sample of movements, but rather a subset of particularly prominent movements.
Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD) www.strausscenter.org/scad.html	The University of Texas at Austin Robert Straus Center for International Security and Law	A dataset of both violent and nonviolent conflict events, including protests and strikes, in Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean from 1990 to 2017. Useful for mapping long-term patterns of violent and nonviolent action.
Armed Conflict Location Events Data (ACLED) www.acleddata.com	Independent nonprofit organisation	A dataset of conflict-related events, initially just in Africa but now updated frequently for most regions of the world (major exceptions are Western Europe and North and South America). The data include incidents of peaceful protest and can be used to closely observe current trends. Data for Africa go back to 1997, while historical coverage of other regions varies.

Note:

repression and shrinking civic space globally, as documented by organisations such as Freedom House and the Varieties of Democracy Project, means that the need for nonviolent action is growing. And second, the current spike in nonviolent movements shows their potency and potential, with the largely nonviolent uprisings in Armenia, Hong Kong and Sudan among the many movements that have successfully mobilised huge populations for major change. But while nonviolent action may be becoming more common, it is also increasingly likely to face severe repression and be met by violent response. Therefore, closing the gap between nonviolent action and peacemaking is imperative.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace.

Deciding on dialogue

Pathways out of violence for armed opposition movements in Myanmar and the Basque Country

Alexander Ramsbotham is Director of *Accord* for Conciliation Resources. Before this he was a research fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research, worked as specialist adviser to the House of Lords European Union (EU) Select Committee, was head of the Peace and Security Programme at the United Nations Association-UK, and has been an associate fellow in the International Security Programme at Chatham House. Alexander completed a PhD in July 2011.

'Armed groups' priorities, structures and goals are not static. They have changed over the last 20 years and will change in the next 20. They need to be understood and factored in to the early phases of peace processes, but their perspectives are often missing.'

Armed group representative in conversation with *Accord*, 2019

This article explores armed groups' pathways 'from fighting to talking', and some factors that influence their decision-making to engage in dialogue in the early stages of peace processes. It reflects conversations between *Accord* and senior members of liberation movements from the Basque Country and Myanmar, which happened on the margins of a larger meeting convened by a fellow international non-governmental organisation (INGO) in late 2019.

The experiences presented here reflect a particular type of non-state armed actor – with a long history of armed resistance, and with political aspirations to represent interests of political constituencies based on forms of belonging and identity including ethnicity, religion, language and location. The analysis does not pretend to be exhaustive, and there are limits to what lessons can be extrapolated from it. Nonetheless, such frank discussions can provide valuable insights into armed groups' priorities, dilemmas and strategies for deciding to engage in dialogue.

The article looks at two key themes underpinning armed groups' deliberations to pursue negotiated settlements: moving beyond narrow security agreements to political dialogue in Myanmar; and maintaining internal cohesion and managing organisational change in the Basque Country. It concludes with perspectives on how international third-party support for armed groups to engage in early dialogue can be more stable, practicable and better managed.

Moving beyond security agreements in Myanmar

Many armed movements have invested significant human, financial and intellectual capital in fighting for a stated cause and cannot abandon the armed struggle without realistic prospect of progress on their political ambitions.

This tendency is illustrated here in relation to Myanmar, where successive regimes have sought to isolate discussions with armed groups from the political sphere and limit them exclusively to narrow security agreements. From the perspective of many armed groups, this tactic has been a major barrier to embracing dialogue. Deep distrust defines relationships between conflict parties.

The historical lack of a political track in Myanmar has undermined more recent efforts to initiate talks since 2011 as part of a major political and economic transition, which have continued to struggle to convince armed groups that talks on ceasefires would provide a pathway to nonviolent political engagement. This is despite additional 'carrots' of removing their proscribed status, which can open up the way for provision of health and education, and other services and official development assistance.

In conversation with *Accord*, Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs – the term preferred by armed groups in Myanmar, partly in an effort to emphasise their political links to their core constituencies) stressed that dialogue must offer a pathway to address their broader political ambitions. EAOs in Myanmar are almost all organised

territorially along ethnic lines and in relation to the British colonial era whereby non-Bamar ethnic groups and regions were regarded as 'frontier' areas.

These groups have been struggling for greater political influence and forms of self-determination for many decades. Their predominant focus has been on establishing a federal state in which ethnic minorities (approximately 40 per cent of the population) are given equal status and recognition. (For more detail, see the article 'Self-determination and peace processes – Pathways and stumbling blocks for conflict resolution' in this edition.)

In August 2011, as part of a new effort to reinvigorate a peace process, then President U Thein Sein offered separate, bilateral talks with individual EAOs at the sub-national level, focused exclusively on securing ceasefires. Many EAOs were wary that the offer did not include a clear avenue to political dialogue related to their central grievances and interests, particularly core concerns relating to self-determination. Their caution was compounded by profound and prolonged distrust. No armed group responded to the president's offer for three months.

The government tried to convince EAOs to engage in a stepwise process: a bilateral ceasefire agreement would be followed by disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, enabling the EAO to register as a political party and participate in elections, after which it could influence amendments to the contested constitution

through parliament. However, this was a long and uncertain route, and EAOs had bitter experiences of 'goal posts' being shifted and of unilateral constitutional reform by past military regimes. From the perspective of EAOs, and also many ethnic communities as well as pro-democracy advocates from among the majority Bamar population, the infamous 2008 Constitution was seen as having been promulgated unilaterally by the military, as being discriminatory, and as further consolidating power and decision-making within the Burmese military elite.

The U Thein Sein government established teams to discuss the ceasefire offer. But these had different structures, and it was not clear which teams EAOs should be engaging with or what the various teams were offering. These teams were variously led by members of parliament (predominantly Burmese men), ministers and others, and each had seemingly different agendas, for example in terms of how expansive they were prepared to be. The formation by the government of more structured mechanisms for dialogue helped to create greater clarity for EAOs, such as the Union Peacemaking Working Committee (UPWC – established in 2012), and then the Myanmar Peace Centre (2015). (See the article in this edition on 'Peace secretariats and dialogue promotion – Potential and limitations' for further detail on these institutions.)

EAOs strove to establish a collective, national ceasefire process and agreement in an effort to gain more influence. It has been a major challenge for disparate EAOs to work

General Secretary of the Karen National Union, Naw Si Pho Ra Sein, signs an agreement in Yangon on 6 April 2012 after peace talks with Myanmar government representatives. © Soe Than Win / Stringer via Getty Images

together to form collaborative structures capable of facilitating cooperation among themselves and negotiating effectively as a bloc. They set up a working group through which they were able to present a counter-proposal to the government's bilateral model, aimed at establishing a National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and framework for political dialogue.

In 2015, the government allowed 17 EAOs to convene a conference in Myanmar for the first time (numerous meetings had been convened in Chiang Mai in northern Thailand prior to this). The EAOs drafted a comprehensive ceasefire agreement and set up the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT). The draft formed the basis of negotiations with the government, and EAOs worked to ensure that the terms of the agreement included commitments to democracy, equality, self-determination and political dialogue. (For more detail, see the article in this edition 'Unsticking stalled peace processes – Insider mediator perspectives from Myanmar' by Ja Nan Lahtaw, an adviser to the NCCT and Co-Facilitator of the ongoing negotiations known as the Formal Political Dialogue.)

Maintaining internal cohesion and managing organisational change in the Basque Country

'How do you know the 'ripeness' of the organisation to enter into dialogue? For ETA, for many years there were many people who said armed struggle had to be left behind. But when is the moment that you can make this step without breaking the movement into a thousand pieces?'

Armed group representative in conversation with *Accord*, 2019

Shifting emphasis from fighting to talking brings tough challenges for armed groups, to maintain internal cohesion and manage the daunting requirements of changing modes of operation. In their conversations with *Accord*, armed group members stressed challenges of shifting from 'winning the war' to 'winning the peace': to understand and engage in bargaining; and to revise objectives that can be supported and sustained through negotiations and that still reflect the ambitions of those they seek to represent. Objectives need to be clear and agreed, but also realistic and relevant to deal-making and (probably) concession. Sustaining the unity of an armed group into a negotiating process is a major challenge that will likely only get harder as a process progresses.

For Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in the Basque Country, for many years of their armed struggle there had been a broad and largely unspoken assumption throughout the movement that they would only agree to relinquish violence and enter dialogue when their core self-determination objective had been achieved.

However, as in many armed conflicts, the circumstances of the decision to pursue dialogue were in fact much more equivocal – with no clear-cut sense of 'victory', but rather deriving from a realisation that there was no military solution and end-point to their struggle. As efforts to engage in dialogue progressed, it became increasingly apparent that self-determination was highly complex. The decision to enter into dialogue did not automatically lead to 'winning' independence, but led to much more nuanced potential outcomes. Intense discussions within the movement followed on what their self-determination objectives from talks now were, and whether political dialogue was compatible with these and was worth the investment.

Dialogue inevitably exposed differences within the movement, which had been held together with common purpose in fighting and 'war mode' for so long. Looking back on the initial phases of dialogue, some members felt that, having decided on dialogue, they had not then dedicated enough time and energy to internal discussions early on in order to think through what realistic outcomes might look like – for example that ambitions carried over from the armed struggle were too high, too idealistic or too categorical. A lesson through hindsight has been that more time spent exploring and agreeing their position earlier on could have helped to mitigate challenges later.

> ❝ **The decision to enter into dialogue did not automatically lead to 'winning' independence.** ❞

Sustaining internal cohesion within an armed group is difficult when entering into talks and gets harder as they progress. Compromises agreed in tough negotiations are hard to sell to others in the movement who were not present in the core of the process, risking tensions between the leadership and wider membership. For ETA, maintaining internal cohesion has required understanding how different constituencies within the movement think, as 'pro-peace' elements need to bring sceptics or dissenters with them. ETA's decision to relinquish violence was unilateral. Restrictions on ETA supporters gathering publicly made maintaining internal cohesion towards peace more difficult. Deciding on dialogue is controversial and potentially divisive, but evading or deferring a decision to talk does not offer a safe alternative, as circumstances will not stay the same or wait for a decision to subsequently be made, but may deteriorate or escalate.

Conclusion: managing external support

'Today we talk like we are experts in DDR, mediation, facilitation. But at the beginning, we didn't know anything.'

Armed group representative in conversation with *Accord*, 2019

Armed groups are often ill-prepared for the demands of dialogue and look to third parties for help. But it can be difficult for armed groups to find (especially international) mediation support or advice early on in a peace process, before it has built momentum or gained international attention.

In early efforts to initiate dialogue in the Basque Country, ETA did fully understand how international peace NGOs functioned and which might be able to provide support, and needed themselves to research and identify potential peace partners, reach out to them and convince them to help. The efforts of the Spanish state to avoid international involvement and the listing of ETA as a terrorist organisation presented additional barriers to external third-party support. (For more detail, see the article 'From ceasefire to disarmament without states – lessons from the Basque Country' in this edition.)

'Armed groups are involved in so many meetings: meetings, meetings, meetings! This has become a problem!'

Armed group representative in conversation with *Accord*, 2019

Conversely, when a peace process begins to pick up speed and interest, armed groups can quickly become inundated with offers of outside help. In Myanmar before 2012, only a very few donors and INGOs were working with EAOs that were based externally in India, Thailand or around the Chinese border. As soon as the peace process started, there was a huge influx of international entities seeking to play roles and undertake initiatives, often at cross purposes.

The introduction of the idea of holding 'national dialogues' (effectively sub-national ethnic or thematic dialogues) in particular sparked external interest, including from donors and INGOs who soon after were approaching local organisations to see what kinds of assistance they could provide. Some external partners came with preconceived ideas and predetermined project models of the sort of process they wanted to support. This added complexity,

for example introducing different and sometimes contradictory models of national dialogue.

Armed groups in conversation with *Accord* urged international peace partners to provide more proactive, stable and responsive support to help them navigate the barriers and pitfalls of early dialogue, and to be ready to seize peace opportunities as they arise. For practitioners this demands flexibility, with implications also for funding streams (explored in further detail in the article 'Dynamics and challenges of funding peace – Perspectives from peacemaking practitioners' in this edition). Proscription regimes are also an obstacle in many contexts. Donor policies can be more consistently aligned to facilitate negotiated solutions, for example to avoid clashes between peace process support and counter-terrorism strategies.

Peace process support organisations need to be prepared to engage in different types of conflict, including those that are controversial or overlooked, and to work with an array of local actors – journalists, religious leaders, women's rights groups and business people as well as armed actors – to find appropriate ways to encourage steps towards dialogue and negotiated settlements. Dynamics of 'supply' and 'demand' for external support can easily become unbalanced and need to be considered frankly. Exaggerated or artificial demand for external support invites multiple challenges, from duplication, to conflict parties and civil society being overwhelmed or pressed into inappropriate activities.

Long-term commitment and investment in establishing trusted relationships and partnerships is often essential for external third parties to make informed judgements on risks and advantages of supporting armed groups' preparations for peace talks and transition. Third-party accompaniment of local partners through the twists and turns of peace processes is often essential to achieve incremental gains and shifts towards dialogue. This can also help create space to challenge armed groups' thinking and approaches, for example in relation to rethinking maximal positions or to changing policies on gender and inclusion.

The dynamics and challenges of funding peace

Perspectives from peacemaking practitioners

Cate Buchanan is Issue Editor of this *Accord*. See the Introduction for her biography.

Sebastian Kratzer is Project Manager for Analysis and Evaluation in the Mediation Support and Policy team at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). He leads HD's monitoring and evaluation team, supports HD's Executive Management with programme development, results reporting and strategic oversight, and manages HD's critical reflection and quality assurance processes. He also provides operational project support and focuses on environmental peacemaking. He previously worked as Field Coordinator with UNDP's Peacebuilding Unit in Darfur, and as Project Officer at the Overseas Development Institute.

This article focuses on the relationships between the core state donors to peacemaking, and international independent or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offering third-party mediation or peace process support ('peace support organisations').[1] Such organisations are involved in diverse strands of work, from taking lead roles in dialogue processes, to providing training to parties to conflict and civil society entities, or logistics support for foreign ministries involved in mediation.
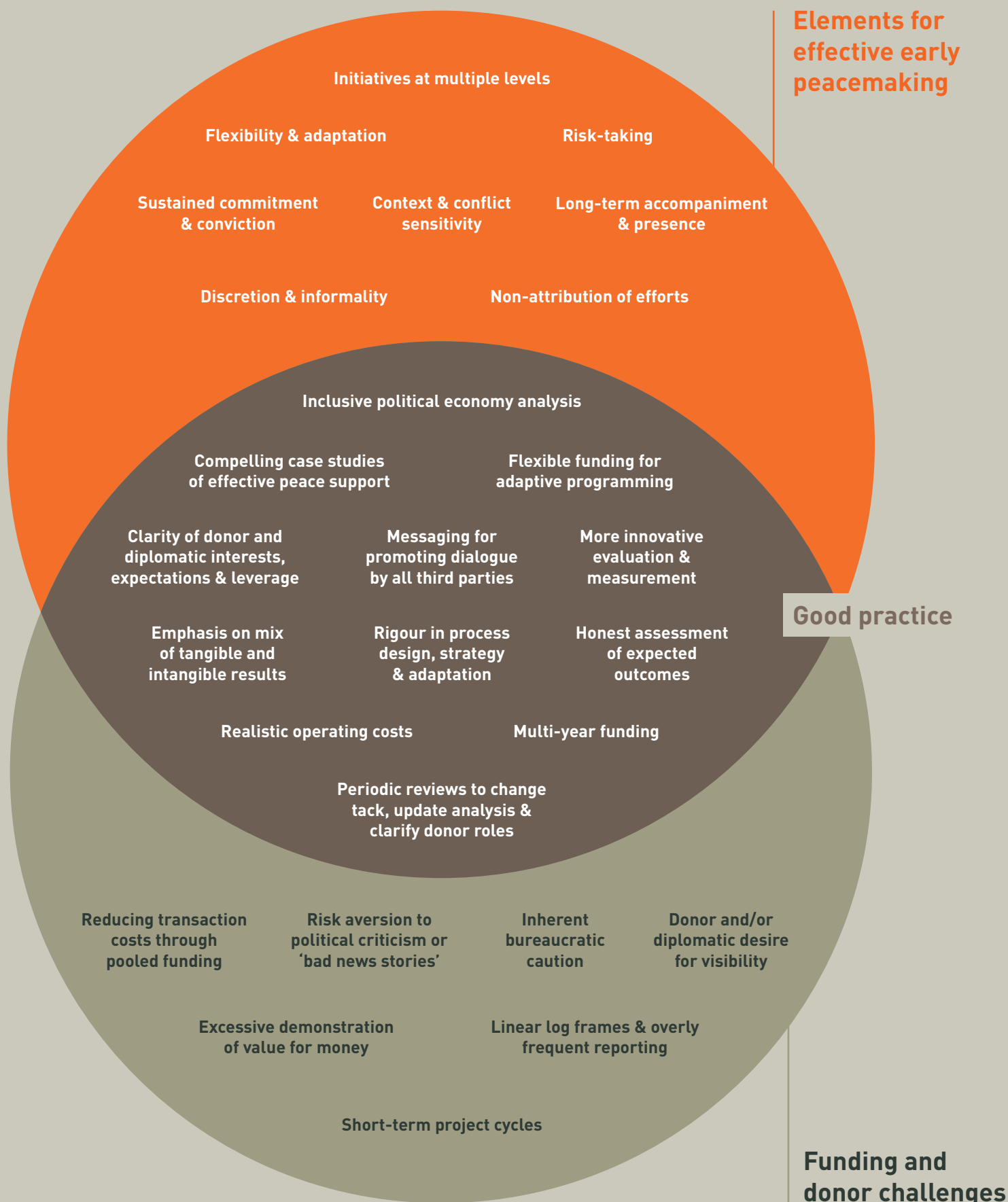
The context in which peace processes are occurring has changed drastically in the past two decades, as discussed in the introduction to this edition. One shift relates to funding of peace process support. Organisations working in this space are increasingly concerned about how their activities are funded, particularly reductions in core and unearmarked funding, increased projectisation of funding streams, and the perception that greater numbers of donors are seeking more active 'hands-on' peacemaking roles. Concurrently many donor agencies are facing increasing internal pressure over development assistance and aid, and the value and accountability of investments in peace and security.

This article tracks trends and elaborates three funding-related dynamics relevant to 'early' phase peace work: operating realities for donors; the importance of flexible funding for the unpredictable, formative phases of peace processes; variations in understanding of what peace process and mediation support is; and increasing donor interest in direct involvement in peacemaking. It also makes recommendations aimed at contributing to greater mutual accountability between donors and practitioners, in order to better address the causes and consequences

1   For example, this includes but is not limited to the Berghof Foundation, Carter Center, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Conciliation Resources, Conflict Management Initiative, Dialogue Advisory Group, European Institute for Peace, Independent Diplomat, Institute for Integrated Transitions, InterMediate, Kofi Annan Foundation, Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution, Sant´Egidio Community, and Swisspeace. Inclusion in this list does not necessarily imply individuals from these organisations were interviewed for, or reviewed, this article. This article refers to unearmarked and core funding which are understood as: core funding – for organisational requirements such as rent, utilities, administration, salaries of staff not covered by project or programme funds; unearmarked funding – for country-specific or thematic issues that is not tied to project activities and can enable more responsive, rapid or tailored actions.

PEACEMAKING FUNDING: DYNAMICS & GOOD PRACTICE

Elements for effective early peacemaking

Initiatives at multiple levels

Flexibility & adaptation

Risk-taking

Sustained commitment & conviction

Context & conflict sensitivity

Long-term accompaniment & presence

Discretion & informality

Non-attribution of efforts

Good practice

Inclusive political economy analysis

Compelling case studies of effective peace support

Flexible funding for adaptive programming

Clarity of donor and diplomatic interests, expectations & leverage

Messaging for promoting dialogue by all third parties

More innovative evaluation & measurement

Emphasis on mix of tangible and intangible results

Rigour in process design, strategy & adaptation

Honest assessment of expected outcomes

Realistic operating costs

Multi-year funding

Periodic reviews to change tack, update analysis & clarify donor roles

Funding and donor challenges

Reducing transaction costs through pooled funding

Risk aversion to political criticism or 'bad news stories'

Inherent bureaucratic caution

Donor and/or diplomatic desire for visibility

Excessive demonstration of value for money

Linear log frames & overly frequent reporting

Short-term project cycles

of violent conflict and those affected by it: mutual planning; innovations in articulating impact and monitoring and evaluation; harmonising funding; strategic collaborations between donors and peace support organisations; and more joint analysis to extend the possibilities of strategic division of labour.

Analysis draws on publicly available data on practitioner and donor perspectives from key informant interviews and related discussions, and on a wide-ranging consultative review process with peace support organisations and donor officials. The article is not definitive and is limited by difficulties in accessing information on funding patterns, opaque funding of certain types of peace process, time lags in financial reporting, and divergent understanding of initiatives that are funded – such as between peacemaking (efforts to encourage dialogue and negotiations to end violence) and peacebuilding (efforts to tackle root causes of violence).

Analysis does not focus on either the United Nations (UN) system, which has a different funding base for its peacemaking efforts, or private philanthropic foundations, whose investment in peace is comparatively low in comparison with other concerns such as health, education or gender equality. Successive years of analysis from the Peace Funders Group indicate that of all the issues private donors fund in the realm of peace and security, peace negotiations are consistently accorded the lowest level of support (see further reading). There are of course exceptions.[2]

" The 'demand' for peacemaking remains high. "

Shifts in the conflict and peace landscape
The 'demand' for peacemaking remains high. The years since 2014 have seen the largest numbers of armed conflicts since 1946 (see further reading). However, the *form* of violent conflict has also been changing, becoming increasingly protracted, fragmented, internationalised and criminalised. Arguably, peacemaking efforts have not kept pace, with few comprehensive agreements able to be reached over the last two decades; processes in the Philippines (Mindanao) and Colombia appear to be atypical and have been marred by implementation problems.

The 'supply' side of peacemaking has also dramatically changed. Only 25 years ago peacemaking was largely the

domain of states. Today it is a bustling professional sector dominated by Western-led international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and private diplomacy organisations varying in size, capacity, credibility and impact, all jostling for space, influence, funding and access. This busy peace support marketplace brings some important benefits for tackling the complexity of violent conflicts today. As explained by one seasoned practitioner, it is the increasingly complex nature of conflicts, and the need for diverse forms and levels of engagement and expertise – local, national, regional, and international, private and public – that has been a key driver behind this proliferation.

But challenges have also multiplied. Fierce competition and a lack of transparency can bring opportunity costs, mixed messages and signalling, overly technocratic approaches, or 'steppingstone' projects aimed at opening access to work directly with conflict parties. Proliferation of peace support organisations can also have deleterious impacts on local civil society mobilisation, leading to instrumentalisation and local NGOs being stuck in a cycle of short-term projects or activities.

A recurrent difficulty relates to coordination and the strategic division of labour among peace support organisations – which need to know their specialisms, strengths and limits, and when to 'pass the baton' to a more relevant entity. Coordination is notoriously complicated in this sector, exacerbated by the sensitivity of highly political processes, the ownership peace support actors feel about their networks and relationships, and by multiple actors jockeying for prominence. Conflict parties may 'shop' among the many peace support 'suppliers' and solicit similar support from multiple organisations for various reasons, from the benign (eg due to not wanting to cause offence, being confused by the competing offers, or believing the overtures are coordinated) to the nefarious (eg finding entities less willing to question repressive worldviews and approaches).

Good peace process support coordination is within the reach of third parties, but positive examples of coordination too often rely on personal connections across organisations. Although there are few incentives to coordinate, entities can agree thematic leads who work to promote collaborative coordination in addition to being a leader or specialist on that topic. This can help all to fulfil stated mandates and realise strengths more effectively. The sector is slowly moving in this direction. At the national level various coordination mechanisms exist to promote more collaborative coordination. (See the article, 'International

support for civil society involvement in peacemaking in South Sudan' in this edition for an example.) At the global level, in early 2020 a group of INGOs involved in peace process support took a promising step when they committed to a Statement of Intent – a set of standards to enhance coordination (see further reading).

> ## " Good peace process support coordination is within the reach of third parties. "

Key themes in funding early dialogue
Three key themes for funding formative dialogue emerged over the course of discussions and feedback for this article: operational realities for Western donors – the main funders of peacemaking; the significance of flexible funding; and a rise in interest from donor states in both funding and being more actively involved in peace and mediation support efforts.

Theme 1. *Operational realities for Western donors*
Current operational realities for Western donors are making it harder for them to support peacemaking, particularly the early nebulous phases. They are increasingly sensitive to pressures of accountability, results, attribution and value for money – legitimate taxpayer expectations for public funds. Challenges arise when these intersect with more detrimental trends such as fallout from overly negative media reporting about development assistance and foreign aid, increasingly nationalistic politics, and more intense, and at times politicised, scrutiny of development assistance. Especially under the severe economic pressures unleashed by the Covid-19 crisis, zero-sum arguments about public expenditure make it increasingly difficult to justify overseas aid – with foreign ministries focusing on trade opportunities and national interest, and intelligence and security agencies responding to politicians' anxieties around national security, terrorism and migration.

> ## " Donors are under pressure to reduce administrative burdens in an era of public sector contraction. "

Many donors are under pressure to reduce administrative burdens in an era of public sector contraction and disbursing larger sums to fewer organisations helps to manage these. The need to spend larger sums of money is also linked to critical global development goals.

Yet at the same time there are fewer resources available for effective management or monitoring and evaluation, and bigger grants have often translated into more bureaucratic reporting and less flexibility. Entities that are large enough or designed to spend funds on time and manage contract amendments and renegotiations have an advantage, and this can be challenging for less well-resourced local NGOs and civil society organisations.

Donors are also under pressure to 'attribute' outcomes, despite the reality that progress in peace processes more often results from cumulative and multiple efforts. Excessive attribution demands can be time consuming and affect longer term outcomes through loss of political access or social capital with belligerent parties, influential actors and local organisations. Demonstrating tangible results has also contributed to a tendency to over-emphasise technical rather than political activities, which are easier to enumerate and profile, such as mediation training, increasing women's (numerical) participation, deploying (or often imposing) expertise from the country of the donor, and study tours. Such activities can of course make a valuable contribution though vary enormously in terms of design, planning, quality and follow-on.

Theme 2. *Less flexible funding*
Funding for peacemaking remains low compared to state military spending, and lack of resources is a fundamental problem for the sector. But the inflexibility of funding that is available compounds the problem – as identified in recent research by Andrew Sherriff and colleagues at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (see further reading).

Less flexible funding can foster unhelpful projectisation that parcels work into smaller 'chunks' (activities or projects) as opposed to longer-term programmes. Forging pathways to peace often implies fewer formal activities that pivot on the continuity of relationships and long-term accompaniment of conflict parties, civil society and communities, prising open windows of opportunity when they arise. This can be more challenging if funding cycles are too short or compartmentalised and increases reporting obligations and administration costs.

Unrestricted funds that are less tied to rigid projects enable organisations to take the necessary political and reputational risks needed to get peace initiatives up and running, and to test and encourage interest in dialogue in challenging conflict contexts, for example in relation to engaging proscribed armed groups. Some donors are reverting to investing in organisations for the long term – a more prominent feature of the funding landscape 10–15 years ago – but this is not a uniform trend.

Earmarked funding certainly has a place, for example to 'ring fence' funds for gender inclusion, which are all too easily dropped from budgets as 'non-essential'.

" Unrestricted funds enable organisations to take the necessary political and reputational risks needed to get peace initiatives up and running. "

Recognising and addressing the factors that have encouraged short-term funding could help inform discussions of viable flexible funding mechanisms, such as how to make them more accountable. Accountability can also be increased with more resourcing and personnel for monitoring and evaluation in pooled funds.

Pooled or Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs) and consortia are increasingly common in international development, which allow donors to disburse larger sums to fewer entities. As currently configured, however, peace process support often falls outside the parameters of MDTFs, as the political sensitivities of dialogue and mediation mean that donors and grantees alike often prefer more discreet bilateral assistance. MDTFs therefore tend to fund overt activities that are more amenable to clear justification and attribution. Practitioners highlighted that MDTFs are often not nimble enough for erratic pre-formal phases of peace processes, and can be stymied, delayed or complicated by competing donor interests, bureaucracy and micro-management. A future challenge is how to make MDTFs more peace process-friendly.

" Consortia aim to stimulate coordination, collaboration and accountability. "

Consortia aim to stimulate coordination, collaboration and accountability. Discussions and interviews for this article affirmed collaborative coordination as paramount in the peace sector, with one donor reflecting that some donors favour consortia as a way to 'tie the international actors to coordination,' and to 'reduce the pressure on national NGOs to be drawn into a multitude of one-off projects, and subject to short-term grants'.

But consortia can also come with heavy transaction costs. Some peace support organisations have limited experience of collaboration and can find consortia difficult, and it can take time to establish complementary mandates and align administrative arrangements. One interviewee bemoaned 'superficial collaboration' as consortium members simply 'continue doing what they do,' adapting to the consortium lead INGO as a secondary donor. Consortia are one way – albeit slow – to encourage more collaborative attitudes within peace support organisations. Secondments across consortium partners can also build better understanding of each other's work and more trusting personal relationships.

Theme 3. *Donor interest in funding and involvement in mediation and peace process support*
There has been a notable rise in 'hands-on' mediation and peace process support by states. While relatively few states are directly involved in 'track one' formal mediation, more and more are interested in being involved in mediation and peace process support in different ways. One practitioner referred to the 'Security Council effect', where prospects of temporary membership brings a corresponding uptick in mediation interest by candidate states.

Mediation support units (MSUs) are well established within the UN and regional organisations such as the African Union and European Union. Individual states are also increasingly establishing specialist mediation teams, for example the United Kingdom's new Mediation and Reconciliation Hub, and these can help to centralise information and expertise. 'Non-traditional' states such as Turkey, China and Qatar are also seeking greater roles in mediation, though have been slower to set up formal MSUs.

The rise in the numbers of donors seeking a more hands-on role in peacemaking has brought both benefits and challenges. A more positive consequence has been a corresponding increase in investment in outcomes: '"Donor-doers" are making an impact. If you seek funding from certain states, it is done with political intent because you want them to get involved.' Another INGO representative argued that a more active role helps donors gain deeper comprehension of activities and results, and thus secures greater support for the slow-burn of peacemaking. One individual stated pragmatically: 'Donors are part of the dynamics that we need to factor in; it's just how it goes; you work with it'.

A negative outcome has been increasing intra-donor competition and desire for visibility. This is challenging for an inherently discreet discipline like mediation – notwithstanding that, as described above, many INGOs are also jostling for position and reputation in the peacemaking marketplace. As one interviewee explained: 'even the so-called humble states are incredibly competitive,

increasingly fixated on their profiles as being significant or in the lead in the domain of mediation support'.

Finding room for new donor actors in crowded peace spaces can be problematic. Several practitioners referred to feeling obliged 'to find more opportunities and roles for donors so they can display expertise and demonstrate they are more "doer" than "donor"'. There can also be pressure to involve nationals from donor states not always linked to their competency or expertise. One practitioner lamented being 'trapped by having to hire or accommodate secondments of nationals from donor states as part of implicit funding deals'.

> " **Supporting early dialogue is time-consuming and painstaking, and infrequently delivers highly visible results.** "

There can also be pressure on peace support organisations to spend time building expertise, analysis, and up-to-date intelligence, to equip and empower donors. Donors may also not be well placed to undertake rapid and flexible operational work or may be restricted by sanctions on designated terrorist groups – which can also affect some INGOs depending on their location. Comparatively short diplomatic posting cycles can further impede relationship building and the necessary contextual understanding in each conflict setting.

Interviewees for this article raised concerns about the broad understanding of peace process support and mediation that has coincided with the rise in peace actors in recent years. Multiple interpretations of peace process and mediation support have accompanied the growth in multi-track approaches to peace processes. These see community-based peace initiatives and high-level negotiations as complementary, and as promoting the benefits of linking peace initiatives across levels of society as part of a big and messy 'peace system'.

Supporting early dialogue is time-consuming and painstaking, and infrequently delivers highly visible results. It requires patience and commitment and is not easy to capture and explain. A lack of clarity and technical knowledge among funders can affect the types of peace process support efforts they are willing to invest in, such as those that are clandestine or have timeframes that are not amenable to quick wins. Practitioners and donors can find ways around confidentiality constraints, such as using forms of accounting other than written reports.

Conclusion and recommendations

Getting conflict parties to the negotiating table is sensitive and risky. The growing trend of direct donor involvement in mediation support is double-edged. It can enhance leverage for private diplomacy organisations that have limited 'sticks and carrots' to influence conflict parties and improve donor awareness of the challenges involved. But it also brings additional coordination demands and can compound confusion over the independence of peace support organisations.

Projectisation and the diminution in unearmarked funding can negatively affect the flexibility and adaptability required for peace support in fluid and shifting contexts. Nevertheless, there are cautiously positive developments in the funding landscape. All actors can undertake useful adaptations to improve accountability to both communities affected by conflict and to the taxpayers behind peacemaking funding.

Mutual planning between peace support organisations and donors needs to factor realistic expectations of donor involvement and support into project design. This requires clarity on donor interests, funding cycles and expectations from the outset and more transparent discussion, including on the pros and cons of donor personnel involvement, how to harness diplomatic and donor influence and relationships with conflict parties and civil society, and innovative ways to communicate impacts. Managing expectations between donors, diplomats and peace support organisations helps to mitigate potential tensions, misunderstandings or non-alignment of goals and methods between them.

> " **All actors can undertake useful adaptations to improve accountability to both communities affected by conflict.** "

Peace support organisations need to invest in capturing and presenting evidence of how conflict parties can be engaged in dialogue – 'telling the stories' of early peacemaking to convince donors and taxpayers why it takes so long, what it can (and cannot) achieve, and how it can contribute to societal cohesion, economic stability and growth. Parliamentarians and non-traditional 'influencers' (eg businesspeople with an interest in global peace who can advocate creative risk-taking) need to be engaged to raise literacy about the potential of peacemaking.

Demonstrating impact is essential but hard. The peace process support sector needs to accelerate innovations in monitoring and evaluation, and how to measure peacemaking impacts. Peace practitioners often complain that increasing reporting and evaluation requirements distract them from the substance of their work. But much of the onus is on peace support organisations themselves to become smarter at articulating nuanced impacts. At the level of process or project specific engagement, continuous discussions with donors are pivotal and are best understood as a 'joint journey' towards clearer understanding of peacemaking progress.

" Honest and regular exchange between funders and grantees could greatly contribute to complementarity. "

Proactive practitioners and donors are well placed to launch a discussion on finding ways to better coordinate and harmonise grant application and reporting templates to enhance high-quality programming. Development and humanitarian assistance actors have long discussed aid harmonisation and effectiveness, and the peace sector could draw many valuable lessons from this. Some donors that have signed up to the Humanitarian Grand Bargain – often the same donors that are funding peacemaking – are testing the potential advantages of a single, simplified reporting template accepted by a range of donors and aid organisations. Extending similar efforts to the peacemaking sector could greatly enhance efficiency and value for money.

Peace support organisations mainly operate best on flexible multi-year funding. This allows proactive

accompaniment of parties involved in peace dialogue, and can enhance coordination, continuity and adaptation. Some peacemaking donors are engaging in strategic partnerships and framework agreements, which blend earmarked and unearmarked funding and tend to be more flexible and long-term. The more donors that sign up to these models, the better the sector will be able to fulfil its collective mission of responsive contextualised support to address violent conflict.

This article has referred to holistic funding of peace processes. An essential part of this is coverage of overheads. Short-term funding can undermine effective management of overheads and administration. Through providing realistic overheads, donors can enable organisations to effectively run their quality assurance and administrative systems. A promising example is the UK Department for International Development's non-programme attributable costs system, which calculates the full costs that grantees will incur and contributes to greater transparency and sustainability of funding arrangements. This also allows donors to be consistent and realistic in terms of the expected reporting requirements and information sharing from grantees.

Finally, joint analysis can inform a peace support 'ecosystem' of multiple actors operating at various levels and layers of a peace process. Honest and regular exchange between funders and grantees could greatly contribute to complementarity and effective allocation of support roles in peace processes. This can support recognising different strengths at different times. It can also assist new players entering (or seeking to enter) a peace process, to readily identify under-developed parts of the support ecosystem. The aforementioned INGO joint Statement of Intent for coordination standards kicks in here and can certainly be a step in the right direction if words are transformed into deeds.

SECTION 2
Perspectives on peacemaking practice and case studies

Unsticking stalled peace processes

Insider mediator perspectives from Myanmar

Ja Nan Lahtaw is a civil society leader in Myanmar. Since 2014 she has been the Executive Director of the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, an NGO founded in 2000. Ja Nan has been directly involved in the peace process in a number of roles including as a Technical Adviser to the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), the negotiation team of ethnic armed organisations and a co-facilitator of the NCCT and Government of Myanmar negotiations for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) from 2013 to 2015. Since the NCA signing in October 2015 Ja Nan has been involved in implementation negotiations. The formal Political Dialogue process, which commenced in January 2016, saw Ja Nan in the role of overall co-facilitator in addition to co-facilitating the dialogue sessions for the 'Politics' theme. Ja Nan is also a Technical Consultant to Kachin Independence Organisation Technical Advisory Team. She holds an MA in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, USA and was a Chevening Fellow at Birmingham University in the United Kingdom in 2008.

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

> **After 70 years of division over religion and ethnicity, many do not feel comfortable moving beyond their identity groups, but the EAOs came to see that what I would do for Kachin people, I would also do for their people.**

My late father, Baptist Reverend Saboi Jum, mediated a ceasefire – the first written agreement – between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) in 1994 that lasted 17 years. With this heritage, I was considered a trusted pair of hands by the EAOs. Yet I encountered suspicion from them about my motivations to engage in peace activities, particularly as the KIO was no longer involved in the

formal national ceasefire process after 2015. However, over time they came to know from my actions and deeds that my Kachin identity was not an obstacle and did not interfere with my role. After 70 years of division over religion and ethnicity, many do not feel comfortable moving beyond their identity groups, but the EAOs came to see that what I would do for Kachin people, I would also do for their people.

Peace process dynamics and actors

The Myanmar peace process is uniquely nationally led. The government and military continue to be highly cautious about international involvement and interference from neighbouring countries. From 2011 to 2014 there was a promising political moment, with the quasi-civilian government prepared to learn from other peace processes and identify where Myanmar could adapt or create its own mechanisms. The formal protagonists – the military, EAOs and successive governments – developed a complex architecture to reach a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) and formal political dialogue. By the end of 2019 it was signed by ten EAOs. Political parties became involved after the NCA was signed and as part of the negotiations to develop the architecture for the formal political dialogue.

From 2010 to early 2015 there were 21 EAOs considered as dialogue partners by then President Thein Sein, the

Ja Nan Lahtaw.
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former general turned reformer. This reduced to 16 EAOs negotiating collectively as a bloc, while the remaining five negotiated bilateral agreements with the government. Towards the end of the NCA negotiation, the 16-group bloc learned that some of them would not be allowed to sign as they did not control territory. In solidarity, some EAOs asserted an 'all-inclusive principle' and decided not to sign the NCA until all relevant EAOs could.

Prior to the NCA, and over successive decades, there had been a bitter history of bilateral ceasefires between EAOs and the Tatmadaw that were mostly 'gentleman's agreements' without written conditions. Ceasefires became an instrument of control to divide and conquer and never led to political negotiations. During the military regime of 1988 to 2010, numerous EAOs agreed to bilateral ceasefires and converted to Border Guard Force (BGF) and militia incorporated into the Tatmadaw. This controversial system led many EAOs that became part of the BGF or militia to access opportunities in illicit or licit businesses. In addition, some were commissioned to fight against other EAOs, creating enormous divisions and animosities.

In the more dynamic phase of the peace process, up to October 2015, the now dissolved Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) was a hive of activity. It played many roles to keep multiple pathways open and fluid, and fostered political and personal relationships. The MPC was not a fully representative mechanism and was dominated by Burmese men. But it played a vital role in keeping the parties in contact with each other – fostering informal and formal connections. (For more detail on secretariats, see the article 'Peace secretariats and dialogue promotion – Potential and limitations' in this edition.) This was complemented by the informal activities of NGOs and blossoming think-tanks that brought various sides of the

multiple conflicts together in hundreds, if not thousands, of dialogues, workshops, seminars, study tours – some more relevant and effective than others.

The Myanmar process is a hybrid: the ceasefire agreement and implementation apparatus are linked to broader peace negotiations occurring within the formal Framework for Political Dialogue (FPD). The State Counsellor (*de facto* President), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is the Chair of this process and there are three co-facilitators representing the EAOs, political parties and the government. I am the co-facilitator for the EAOs. Almost all EAOs share the same political goal – building a genuine federal union with rights to self-determination, equality and democracy – but they are diverse in many ways including religion, culture, environment, size, governance, history and political experience. This results in divergent capacities, fears, behaviours, ideology and political interests in the negotiations.

The peace process is now so complex that many participants have lost track of all the moving parts.

The peace process is now so complex that many participants have lost track of all the moving parts. Many international actors are also involved as advisers, analysts and donors. This adds more complexity in a context where international intervention and presence is generally viewed with suspicion, and traditional international mediation is not possible.

The EAOs must work patiently to understand each other's positions and interests to forge common positions. This involves compromise and negotiation so they can speak

with a combined voice. The same can be said for the government side, where the Tatmadaw and the government have different goals and interests. Nyein staff and I assist the EAOs in roles of accompaniment and through facilitating informal and formal meetings to support building common positions. For many years Nyein also hosted a *de facto* secretariat for the EAOs (signatory EAOs now have their own secretariat).

'Jointness' and managing asymmetries
Just before the first meeting to discuss a nationwide ceasefire between the EAOs and the then quasi-civilian government, it was decided to have co-facilitation of the talks, with a representative from each side to manage equity in the process and foster 'jointness'. There was no precedent to build on. The leader of the EAO bloc was not sure how this could work best and asked me to assist as co-facilitator. I stayed in the role, always with a Burmese male counterpart as a 'co-pilot' (four men over the period up to the formal signing in October 2015).

The NCA is signed by two parties: the government and EAOs. It should therefore be jointly owned and implemented, but this was rarely the case. In practice, in both mechanisms for ceasefire implementation and the political dialogue, the Tatmadaw (lead in ceasefire implementation) and government (lead in political dialogues mechanism) dominate, while the EAOs are in deputy or subordinate roles. This results in them feeling like secondary actors and reminds them of 1947, when ethnic nationalities joined to secure independence from colonial Britain only to be let down by the Burmese with the Panglong Agreement neither respecting nor addressing ethnic aspirations.

Other asymmetries relate to gender and language. In Myanmar's male-dominant culture, men naturally think they should be in lead roles. Language issues were also a factor. As Burmese is my second language, sometimes I was frustrated with not being able to articulate ideas clearly. During the NCA negotiations, to overcome my fears and differences with my male Burmese co-facilitator, we talked through the agenda and assigned various sections for each of us to facilitate.

Peacemaking challenges – Working with ambiguity
Initial expectations of me were to be a master of ceremonies – a gender-appropriate role for women in Myanmar. However, I was interested in doing more than this and saw opportunities to build links between people. Not everyone liked or wanted this facilitation style: at one point a Tatmadaw general interjected, 'stop summarising!' Some government officials refused facilitation because this did not suit their interests and ability to manipulate outcomes. But after several meetings, another general commented

on how useful this new style was. This change of heart was probably influenced by a clear leadership signal from former President Sein Thein to do things differently.

> **" Initial expectations of me were to be a master of ceremonies – a gender-appropriate role for women in Myanmar. However, I was interested in doing more than this and saw opportunities to build links between people. "**

A key challenge as an insider mediator is maintaining trust with both sides. For example, I must listen carefully to what everyone says (and does not say) at the negotiation table and summarise the discussion impartially. If the summary is accepted by both sides, I have done my job well. Insider mediators must maintain good personal relationships with all parties. I am mindful to not only engage with EAO leaders and staff but also to reach out to government and Tatmadaw leaders and their staff.

Sometimes I felt the expectations of EAOs was for me to speak *for them*. However, all I can do is create the space for them to speak. Not every negotiator is operating from the same starting point or strengths and over time this style of facilitation has proven effective for those operating in languages other than Burmese or English, or with less formal education, to follow the proceedings. This approach comes with certain pressures, particularly in hierarchical and rigid cultures such as Myanmar's. For example, when I am summarising discussions, participants listen very carefully as this is recorded in the minutes and I need to capture all perspectives fairly.

> **" Sometimes I felt the expectations of EAOs was for me to speak *for them*. However, all I can do is create the space for them to speak. "**

In tense situations, as a woman I can say things that are perceived as less threatening. From time to time my male co-facilitators ask me to manage tricky issues because of my style and perhaps because I am female. Sometimes I experience pushback, but my personal style and reputation help to navigate these tougher moments. I also bring a deep familiarity with the spirit and intentions of the NCA,

an understanding of the fabric behind the words on paper. This historical continuity is valuable, especially as the process became bogged down on issues of process and form.

Terms of reference or not?

Since 2017 there has been a review of the FPD by the parties as it was not clear how the peace talks could connect with parliamentary processes. The self-administered formal review also aimed to clarify other matters such as changes to the chairing of various committees and mechanisms for more equitable representation of EAOs and political parties. (There have also been informal reviews offered by individuals and organisations to the various parties.) The review ground to a halt around October 2018. Reinvigorating the process seems further away than ever. My co-facilitators and I had asked for Terms of Reference (ToR) for the facilitator role in the review process, so we could clearly know the parameters. But in fact, without ToR we have been able to broaden discussions. My thinking has shifted, and I see the value of not always having explicit ToR and the opportunities that more flexibility can offer.

In the current negotiations that I co-facilitate, I rarely get to ask searching questions. I can probe deeper informally, but the willingness to shift to the resolution rather than the management of conflicts is slow and dependent on individual will and capacities. There are some who are willing to go deeper on the issues and want to understand the concerns of their counterparts. We need more people with this frame of mind for more effective pathways to peace.

There are various people playing insider mediator roles. One or two from the teams of the government and EAOs informally engage and have explored options to break the 2018–19 deadlock. This involves shuttling back and forth, bringing options to their respective leaders and forging pathways. It is sensitive work. Furthermore, insider mediators can be perceived and accused of playing all sides and can lose the trust of their own party.

Unsticking a stalled process

The process began to stall from late 2018 and through 2019. There are multifaceted reasons for this, but as of early 2020 some progress was made by all sides on troop repositioning – a major sticking point. Unclear demarcation has made it virtually impossible for the ceasefire monitoring mechanism to work effectively. Not only did ceasefire implementation stall but also the political dialogue process. Convening official national dialogues has become contested terrain, further excluding the public from contributing and raising concerns.

The 2015 ceasefire agreement provided a mandate for EAOs to convene such dialogues with their own constituencies. Nyein staff and I have accompanied the signatory EAOs through two national dialogue rounds, providing advice on international good practice. This process has been patchy and subject to interruption by the military, which cites security concerns.

Over 2019 the government, Tatmadaw and EAOs have engaged in informal meetings. I have also facilitated

Myanmar President Thein Sein (seated, centre) looks on as Aung Min (left), vice chairperson of the Union Peace Working Committee, shakes hands with Naing Han Tha (right), a leader of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team, after they sign a nationwide ceasefire draft agreement at the Myanmar Peace Centre in Yangon on 31 March 2015. Ja Nan Lahtaw is pictured (standing, centre). © STR/AFP via Getty Images

and coordinated informal meetings between the NCA signatory and no-signatory EAOs on developing principles for a federal state. Building on some good relations with members of the government delegation and leaders from the KIO, I facilitated informal meetings between them. These have increased trust between the parties in a small but significant way, resulting in the Tatmadaw considering proposing options for EAOs to convene further national dialogues with their communities.

Perceptions of international actors

The international community increasingly refers to the importance of insider mediation and local mediation, but my experiences of international support are mixed. Nyein has been supported by many donors and INGOs with an array of relationships related to this support – direct, indirect, hands off, and more demanding expectations for information and connections. I observe several confusing trends and concepts. Navigating and managing international interests, branding expectations and funding requirements have become a major strand of the peace process, in ways unforeseen in 2011–12.

Study tours are one example. These are often used by international actors as a stepping-stone to building relationships with the government and EAOs. The purpose of the tour is generally benignly framed – for example, the process is stalled, both parties need a space to talk and build trust and being out of the country can help them connect. However, the key objectives are rarely achieved. The combination of frequent and poorly coordinated study tours takes key decision-makers out of the country, ironically exacerbating the problems with unblocking the peace process. Study tours have also contributed to internal competition, as not all EAOs or government leaders are selected – especially if they do not speak English.

Some INGOs that have been in the country for decades and have blended with local and national actors with a good handle on conflict drivers and community dynamics. Newer INGOs or UN staff, however, are not always so careful and are increasingly associated with using NGOs to access EAOs and conflict-affected communities. They can also be inconsistent about the roles of local and national actors in peace processes: for example, relegating local actors to 'the back seat' while they lead. While many have specific and useful skills, they could benefit from more humility and adopting approaches that encourage meaningful partnerships.

An effective form of support is side-by-side from a reliable individual or team, knowing that I can call on them as needed and that they will respond quickly with comparative expertise or practical assistance. Rapid and flexible response from donors is also vital as there are so many factors that disrupt activities and projects far beyond our control. There are some good examples of donor flexibility. A pool of unearmarked funding is also critical for responding proactively to opportunities to forge dialogue, without losing momentum owing to the need to fundraise.

Conclusion

In a context like Myanmar, where armed conflict is protracted and there are multiple peace processes, conflict parties find it challenging to speak with one voice. There is also limited third-party involvement (although China can be considered the main external influence).

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

The complex Myanmar architecture for peacemaking makes it difficult to inject fluidity back into the system and grow new and creative pathways. Suffice to say, the core challenge is mistrust and a deep scepticism about what and who this peace process is for. We stick with it, however, because it has been our best chance to find a political settlement for generations.

Navigating local and central dynamics

Peacemaking with the Taliban

Khalilullah Safi is an independent peace activist and analyst. He was born into a land-owning family in eastern Afghanistan, where his father was an elder in their tribe. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 his family was displaced to Pakistan. While enrolled at Dawat al-Jihad, an orthodox university, his classmates and cohort included future Taliban leaders. Khalilullah has degrees in agriculture from Kabul University and international relations from Peshawar University.

This article is a personal account of an 'informal connector' role, building relationships between the Taliban, the Afghan government and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). It recounts the story of initial personal contacts established to catalyse official dialogue between UNAMA and the Taliban, which developed across various tracks – peace, humanitarian access and the protection of civilians. The article considers the extent to which the different levels of engagement, spanning formal political leaders, local commanders and influential civilians such as tribal elders, fostered pathways to peace.

Since its overthrow in 2001, the Taliban has regrouped, launched an insurgency and assumed *de facto* control of a significant portion of Afghanistan, despite having no recognised role in the country's governance or administration. For a long time, people have acknowledged the need to engage the movement in dialogue at a national level, in part to complement or to control relationships established locally. The Taliban, however, have been wary of external contacts. Engagement requires the establishment of trusted channels of communication.

Building early connections
In September 2011, the then UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), Staffan de Mistura, asked me to organise a meeting between the UN mission and the Taliban. This was the first formal UN attempt at contact. I conveyed the message to Taliban Deputy Supreme Leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour through a friend.

Mansour promptly authorised a former Taliban diplomat to meet de Mistura on his behalf, scheduled for late September 2011 in Dubai. On 20 September, the then Chair of the Afghan High Peace Council, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, was assassinated. Rabbani had been reaching out to the Talban and working to persuade members of the former Northern Alliance to embark on reconciliation discussions. With characteristic over-caution, UNAMA cancelled the meeting, counter to the view of a former UN SRSG who used to say events on the battlefield should be kept separate from events at the negotiating table. This set UN-Taliban relations back by two years and was the first of several lost opportunities to build pathways to peace.

In December 2013, the new SRSG, Jan Kubiš, asked me to convey a message to Mansour to again send his envoy. The Taliban's Political Commission was authorised to meet with Kubiš and the first meeting took place in January 2014 in Dubai. Two senior Taliban representatives attended: Zahid Ahmadzai, a former Taliban diplomat in Islamabad, and Qari Din Mohammad Hanif, a former Minister of Planning under the Taliban government. Their seniority signalled that the Taliban were serious about engaging. Discussion covered public health, human rights, access to political prisoners and security guarantees for humanitarian assistance.

A second meeting in March 2014 in Qatar involved a Taliban delegation led by Supreme Leader Mullah Omar's personal envoy, Sayyid Tayyib Agha, Director of the Taliban's Political Commission. Discussions covered the need for a peace process and the upcoming presidential elections.

Agreement was reached for UN and Taliban political and humanitarian teams to meet regularly to discuss peace, human rights and humanitarian access. A third meeting followed in May, bringing together UN officials with the directors of the Taliban Commissions for Health, Prisoner Issues, Non-Governmental Organisations and Protection of Civilians. This was the start of a periodic dialogue that still continues.

2014 elections

Concurrent to these direct talks, I facilitated communication between Kubiš and Mullah Mansour on the election process, through a close contact of Mansour. Kubiš promoted the idea of peaceful elections as a shared goal and staging a regional dialogue to rejuvenate the peace process. Mullah Mansour issued confidential instructions to Taliban shadow governors and military commanders not to disrupt campaigning or election day itself, or to threaten the public and election commission workers. Despite this, there was a spike in Taliban violence and casualties around polling day, although fighters seemed to refrain from directly targeting voters. This illustrated the limited ability of the Taliban central command to control the largely decentralised operations of its fighters.

After an impasse over the result of the presidential election, a brokered deal brought the final two candidates into a National Unity Government (NUG). Ashraf Ghani took over as President on 29 September 2014 with Abdullah Abdullah

designated as Chief Executive. Two weeks later, Ghani referred in a press conference to the Taliban as 'the political opposition' of the Afghan government. This reframing of the Taliban as 'opposition' rather than as 'terrorists' followed a request passed to Ghani by Kubiš after the talks in Doha.

Mansour had proposed that the UN adopt a mediation role. President Ghani subsequently proposed the creation of a special envoy for 'peace and regional cooperation' in a telephone conversation with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. However, Ghani did not follow through with a written request to the Security Council, so the proposal remained pending. The UN concluded that the president did not favour a major UN role in the peace process, and subsequent comments have borne this out, such as when Ghani laid the blame for the death of former Afghan President Najibullah on the UN: 'The UN guaranteed him peace, but it ended up with a disaster,' (*New York Times*, 28 January 2019).

Ghani faced domestic criticism for his initial overture to the Taliban. In search of more tangible gains from reaching out to the Taliban, Ghani asked Kubiš to ask Mansour to declare local ceasefires in Helmand Province. If successful, this could have emboldened Ghani to advance the peace process, including direct government contacts with the Taliban and confidence-building measures such as removing Taliban figures from sanctions lists and releasing prisoners.

> **"A ceasefire could have supported government efforts to reframe the Taliban as disaffected opposition rather than terrorists."**

A ceasefire could have supported government efforts to reframe the Taliban as disaffected opposition rather than terrorists. Mansour countered with a more ambitious proposal for provincial-level ceasefires in places such as Kapisa and Konduz. However, Ghani pivoted to demanding that the Taliban first enter direct political negotiations before he consider local ceasefire arrangements. This about-face appears to have been on the advice of security officials, who opposed the idea of piecemeal peacemaking and pursuit of confidence-building measures. The episode had a lasting impact on Taliban perceptions of the government, elements of which they suspected were not serious about making peace.

Pieces of the puzzle

It proved impossible to build on the confidence established in the early UN-Taliban dialogue. High-level talks were blocked by the Taliban's refusal to talk directly with the NUG, while the US refused to talk officially to the Taliban about withdrawal. Meanwhile, fighting intensified and casualties mounted on all sides. In this context, local peace initiatives emerged organically in several locations, but with the central government deeply sceptical about such efforts, trust ultimately proved elusive. The following are some critical events that eroded what little trust remained.

Konduz, September 2015

Konduz city was taken by the Taliban in September 2015. Civilians were caught in the crossfire and killed as they attempted to find food and water. The UN requested a 'humanitarian pause' to send a convoy of food and water. The government refused, prioritising the military operation to regain the city and deny the Taliban any political advantage from an extended occupation.

Dand-e-Ghori, September 2015

In September 2015 Afghan officials, including the Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs, the Baghlan Provincial Governor, and tribal elders from Dand-e-Ghori (Pul-i-Khumri district), signed an agreement to improve security in the area. It stipulated that neither the Afghanistan National Defence Forces nor the Taliban would carry out military operations, that a joint commission between elders and government officials would be established, and that elders would act as guarantors. Local elders close to the Taliban signed the deal, but the local Taliban leadership did not.

The Taliban did not feel bound by the terms of the deal and the elders had no way of forcing compliance.

Dand-e-Ghori is predominantly Pashtun and strategically important due to its location on the highway linking Kabul and northern Afghanistan. In April 2015 the Taliban took control of large parts of the district as part of their spring offensive. Government counterattacks led by Tajik commanders began in August. Some 250 families were displaced, schools closed, and livelihoods disrupted. Community leaders believed that they were unfairly targeted because of their Pashtun ethnicity and perceived sympathy for the Taliban. In the face of the widespread insecurity and impact on the civilian population, President Ghani backed his minister's mission, which culminated in an informal agreement to leave the area as a demilitarised zone in which no armed actors (government, Taliban or militia) would operate. But critics again claimed the agreement showed the NUG's inability to defend territory against Taliban attacks.

Following the signing of the agreement, displaced Dand-e-Ghori residents returned and resumed agricultural activities. Security improved significantly, with recorded incidents declining from 40 in July–August to six in September. However, the agreement fell apart in October with the government accusing the Taliban, emboldened by their recent successes around Konduz, of breaking the agreement and using it to move fighters to the Konduz offensive.

Local factors exacerbated the collapse of the deal, including ethnic tensions and proximity to the major battlefield around Konduz. But the central problem was that the deal was not actually signed with the Taliban. The community wanted the deal, but local Taliban were concerned about the likely negative reaction of their ruling council, based in Quetta, Pakistan, who would oppose a deal with the 'puppet administration' and were unwilling to relieve pressure on government forces. None of the parties seemed to see any benefit in a third-party monitor, so the elders were in effect not only signatories but powerless monitors too.

Central Afghanistan, March 2016

In 2016 a Taliban provincial 'shadow governor' contacted me seeking an agreement with the government on a ceasefire in his province and wanting a UN role in mediating and supervising any agreement. Despite the earlier indication that Ghani wanted the UN to mediate, the government would not agree to this. There was by this time a new, top-down initiative called the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (involving Afghanistan, China, the US and Pakistan), which hoped to engage the Taliban in talks.

Ghani did not want to allow any other tracks that might relieve the pressure on them to participate in his initiative. Once again, the space for the UN diminished.

Eid, 2018
Coordinated unilateral ceasefires for Eid in June 2018 saw scenes of Taliban and Afghan police and soldiers embracing, and fighters being able to cross into 'enemy-controlled territory' to see relatives and friends, with minimal incidents of violence. It was a clear indication that the community wanted peace and could live together, yet this disturbed the leadership of the Taliban and Afghanistan National Army .

Eastern Afghanistan, 2018
In late 2018, a Taliban military commander in Kunar province reached out to me and claimed that he could implement a local ceasefire. I was no longer working for the UN, but he also wanted the UN to play a role in the initiative. The UN, under their 'good offices' mandate, commenced shuttle diplomacy and the government showed some interest in the idea. UNAMA convened intermediaries for the Taliban (a religious scholar, a humanitarian worker and a tribal elder) alongside other UN personnel and the government. An intermediary presented audio and video messages from the commander in question, proving his *bona fides*. At this point, the government decided to insist on dealing with only one genuine intermediary, to deter inflated demands for assistance.

The UN, having initially provided good offices, stepped back once the parties were in touch. There were initial successes, including agreement on de-escalation and a reduction of US airstrikes. The government reached a longer-lasting, one-year agreement with the Taliban in Kunar.

Burka, 2018
In December 2018, a mediation led by religious scholars in Burka district between the district officials and Taliban concluded with the endorsement of a four-month ceasefire. This allowed free movement and security of civilians and government staff, and led to a reduction in violence, growth opportunities for local businesses, and access for public service delivery into some Burka villages. The move was perceived locally as a communication bridge between the government and Taliban that permitted local stability. However, the ceasefire could not be sustained. While local religious leaders and community elders advocated its extension beyond March 2019, the Taliban leadership announced their usual spring offensive. Local Taliban leaders initially acquiesced to local pressure for the deal but later could not resist more intense pressure from their own high command to resume fighting.

Conclusion
These examples reveal both the potential for, and obstacles to, peacemaking in Afghanistan. Engagement with the Taliban at the leadership level generated a mechanism for the UN to connect productively with a conflict party in a structured way, over a period of years. But when the Taliban leadership gave an undertaking to deliver a specific effect (avoidance of election violence in 2014), the impact on the ground was less than the UN had hoped. In other elections, including the 2019 presidential election, local-level deals succeeded in places in reducing violence, even in the absence of central leadership authorisation.

> **" Attempts to 'decentralise' peacemaking have been resisted by central leaders and regarded as a threat. "**

Communities in rural areas of Afghanistan exercise a significant degree of autonomy, but both the government and the Taliban lean towards a centralised institutional culture. This tension means that the Taliban and government alike have restrained rather than encouraged local peace initiatives. Attempts to 'decentralise' peacemaking have been resisted by central leaders and regarded as a threat.

The government in particular has tried, with some success, to limit the role of outside parties in peacemaking. The UNAMA mandate has been watered down to 'support an Afghan-led' process – although the 'good offices' mandate of the UN gives broad authorisation and UNAMA has always been careful to keep the government broadly informed of its activities. The Taliban seems to accept that the UN will have an important future role and does not see the UN as too close to the government, but some neighbouring states still regard the UN as too pro-US or just do not want further internationalisation of a regional issue.

Successful local peace initiatives must find ways of either insulating themselves from the disapproving high commands – for example, by adopting a low profile or operating with the cover of local influencers or religious authorities – or overcoming resistance and co-opting the relevant national authorities. While provisional assessments indicate that local level humanitarian and civilian protection dialogue tracks have delivered practical effects to mitigate the harm to the Afghan population from the ongoing conflict, experience since 2011 provides examples of higher-level politics blocking 'bottom-up' efforts to progress the peace process. Senior leadership buy-in is clearly a prerequisite for progress on the formal

and national-level processes. Conversely, local violence reduction makes a difference for ordinary war-weary people.

We need to rethink the approaches to make local solutions 'stick' in places like Afghanistan. One contributing factor is how narrow or broad the processes are. For example, few of the deals described above prioritised inclusivity, and none paid attention to gender: women were not involved in negotiations and nor was consideration given to their contributions or perspectives. In the Dand-e-Ghori agreement there was at least an attempt to set up a joint body to monitor the arrangements. But, because this was between officials and elders rather than actual Taliban, it was easy for the Taliban to renege on the arrangement, while Tajik security commanders also worked to undermine the deal. Local agreements require a joint commission involving all interested parties plus civil society and religious figures to promote adherence.

Local initiatives can provide positive outcomes. Community members – women, men, boys and girls – have varied and important insights and information. They can readily distinguish between the local opposition, the government, fighters sent in from elsewhere, and groups who are not Taliban. Such initiatives can also be faster and cheaper to implement than those at a higher level. Indeed, local Taliban commanders often have close relationships with their counterparts in neighbouring areas. Effective implementation of a local ceasefire can provide confidence to Taliban commanders in surrounding areas to join the process. But, in the absence of agreement at a more senior level – or at least a blind eye being turned by central leadership – these initiatives will struggle. Conversely, high-level agreements can only be implemented effectively with the negotiation and supervision of myriad local peace agreements.

Peace secretariats and dialogue promotion

Potential and limitations

Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka has 20 years' experience working on conflict transformation and peacebuilding as a practitioner, researcher and lecturer, as well as Senior Policy Officer at Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), most recently focusing on inclusive peacebuilding, recovery and reconstruction in the Middle East and North Africa region as well as Afghanistan. From 2005 to 2012, Ulrike was Deputy Director of the Sri Lanka Project of the Berghof Foundation and supported the Mediation and Peace Infrastructure Programme, shaping the concept of Infrastructures for Peace. Ulrike holds a PhD from the University of Hamburg, investigating the role of the peace secretariats in Sri Lanka's peace process and their contribution to conflict transformation.

In an era when peace processes are increasingly stalled or have collapsed, and where links between formal and informal dialogue are more vital to foster, peace secretariats can help build confidence, establish communication channels, and build skills and capabilities among conflict parties to prepare common ground for formal discussion. Peace secretariats are typically locally owned, in line with the priorities of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States and the UN Sustaining Peace agenda. This article explores how they can be responsive to the increasing prevalence of fragmented conflicts and promote peace initiatives in contexts that are less amenable to international mediation.

Peace secretariats are part of the wider 'infrastructure for peace' – the landscape of actors, networks and institutions that support a peace process. They are always established by and closely affiliated with at least one of the conflict parties, distinguishing them from more inclusive infrastructure such as local peace councils or committees that include civil society. Conflict parties typically decide to establish peace secretariats when formal peace talks are possible or are being prepared, but there are instructive examples of equivalent structures that have been established much earlier. This article illustrates challenges and opportunities with examples from Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and South Africa, while acknowledging the limitations of generalisation.

Peace secretariats – role, status and mandate

Peace secretariats implement tasks assigned to them by leaders of conflict parties or their negotiators, primarily to support negotiation or dialogue processes. These include secretarial duties such as notetaking, archiving and logistical support, as well as communications and media relations, strengthening skills and capabilities and providing advice. Secretariats can also liaise with mediators and other third parties, civil society and representatives of other conflict parties. They can be mandated to facilitate intra-party consensus building, inter-party relationship building and conflict management.

Prior to reaching an agreement, peace secretariats are necessarily unilateral, supporting their respective negotiating parties. Peace secretariats sometimes play roles after an agreement has been reached to facilitate and monitor implementation. Post-settlement peace secretariats can be multilateral, building on increased trust among the parties, such as South Africa's National Peace Secretariat. They may also undergo an organisational transformation and consolidation, for instance from a secretariat into a ministry as occurred in Nepal.

In 2004, Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba established a High-Level Peace Committee supported by a secretariat to assist the government negotiation team. There had been no formal governmental structures

to support the talks between the state and the Maoists in 2001 or 2003, and the secretariat signalled a new approach. The secretariat gradually developed the capacities of a resource centre, eventually hosting consultative talks with civil society and serving as communication channel for the government to engage with donors. A peace deal between the Nepalese government and the Maoist insurgents was signed in 2006.

For non-state armed groups, peace secretariats can provide an organisational structure and often a first official 'address' to help them engage in dialogue. Establishing a secretariat early in a nascent peace process can help an armed group build a foundation of required skills and expertise, as well as trusted contact points and communication channels. Secretariats can provide the logistical support needed to overcome the restrictions on freedom of movement or safe passage faced by non-state armed groups.

> **Establishing a secretariat early in a nascent peace process can help an armed group build a foundation of required skills and expertise.**

Secretariats are usually established close to powerholders, for example in a prime minister's office in the case of a state conflict party, which can leave them open to criticism of being opaque and exclusive. The South African secretariat, for example, was accused of undue government influence over its supposedly common, all-party structure. The peace secretariats of non-state armed groups also usually cater to a narrowly defined and relatively constant set of powerful actors within the group, raising concerns over representation and legitimacy.

Secretariats' roles are often poorly documented due to the confidentiality of ongoing peace talks or conflict parties not being predisposed to keeping written records. As part of the parties' 'internal affairs', the staffing and mandates of secretariats are also often politicised.

In most cases, peace secretariats are set up as temporary support structures that will expire once peace talks are finished, with a limited mandate, clear instructions and a defined role within the hierarchies of the conflict party that limits their influence and clarifies their relationship with the party leadership in order to avoid internal rivalry. While this can help secretariats to fulfil their role, it can also limit their potential to innovate and adapt, for example to take on new tasks, expand into other areas of responsibility, or develop alternative approaches to conflict resolution.

Changes of leadership affect a party's peace discourse and strategy. Although this can affect all conflict parties, state-affiliated peace secretariats are especially prone to changes of political direction – and often of key staff – sometimes with detrimental repercussions for peace. For example, when a new round of fighting broke out in Sri Lanka in 2007–08, the secretariats of the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) effectively transformed into propaganda machines for the war.

Peace secretariats and early phases of peace processes
Peace secretariats have traditionally been established when conflict parties are actively preparing for peace talks – often when a peace process is well under way and secretarial support is required. But there are examples of equivalent peace support architecture established much earlier on. The Afghan High Peace Council's secretariat, for example, was established as a cornerstone of President Hamid Karzai's approach to peace and national reconciliation in 2010, when there was little movement towards organised peace talks. Its activities were focused on creating consensus among Afghan political factions about a peace process with the Taliban, but also included confidence-building measures like prisoner exchanges. (For more on Afghanistan, see the article 'Navigating local and central dynamics – Peacemaking with the Taliban' in this edition.)

Moreover, peace processes are not linear and are prone to stalling, collapse and starting over. Peace secretariats may, therefore, repeatedly experience *de facto* 'new' and pre-formal phases. The Colombian Office of the High Commission for Peace, for instance, was created to support peace dialogue 20 years ago and has remained active as the main governmental body to explore, design and lead peace and humanitarian negotiations with several armed groups. (For more discussion on conflict parties with a focus on Colombia, see the articles 'Building political will for dialogue – Pathways to peace talks in Colombia' and 'Deciding on dialogue – Pathways out of violence for armed opposition movements in Myanmar and the Basque Country'.)

Four functions of peace secretariats are relevant to informal or early phases of peace processes. These are discussed in more detail below.

Theme 1. *Commitment and political will*
Establishing a peace secretariat can demonstrate parties' resolve to adopt a new approach or change of political direction. For example, Sri Lanka's Secretariat for the Coordination of the Peace Process was established in early February 2002 before a ceasefire agreement had officially been signed. Given the government's experience of earlier

talks, for which it had not been well prepared, the secretariat was intended to professionalise the management of talks, coordinate government activities and assist its interaction with the LTTE and the Norwegian facilitator.

Within a very short time, the LTTE also established its own secretariat as a counterpart to the government structure and as a (much-contested) attempt to signal parity of status.

> **"A peace secretariat can demonstrate parties' resolve to adopt a new approach or change of political direction."**

Later, the political parties representing Muslim communities founded their own secretariat with the aim to position themselves as another – albeit unarmed – party of the conflict and to promote their inclusion in the peace process.

Conversely, a weak secretariat can also show a lack of resolve. In Myanmar in 2016, the new government replaced the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) with the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC). The MPC was established in 2012 to support the peace process and negotiation of bilateral ceasefires. The NRPC is widely regarded as poorly led and staffed, limited to logistical functions and as such a reflection of the current government's political priorities. (See the article 'Unsticking stalled peace processes – Insider mediator perspectives from Myanmar' in this edition for more background.)

Theme 2. *Accessibility and preparations*

Armed groups can be hard to contact. Many operate without obvious official organisational structures and often in hiding, particularly when they are listed as terrorist organisations. A secretariat can improve access to the armed group, including in some cases with a first official 'address' – like the Afghan Taliban's political office in Doha. Such offices can provide a reliable contact point for an armed group. This is useful in the early phases of peace processes, for preparatory meetings, direct contact with officials before the formal talks begin, or as an entry-point to building negotiation skills – helping groups to prepare arguments, clarify positions or simply know what to expect during different rounds of talks and how to organise their representation. Armed groups that have been isolated for long periods of time may be especially in need of such support.

State conflict parties may be wary that formalising organisational structures for non-state conflict parties implies parity of status. In Sri Lanka, for example, the

LTTE developed increasingly elaborate political and administrative structures to complement its military outfit as part of its own statebuilding efforts. The Taliban established a political office in Qatar in 2013 with the support of United Sates and Qatari governments. This met strong resistance from the Afghan government, provoked by the Taliban raising their flag and identifying their office as belonging to the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan', both of which symbolised the Taliban's 1996–2001 period of rule in Afghanistan. The Taliban temporarily closed the office. It became operational again after guarantees it would be used exclusively to support peace talks.

Theme 3. *Connection and coordination*

Peace secretariats can play an important role in developing good working relations among conflict parties in the early phases of peace processes, which can also help in later stages to navigate impasses. This might include confidence-building measures like exchanges of prisoners, coordinating transport and treatment of injured fighters, facilitating socio-economic support measures, and even helping to reintegrate demobilised combatants.

At the beginning of the peace talks in 2003, the Sri Lankan government and LTTE secretariats developed relatively informal, cordial relations between their respective staff – partly credited to the personal attitude of the respective directors at the time, but also encouraged as part of confidence building. The secretariats facilitated the initial work of various sub-committees dealing with specific issues and the delegations' travel to several rounds of talks outside the country. Initially they managed to maintain functional working contacts even when the talks stalled, and formal relations soured. The secretariats participated in informal and 'track two' dialogue as well as in official talks, which helped to bridge deep divides between the two sides.

In Myanmar in 2017, representatives of ethnic armed groups that had signed the so-called nationwide ceasefire with the government in 2015 wished to enhance their ability to engage in the peace process. Despite anxieties from some donors that such a secretariat represented inappropriate institutionalisation, the (then) eight ceasefire-signatory groups established an office to improve their preparations for peace negotiations, and to support internal coordination and with other elements of the peace architecture, like the NRPC and the ceasefire-related Joint Monitoring Committee. The secretariat office is located near to these institutions, ostensibly to promote better communication. It builds on pre-existing informal efforts by NGOs to provide secretariat-style support during earlier informal periods, and mirrors to some extent the work of the NRPC, which is also tasked with supporting and coordinating the activities of different peace bodies at national, regional and local levels.

When peace talks stall, negotiators stop talking. But this does not mean that all contacts need to cease. Peace secretariats can continue to be active, offering an entry point for communication in addition to other less formal contacts or backchannels. During later stages of the last Sri Lankan peace process, for example, when official meetings were difficult, the constructive relationship and continued contact between the parties' secretariats included a dedicated phone line between their two offices. But as tensions escalated and a return to war loomed, even the phone line was eventually cut.

Peace secretariats can be officially mandated to keep working for peace when a process is interrupted. Even during the most violent years in Colombia, the peace secretariat kept various informal and formal, direct and indirect channels open with armed actors, facilitators

ROLES OF PEACE SECRETARIATS IN PROMOTING PATHWAYS TO PEACE

Identifying and supporting measures and gestures to build confidence and trust.

Supporting internal coordination and with other elements of peace architecture.

Providing learning opportunities and briefings on policy issues and process concerns for negotiating parties and teams.

Trusted contact point and communication channel – informal and formal, direct and indirect channels.

Engagement with civil society, the public and international actors, and effective documentation of meetings.

Building a foundation of skills and expertise within negotiating parties and advisers.

Logistical support such as travel, visas, free passage, and events.

Problem solving through personal relationships

Arranging knowledge exchanges and learning events

Managing peace process etiquette

Documentation

Briefings to civil society, donors and the media

Logistics

Supporting political relationships
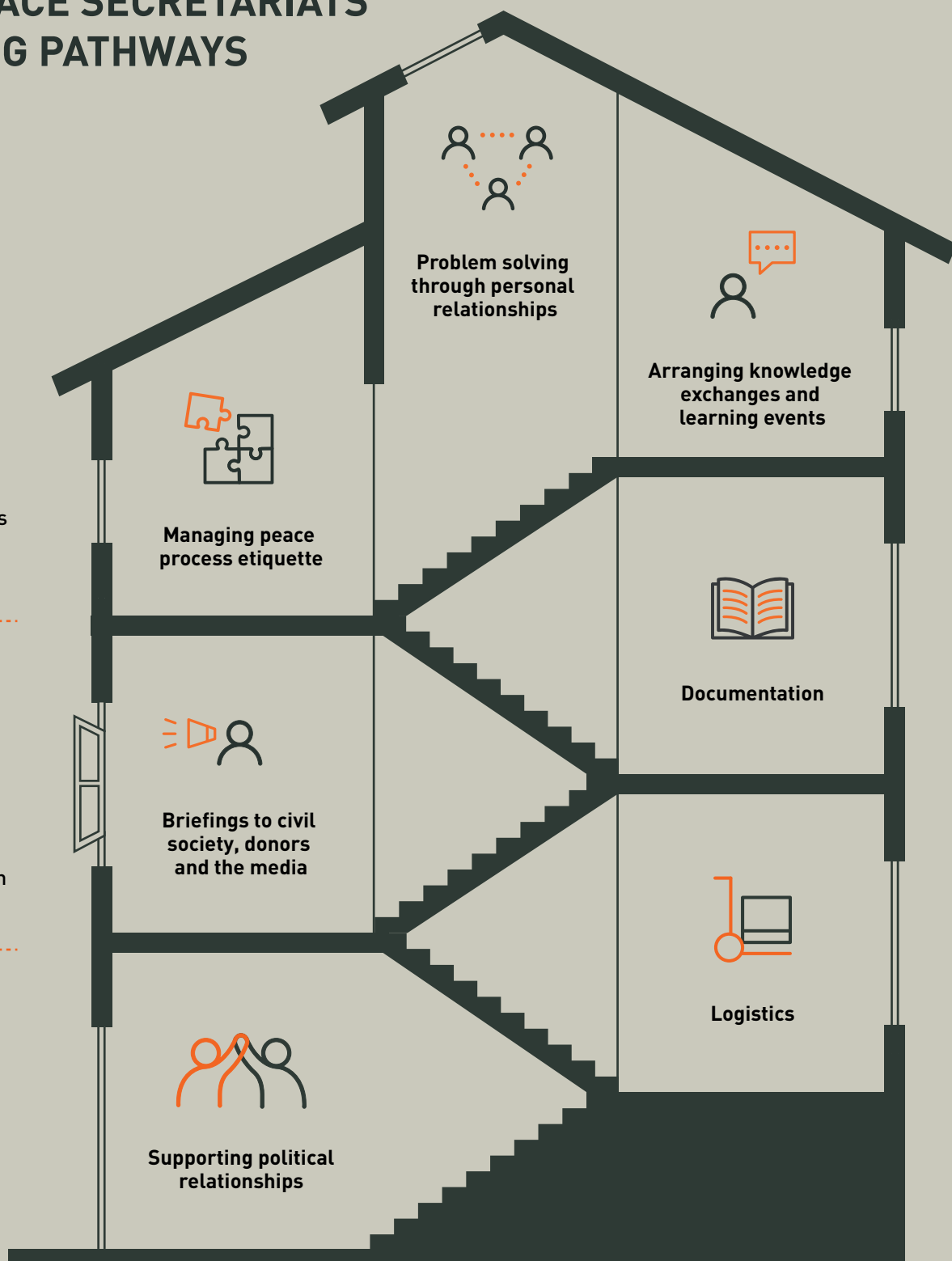
and mediators, to explore pathways to facilitating humanitarian access or to revitalising peace efforts. The presidencies of Álvaro Uribe (2002–10) and Iván Duque Márquez (2018– today) maintained a public stance against any peace negotiations with insurgencies in Colombia, but in practice both kept regular, secret contact with armed actors to explore opportunities for dialogue.

Secretariats can also be revived after a period of silence. The Taliban political office in Qatar maintained a low profile for some years after 2013. In that period, some Taliban were able to meet with government officials or civil society at track two events in Qatar and elsewhere. The office became more visibly active when informal talks were facilitated by the 'Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs' in 2015 and 2016. The office has more recently played important roles during direct talks with the US government from 2018–20. The presence in the office of long-time representatives such as the spokesperson of the Taliban in Doha and former Taliban ministers and diplomats has helped the movement to remain accessible.

Conversely, when secretariats or similar organisations are deliberately shut down, their institutional memory is often lost. The Sri Lankan government's peace secretariat remained active until the very end of the civil war in 2009, but was closed down at short notice – to the surprise of its staff, who had already started to prepare for post-war tasks related to rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-affected areas. No preparations were made to store archives or sustain the expertise of past experiences. The sudden end of the secretariat left a knowledge vacuum within the government administration of how to address post-war needs in a systematic and coordinated manner. After a phase of transition, different government bodies resumed responsibility for various aspects of social cohesion.

Creating space for secretariats to support early dialogue
Secretariats can play an essential role to support informal, early or stalled peace processes – helping to build or maintain bridges between informal and formal channels, making non-state armed groups' accessible and building their confidence to engage in dialogue, and demonstrating states' commitment to find a negotiated solution to armed conflict. The four functions highlighted above show where peace secretariats can most usefully play a preparatory and facilitative role.

Peace secretariats require recognition and support to realise their potential. But they also need leeway and authority to solve problems, guide peacebuilding strategy and think 'outside the box' of political priorities of the day. Such functions need to be mandated by the leaders of conflict parties. Often created in a rush, using loyal staff members and close confidantes not necessarily equipped with the required expertise on conflict resolution, the modalities of peace secretariats do not always receive enough attention.

Whereas the conflict parties 'own' the secretariats and define their mandates, external support during the preparation for peace talks should also extend to peace secretariats. Mediators and other third-party peace supporters should pay more attention to advising conflict parties on the creation and functioning of effective support structures, for example by offering lessons learned and advice on the mandate, functions and scope of peace secretariats. Useful options for consideration might include an explicitly mandated task of providing access to alternative thinking and constructive feedback on negotiation efforts, which also allows for the expression of critical views without being perceived as treacherous. Third parties can also help ensure that secretariats communicate with all stakeholders and consult with civil society in a more inclusive manner, which helps avoid marginalisation of some positions.

Another precondition for effective support structures are qualified staff and resources to perform the required tasks. Again, third-party actors and donors can be helpful. Encouraging and assisting conflict parties to establish or sustain peace secretariats to support their peace process might prove to be a cost-effective investment – given how many processes fail to get off the ground, fall at the first hurdle, stall, fragment or collapse. If sensitive to the political context and carefully monitored and adjusted to changing conditions, secretariats can even support implementation of a peace agreement once it is reached.

Peace secretariats should be part of a wider landscape of peace support actors, networks, organisations and structures – not all of them formal institutions. Their effectiveness is enhanced by understanding their positioning within the broader peace infrastructure and by creating and transforming relationships among various conflict and peace constituencies. This requires consideration of intra – and inter-party peace structures and efforts at different tracks, how they interlink vertically and horizontally, and how complementary they are.

Secretariats – as one element of a wider infrastructure for peace – are defined by their proximity to formal government administration or the hierarchy of armed groups. But such bodies – and the decision-makers who establish them – should also be encouraged to reach out to informal actors and networks, which play an essential role in exploring different pathways to peace, especially in the context of informal and pre-formal efforts to begin a peace process.

Self-determination and peace processes

Pathways and stumbling blocks for conflict resolution

John Packer is Director of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre and Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution in the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa. He previously taught at the Fletcher School (Tufts University) and the University of Essex, held fellowships at Cambridge and Harvard Universities, and has lectured at academic and professional institutions around the world. He worked for 20 years for the UN and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and has advised governments, communities, and other actors in over 50 countries. In 2012–2014, he was the Constitutions and Process Design Expert on the UN Mediation Support Unit Standby Team of Experts. Research areas include the intersection of human rights (including minority rights) and security, conflict prevention and quiet diplomacy, international mediation, transitional arrangements, and institutional developments at domestic and multilateral levels.

Sally Holt is Editorial and Research Manager at Conciliation Resources. Since 2000 she has worked at the intersection of conflict, development and human rights, specialising in minority rights, for policy-oriented research centres, NGOs and intergovernmental organisations. She has been Deputy Director at the Democratic Progress Institute, an NGO working on conflict resolution in Turkey, held research positions at Bradford University (Peace Studies) and the Centre on Human Rights in Conflict, University of East London, and served as a Legal Officer at the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. Sally holds an MA in Understanding and Securing Human Rights from the University of London.

Many contemporary violent conflicts result in or arise from claims of self-determination (SD), explicitly or by implication, in disputes over distribution of power, access to resources or other substantive issues. SD conflicts have consistently accounted for some 50 per cent of armed conflicts since the 1960s according to Uppsala University Conflict Data (see further reading). As Louise Arbour has observed, these conflicts represent a 'confluence of law, politics, power, economics and identity'. They often pivot on deep-rooted socio-psychological issues of religious or cultural identity. Where a group is or perceives itself to be systematically discriminated against, marginalised, or disadvantaged within a state, SD is pursued, often over generations at great individual and collective cost. This article introduces the normative framework and state of international relations which provide the reference points for addressing such conflicts. It then examines a set of challenges for peacemaking arising from SD conflicts, particularly in the pre-formal and 'early' phases, before offering suggestions for third parties seeking to encourage and support conflict actors into dialogue.

Protracted conflicts in a turbulent world

SD disputes and claims typically arise out of frustration with denial of human rights, unaddressed grievances, failed negotiations or violent repression. It is increasingly understood that such frustrated SD claims may in time become accompanied by violence. The Minorities at Risk dataset found a gap of approximately ten years between articulation of grievance and eruption of violence, whereas the Self-Determination Movements dataset argues this is about six years. Thus, early action is critical to interrupt this trajectory. Crucially, the longer the dispute goes unresolved, the more entrenched positions and narratives become. These conflicts are protracted, lasting 30 years on average, again according to the Self-Determination Movements dataset. There are many examples ranging from contexts as diverse as Western

Sahara, Transdniestria, Myanmar and West Papua. This timespan sees many processes often engaging third and fourth generation diaspora all over the world.

The contemporary backdrop to such conflicts is a fast-changing global order. The pathways for addressing grievances depend on what channels are already in place for engaging in dialogue and negotiating difference. Resolving SD conflicts is more challenging than ever in a global political environment associated with a diminution in respect and application of international law, rising populism, virulent nationalism, and unilateralism. Action to address such conflicts tends to be ad hoc, reactive, and late. Attention tends to come after conflicts have boiled over and threaten the interests of other states. While norms have developed that can help analyse and address this kind of dispute (for more information, see the Box overleaf), the international legal framework has shortcomings. Notably, the lack of an effective recourse mechanism for the settlement of a SD claim means responses are politicised, turn on power relations, and almost always prove inadequate. As such, situations and claims go unaddressed or run aground when belatedly taken up.

Robust democracies equipped with the political institutions and systems that enable diverse groups to pursue their interests and claims through effective political participation remain the exception rather than the rule. For over a decade democracy has been in retreat. It should be noted however that the 'level' of democracy does not necessarily correlate with attitudes in favour of SD. For example, in Kazakhstan, where no elections have ever met international standards, the Assembly of the Nations of Kazakhstan reflects a state policy of multi-ethnic social revival, self-preservation and unity, and promotion of multicultural development. Meanwhile, many countries generally recognised as democracies still discriminate against minorities and indigenous peoples. Some of the world's largest democracies (eg India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Brazil) face major challenges in managing diversity and SD claims of varying kinds. Nor have the old, Western democracies resolved their persistent conflicts or SD claims – whether of indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities in Canada or national SD movements in France, Belgium, Spain, the UK or elsewhere in Europe.

Historical oppression, exclusion, exploitation, and injustice are among the origins and drivers of SD claims. Legacies of colonialism include the imposition of borders in attempts to create new nation states (or divide some) with little or no regard for the distribution and ethnic and cultural ties of those living there. In protracted conflicts, unmet or disrespected agreements may stick fast in

conflict narratives – as is the case with the Panglong agreement signed by General Aung San and ethnic leaders in Myanmar in 1947, which promised SD and democratic rights but was never implemented.

Peacemaking challenges
There are persistent difficulties with resolution of SD claims. Fears, misunderstandings, historical experiences, and mistrust, as well as the nature of achieving political change, all combine here to beset these conflicts with challenges long before formal negotiations take hold. The next section outlines five recurrent challenges (amongst many) for forging dialogue. These are commonly associated with misunderstandings about SD and its implications.

Challenge 1. *Allaying fears that self-determination always equates to division and separation*
States tend to equate SD claims with secession. They are thus wary of contacts and encounters that might legitimise the interests of claimants, lest they exacerbate internal tensions and lend recognition to insurgents, rebel groups, 'terrorists', or others (however labelled by states). This can happen even if claims are not framed explicitly in terms of SD, but where the state interprets them as such. This is the case for the Rohingya who have consistently claimed equal rights of citizenship and recognition as an ethnic group within the existing state of Myanmar while eschewing 'separatism'. Territorial gains by separatist movements tend to intensify government concerns that *any* informal interaction implies recognition of the claim to independence. For example, Azerbaijan has long refused all contact with the authorities (and indeed the population) of Nagorny Karabakh.

Mistrust of the notion of SD can also reflect an ideological resistance to the concept of group rights, including minority rights, indigeneity, and the like. This is seen in states that adhere to the French Republican model of the unitary state (eg Turkey, Greece, Egypt), as well as in some non-unitary states that nonetheless promote the singularity of the 'national' community (eg Indonesia's state ideology of *Pancasila*).

The call for SD typically follows long experience of disrespect or disregard of the rights, needs, interests and aspirations of a group or population. Out of frustration, claimants may jump straight to demands for SD, without considering whether this is the most effective way to achieve their aims. In Yemen, for example, the Southern Movement (*al-Hirak*) refers to SD and calls for 'independence'. Yet the conflict is likely more related to issues of poor governance than to identity. The pressing conflict drivers are access to natural resources (including scarce fresh water) and related environmental concerns that will not be solved by creating an independent state. In other cases, a SD movement may already have achieved control

International normative frameworks for understanding and responding to self-determination conflicts

Under the UN Charter, all states are equal in their sovereignty and must respect other states' jurisdiction over their territories and populations. The Charter also requires states to cooperate in maintaining peace and security, including respect for human rights. This raises a fundamental question: if a state is unable or unwilling to protect the security and well-being of SD claimants in its jurisdiction, do other states or the international community have a residual obligation to intervene? There is a duty on all member states to exhaust all peaceful means for settling their disputes, including through mediation and negotiation. Failing that the UN Security Council is mandated to address conflicts which constitute a threat to international peace and security.

Article 1(2) of the UN Charter stipulates 'respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples'. Expression of SD as a category and a right is articulated in Article 1 common to the two international covenants for human rights adopted in 1966, as follows:

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) provide that '*All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*' (common Article 1(1)). States must promote the realisation of this right in conformity with the provisions of the UN Charter. Thus, SD is inextricably linked to peace and development – core objectives of the UN Charter.

SD was further elaborated in the context of decolonisation, and later applied to cases of foreign occupation and racist regimes such as Rhodesia and South Africa through the UN General Assembly resolution 1514(XV) of 1960, followed by UN GA resolution 2625(XXV) of 1970 which adopted the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Declaration identified three modes of implementing the right of SD: 'The establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free association or integration with an independent State or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people'. These modes of implementation are essentially remedial.

Post-Cold War interpretation broadened the meaning further linking SD with the evolving notion of democratic sovereignty, whereby the legitimacy of authority depends on the consent of the governed and public trust in state institutions. In short, SD has evolved along two lines of distinction:

» **External SD** involving secession resulting in complete political and legal independence. The right to establish a separate state in cases of colonialism, a racist regime or foreign occupation, has subsequently extended to apply – in exceptional circumstances following exhaustion of all alternatives – where a people suffers sustained repression to an extent equivalent to one of those three categories where the will to secede is clearly expressed. Few cases have met this threshold. The Republic of South Sudan did so in 2011, becoming the newest member state of the United Nations following a deliberate, negotiated process and agreement followed by a referendum with near unanimous support. For some, the 2008 Kosovo declaration of independence should arguably also qualify (despite strong contention) on the combined grounds of the abject illegitimacy of imposed Serbian authority with ongoing repression, the exhaustion of effective alternatives, and the evident threat to international peace and security, as well as the will of the people expressed by an overwhelming majority in a referendum.

» **Internal SD** has evolved to mean the enjoyment of SD rights by a people within the territory of an existing state, i.e. short of secession. This broadly entails autonomy over certain aspects of governance, often related to minority identity such as language, religion, and culture, political participation, public administration, economic and social development, policing, and justice, and transfrontier relations. These situations are amenable to management or resolution within existing or modified governance arrangements within the same state, through mechanisms like federalism or other forms of decentralisation. One example is the special autonomy arrangement for Aceh in Indonesia (pursuant to a negotiated peace agreement). Central state authorities generally maintain control over core areas such as frontiers, monetary policy, defence, and taxes, but in some cases arrangements may enter these spheres – perhaps to be shared – stopping short of independence or statehood. Non-territorial arrangements for self-governance can also meet demands for recognition of linguistic, religious, or other identity rights, as in the case of language communities in Belgium. These are more suited than territorial arrangements for dispersed populations, i.e. where members of a cultural community are not all concentrated in one geographical area or regions. Guidance for such forms of self-governance has been most developed in the Euro-Atlantic space (see further reading) but is far from limited to it.

over many aspects of governance (eg. education, language, and culture) yet still aspire to SD. The ambition then is more symbolic than one that can be met with practical arrangements for self-governance.

Challenge 2. *Understanding and balancing rights and claims*
SD does not necessarily threaten the rights of others though it is often perceived as such, generating fear and resistance which can block pathways to dialogue. Fears can be manipulated (notably by unscrupulous actors or 'ethnic entrepreneurs') playing groups off against one another or seeking to undermine the movements' cohesion by highlighting (real or perceived) lack of inclusion within them, or divided interests and multiple or overlapping identities amongst members of the group.

> " **Conflict parties that are seeking self-determination are often excluded from the early stages of peacemaking.** "

It is important to observe that, as a matter of coherence, the right of SD is a qualified right and models exist to ensure its enjoyment by one group does not damage the rights of others. This is expressly so for the right of SD in the two UN Covenants which, pursuant to Article 5(1) of the ICCPR, limits the right of 'any State, group or person [...] to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms recognized [...] in the present Covenant.' Notably, in situations where territorial self-governance for one group risks creation of 'minorities within minorities', measures can be put in place to protect the minority within the self-governed territory as they would for a minority group within the state as a whole. For example, such protection was negotiated for ethnic Ukrainians constituting a minority within the Autonomous Republic of Crimea by means of entrenching the autonomy within the (otherwise) unitary state of the Republic of Ukraine (with its ethnic Ukrainian majority) and its constitutional safeguards against secession. All rights, needs and interests need to be respected and creative compromise and accommodations need to be found to do so.

Nevertheless, conflict parties that are seeking SD are often excluded from the early stages of peacemaking, out of concern that the SD claim might dominate the agenda and damage attempts to initiate dialogue. For example, the systematic disregard of grievances expressed by the Anglophones in Cameroon has given rise to the exclusion of certain community representatives in current or nascent peace processes. Tactical exclusion of particular groups or constituencies can have negative implications for

peacemaking in terms of both actors and agenda. Aside from the principles of equality and non-discrimination at stake, failure to include certain groups at any point risks generating greater claims and conflict in the future.

In assessing the nature and implications of grievances (claimed and real) it should be recognised that these may be more strongly felt by groups who face discrimination based on language, culture, and religion. Once a sense of identity-related grievance is entrenched it becomes hard to shift. Cases involving Indigenous peoples, whose whole way of life is tied to the land, are existential by their nature and difficult to negotiate. However, it is not always a question of negotiating control of or access to a finite resource like oil or land; it may be more about recognising and accommodating difference which can be achieved through a vast array of arrangements, including devolved governance and power-sharing arrangements. For example, the successful 2019 Bougainville independence emerged from a lengthy power-sharing arrangement. Measures that do not necessarily require significant material resources such as political declarations, apologies, and status, can also go far in addressing grievances and claims.

Challenge 3. *Navigating sensitivities about terminology, recognition, and status*
Wariness and confusion about the meaning of SD can see parties fixate unhelpfully on terminology or have differing understandings of the same term. Considerable time, sometimes decades, is spent by intermediaries and peace process support entities shuttling back and forth between conflict parties to find acceptable terminology and framing.

> " **Many self-determination conflicts reach a peacemaking impasse due to labelling.** "

Many SD conflicts reach a peacemaking impasse due to labelling. Governments sometimes refuse to acknowledge the significance or even existence of SD conflicts, classifying the claimants as 'terrorists' or criminals, and thus a 'law and order' problem. This problem is acute in situations where SD claimants have already resorted to organised protests, civil disobedience, rebellion, or other ways of contesting state authority. The effect of official proscription makes provision of international support difficult and complicates efforts of mediation (as described in the article on Ogaden in this *Accord*). Examples include the designation of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka as a terrorist organisation, as well as the characterisation by the British government and Unionists of long-running political violence in Northern Ireland as a problem of 'terrorism'. In this case

the British government portrayed the role of state forces as being primarily that of peacekeeping between the 'two communities'. The UK's belated recognition in the Good Friday Agreement 'that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination' proved crucial for peace.

Leaders of SD movements may also insist on recognition of their status as politically independent leaders of a contested territory as a precondition for dialogue. For example, the *de facto* government in Abkhazia has resisted peacemaking initiatives that are framed as a step towards re-establishing Georgia's territorial integrity – ie that go through Georgia, have to be approved by the Georgian authorities, or do not refer to Abkhaz leaders as representing an independent state. Similarly, the name given to the territory in question by different actors may be an obstacle to initiating dialogue as in the cases of Nagaland in north-east India and Ambazonia in Cameroon.

Challenge 4. *Inclusivity, representation, internal dynamics*
No group is homogenous despite expectations from governments, or some in mediation support roles. Proponents of SD come in many forms, including political parties, social movements, feminist groups, religious and community leaders, and individuals acting in their own interests. There are often diverse views internally in relation to the groups' grievances, demands and strategies, including the use of violence. Despite the allure and myths of liberation struggles, many groups seeking SD are not inclusive, representative, or 'democratic' and frequently suffer leadership gaps, with older men dominating decision-making for decades on end.

> **Claims evolve over years as factions and generations within the same community develop different visions of self-determination.**

Claims also evolve over years as factions and generations within the same community develop different visions of SD. Demographic or other changes may alter the situation. For example, in Spain the Basque SD movement's leaders' gradual acceptance that they could not win their struggle militarily and their decision to seek a negotiated solution exposed many different perspectives and goals within the movement. (For more details on this process, see the article 'Deciding in dialogue – Pathways out of violence for armed opposition groups in Myanmar and the Basque Country' in this edition.)

In the absence of internalised democratic and human rights principles, dispositions may not exist to negotiate and resolve various SD conflicts. Dispositions may also change. For example, a movement against dictatorship (eg the Burmese opposition under Aung San Suu Kyi), may assume a different stance on human rights once in power. In effect, such moral inconsistency can profoundly undermine the legitimacy of groups which seek SD due to their own authoritarian character.

On the other hand, some non-state conflict parties prioritise inclusion as part of their resistance to the actual or perceived exclusive policies of the state. In Turkey, for example, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) espouses inclusion and gender equality and seeks to promote these ambitions in its approach to peacemaking. (See the article on Syria in this edition exploring the challenges of implementing such an inclusive approach.)

In the last 20 years there has been a momentous effort to explore inclusion in all its aspects in peace processes including representation of half the population – women – and young people (often in fact the majority) and minority groups within minority populations (eg religious minorities within an oppressed ethnic group). Techniques such as national dialogues have come to the fore as a model for greater inclusivity. National dialogues can be a cathartic process of peacefully airing grievances and expressing claims, providing forums to discuss fundamental questions such as identity and belonging, distribution of resources and wealth, and power relations. To be sure, they are not without challenges and can be or become delinked from formal political negotiations. They can also raise expectations in communities of political change that may be distant or prove unsatisfying. Many political movements and armed groups are not used to 'listening' to communities under their control and there are examples, Myanmar comes to mind, of national dialogues that reinforce exclusion and manifest edict-style 'dialogue' by some non-state armed actors. Arguably, resort to national dialogues comes too late – once violence has already erupted – as an instrument of conflict resolution rather than prevention.

Challenge 5. *Engaging and managing other states*
Self-determination movements receive support from external actors, whether well-organised diaspora, international NGOs, or patron states. In an era of increasingly toxic geopolitics and proxy wars this is a major challenge that is likely set to grow. External backing, particularly from patron or kin-states, can heighten anxieties about secession. History has shown that these fears are not unfounded. But external backing for SD movements is not unlawful, if it proceeds through peaceful

means (although it will surely be perceived as unfriendly). The territorial state may resist this external support (or 'interference') and the involvement of international mediators as it endeavours to undercut SD claims and frame the conflict as an internal 'problem' amenable to law and order solutions. For example, external involvement in the SD processes in Catalonia and the Basque Country have long been rejected by Spain. Sometimes external powers prefer the situation not to be resolved as the status quo serves their interests, for example by giving them access to resources that might be curtailed if SD succeeds. Western Sahara and Transdniestria are cases in point. Narrow interests tend to prevail over conflict resolution and the longer-term interests of local populations.

Conclusion and recommendations
Finding pathways to peace in SD conflicts is fraught with missteps and difficulties for insider mediators as well as external actors. Peace support actors and intermediaries grapple in their efforts to assist conflict parties and communities to move from zero-sum positions to appreciation of the wider range of possibilities generated through concessions and compromises. Each conflict is of course so context specific that we must be careful about generalisations. However, after decades of intense support to address such conflicts there is a core body of effective practice to draw upon. The suggestions below reflect this, and also look to the future for ways

in which peacemaking practice can be elevated to support resolution of these persistent conflicts.

> ❝ **Stakeholder and power analyses should consider the rights and claims of different constituencies.** ❞

First, astute and inclusive political analysis is essential for navigating the possible tensions between the rights of different groups within the state and of constituencies within them. Stakeholder and power analyses should consider the rights and claims of different constituencies, how options for their implementation in practice impact on the rights of others, current and consistent application of relevant norms, and what arrangements would help balance the needs and interests of different groups and reconcile differences.

Clear-eyed analysis also requires mapping and understanding of the motivations, aims, forms of power, strategies, and tactics of different actors. This includes understanding the composition and internal dynamics of different groups as well as relations amongst them. Increasingly, digital innovations are of benefit here for gauging sentiments and devising ways to shift toxic

Pro-Scottish independence march in Glasgow, Scotland on 11 January 2020. © NurPhoto via Getty Images

narratives and discourse. (In this edition, the article 'Digital analysis – Peacemaking potential and promise' provides an overview of developments.) Comprehensive analysis includes demographic data and trends; power distribution/s (territorial, administrative divisions and mandates, as well as non-territorial cultural autonomy arrangements); key actors and relationship dynamics; forms of violence, repression, resistance and social mobilisation; and conflict resolution and management scenarios.

Second, one size does not fit all. There is no one model that can be applied in all circumstances. Real experiences (positive and negative) of developing and implementing policy and law inform practical responses to commonly confrontational issues around inclusion, representation, and diversity, as well as the clash of competing visions for development. Responses with alternatives can be carefully tailored and supported with suggestions based on analysis of the issues, demands, needs, and interests in terms of what is reasonable, proportionate, and ultimately persuasive in the situation. Conflict parties and communities can be supported to develop their understanding of the meaning and content of SD and explore possible avenues for meeting demands that do not require secession. Making the arguments and providing examples of effective diversity management that accommodate difference and respect the rights of all within the state's jurisdiction can inform this process. Options include different forms of shared or devolved governance including all kinds of power sharing and forms of effective participation at the central level, as well as various models of decentralisation. Scenario development with conflict parties and communities, including exploration of non-territorial models of self-governance beyond territorial or power-sharing arrangements that parties may be more familiar with, can open new possibilities for reframing claims and reaching agreements.

Third, mediation and peace process support entities can – if credible, effective, and open to adaptation – play invaluable roles in accompanying conflicting parties and communities caught in conflict to clarify understandings, aspirations and demands. Critical evidence-informed support is vital for thinking through context-specific subjective aims and what is needed to meet them. Central to this role is advice on the consequences of invoking and advancing specific concepts, claims and terms. Peace support actors can also identify or create informal channels valuable for testing ideas and reframed claims, and for building relationships. This type of work requires time, patience, and flexible donors with bandwidth for

'failing forward' as this area of peace process support requires repeat and persistent efforts.

Finally, peace support actors are well-positioned to build professionalism and bolster specialised knowledge in conflict prevention, management, and resolution – starting with early dialogue – among CSOs, insider mediators and influencers at national and sub-national levels. Knowledge and skills support can enhance the effectiveness of those engaged in conflict, security and mediation roles in international and regional inter-governmental organisations, particularly regarding substantive understanding of the breadth of arrangements available for addressing SD conflicts and their advantages and drawbacks depending on contextual variables. This should include an understanding of available (albeit limited) international recourse mechanisms for dealing with SD conflicts. For example, adjudication on a SD claim brought by Indigenous people before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (as in the case of *Lhaka Honhat Association (Our Land) vs. Argentina)* may not resolve the problem (due to lack of implementation by the respondent state), but can affect the terms of subsequent negotiation. Related to this, the creation of more robust international recourse mechanisms would support the development of principled and consistent responses in addressing SD claims in contrast to the current prevalence of politicised and inadequate responses. Measures could include revitalisation for the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the UN General Assembly and improved operationalisation of the two UN Covenants and their supervisory bodies which currently do not treat SD claims under common Article 1.

There is no doubt that the notion of SD and the variety of claims to which it has given rise are among the most complex and thorny issues of international relations. Careful unpacking of situations to understand their causes, dynamics and options for resolution is essential. This knowledge needs to be cultivated across a range of actors and applied as early as possible – when the chances for success are greatest and before positions become hardened, irreparable harm is done and violence envelopes the conflict.

International support for civil society involvement in peacemaking in South Sudan

Alex Shoebridge, an Oxfam Peacebuilding Adviser based in Denmark, is involved in supporting civil society peace organisations in South Sudan, at the national and local levels as well as in the refugee community in Uganda. This role includes a specific focus on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Previously Alex worked in the UN system on conflict prevention and peacebuilding focusing on the Middle East and North Africa. Alex holds an MA in Anthropology, with a focus on conflict and fragility, from the Australian National University.

The importance of civil society involvement in peace processes is increasingly recognised. Yet providing effective support to civil society can be challenging for bilateral and multilateral donors, United Nations (UN) agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) alike. Space for civil society in conflict-affected societies is often, and increasingly, contested and constricted. In many conflicts, fractures within civil society mirror the societal fault lines that underpin the violence.

The South Sudan peace process has often been cynically characterised as a negotiation between two sides seeking to 'divide up the cake' of available rents and resources. The inclusion of civil society in the process has helped both to broaden the issues raised at the negotiation table, and to ensure that wider society is more aware of and engaged in it, including South Sudanese refugees. This article focuses on the efforts by international actors in South Sudan to support civil society and the mixed results thus far. It touches on the difficulties of coordination, representation, and legitimacy – perennial challenges in peace processes.

Civil society and different dialogue 'tracks'
Support for civil society engagement in peace processes varies enormously. It spans practical assistance, such as technical support and guidance, subject-specific training and comparative insights gained through study tours or examples of civil society engagement; campaigns, research and advocacy; funding or logistical assistance for workshops and other activities; organisational development support, and much more.

Invoking the concept of multi-track diplomacy, civil society can engage in multiple dialogue 'tracks' in peace processes: formal 'track one' talks between states and conflict parties, and less formal talks, such as 'track two' involving social leaders and influencers, or 'track three' at much more local and grassroots levels. Civil society's experiences of different dialogue tracks in South Sudan has been varied. Its involvement in track one negotiations over the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS, 2015) and the Revitalised ARCSS (R-ARCSS, 2018) has ebbed and flowed. This inconsistency has resulted partly from varying levels of external support, partly from the realities of the exclusive and high-level approach to formal talks, and partly from the level of openness of individual mediators over time.

Track two processes have enjoyed greater donor support with more flexibility and variety, which has helped ensure local civil society receives timely funding support, though

this is often fragmented and rarely sustained. Links between formal and informal peace initiatives are developed in track two processes, which are vital to help mobilise and engage a broader set of stakeholders with different types of influence and access. Track three processes in South Sudan are generally sporadic and under-resourced and features more limited opportunities for civil society involvement. This is affirmed in research by Christian Aid that notes international support for local-level peace initiatives in South Sudan are inconsistently connected 'upwards' to sub-national or national level, and are typically not supported sustainably.

Representation and legitimacy

Legitimate representation is an ever-present challenge for civil society in South Sudan, as in other conflict zones. This difficulty is especially stark in the early phases of peace support or in periods of collapse, when competition for influence amongst civil society actors is more pronounced and when mechanisms for cooperation and coordination are nascent or perhaps at their weakest. Identifying 'legitimate' civil society in the early phases of peace processes is difficult for external actors, often operating to short timeframes in situations of emergency and are likely to have limited local networks. This means that external actors may need to make difficult decisions whether to settle for limited civil society representation if it is not possible to engage more diverse or less accessible civil society.

Organised violence and repressive public policy shrink space for civic engagement, and few actors can openly or officially engage in peacemaking. Less structured civil society entities are often less able to mitigate risks of engaging in dialogue and are more likely to be squeezed out, regardless of their legitimacy, competency, credentials or expertise. Seemingly mundane issues affect civil society's representation and influence, from English language skills and access to passports, to being known among external actors.

> **Organised violence and repressive public policy shrink space for civic engagement, and few actors can openly or officially engage in peacemaking.**

External support can tend to favour 'low-hanging fruit' – the more organised and accessible civil society entities that external actors can more quickly and easily engage with. This typically pivots on an urban bias and a focus on NGOs over smaller community on organisations. Furthermore, the types of local entity deemed eligible for donor support – directly from a donor or sub-contracted via an INGO or the UN –

tend to be those that can spend and account for funds, and have the requisite organisational development to manage reporting, monitoring and evaluation requirements. External actors also often look to national civil society actors, operating in alliances, as stand-alone organisations or as individuals, to represent the authentic 'voice' of civil society – and by extension constituencies of the broader population.

One manifestation of legitimacy concerns is when individuals active in peace promotion are accused of becoming detached from key perspectives, priorities, and interests, especially beyond capitals or major towns. Peace talks are often held outside of the conflict-affected region, and in-country or diaspora elites may be unfairly advantaged due to language skills, location, and access to passports and visas. Local perceptions that peace processes are exclusive run the risk of being reinforced. This has been the case in South Sudan.

Support for civil society peacemaking can also suffer from challenges of reductionism or tokenism, for example in relation to the Women, Peace and Security agenda where over-emphasis on *numbers* of women involved in events has become both conflated with, and displaced efforts to facilitate, meaningful participation and women's abilities to seize opportunities, set and shape agendas, and influence outcomes. This presents further costs for the participants themselves. In South Sudan, support for civil society is typically over-reliant on a comparatively small circle of English-speaking, urban-based women, who as a result suffer exhaustion from multiple demands, diminished credibility and isolation from their constituencies.

Coordination and competition

Coordination during periods of peace process collapse or pre-formal periods can be challenging for donors, INGOs and the UN. It takes time that may not be available early in a peace process, while coordination models from other sectors like the humanitarian cluster system are not necessarily easily transferrable. In times of peace process collapse and crisis coordination, donor attention and engagement also oscillate, reducing the time and appetite for coordination on one hand, while also potentially reducing the 'space' and opportunities for donors to support relevant initiatives.

Groups of Friends and Multi-Donor Trust Fund mechanisms in South Sudan have struggled to enhance complementarity in practice and have often been limited to facilitating internal conversations about what and who members are respectively supporting alongside tensions about credit and attribution. While such information-sharing shows willingness to coordinate, some donors are not yet fully comfortable with ceding influence, intellectual property and transparency to enable greater levels of collaboration and such forums

can struggle to secure a strategic division of labour in support of civil society actors' aspirations and priorities.

The High-Level Revitalization Forum for South Sudan (HLRF) illustrates the challenges of intra-civil society competition combined with poor donor engagement. The HLRF was established under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in June 2017 to bolster the moribund 2015 ARCSS. The HLRF mandate sought to restore a permanent ceasefire and to implement the ARCSS.

During the early phases of the HLRF, numerous South Sudanese civil society organisations and alliances were funded by different donors to engage with the African Union and with the IGAD Special Envoy to South Sudan, Ambassador Ismail Wais. Drawing on different support from multiple donors, each organisation sought to establish itself as the 'genuine' voice of South Sudanese civil society, often without conferring. Wais met with multiple organisations purporting to represent the same constituency, often presenting contradictory perspectives. He implored South Sudanese civil society to engage in a more coordinated and coherent manner.

Looking ahead – indications of better practice
There are promising examples of international actors and civil society working together productively in South Sudan. Cooperation among a group of INGOs subcontracting to local organisations made it possible to support civil society in a flexible way, adjusting project-specific activities and resources towards joint activities or common priorities, ensuring greater transparency and adaptation to the needs, ideas, and interests of civil society actors themselves. This arrangement facilitated coordination, with some INGOs (effectively secondary donors) providing funding for travel,

while others supported specific activities or provided technical expertise. As a result, civil society actors were able to respond to emerging opportunities, including to travel and participate in regional talks, while also in turn helping to strengthen civil society cohesion.

> ❝ **The incentives to compete for influence and visibility seem to be higher than those to collaborate.** ❞

Representatives from the South Sudanese refugee community have been supported to participate in regional meetings on the peace process. Such direct engagement of refugee communities in peace negotiations is quite rare and, given the scale of the South Sudanese refugee population in neighbouring countries, ensured that a substantial section of South Sudanese society was represented in dialogue that would normally have excluded them.

In addition to the INGO mechanism noted above, some INGOs and government donors also regularly coordinate, share perspectives and adjust project timelines and activities to provide complementary and well-timed support, both as individual organisations and via the South Sudanese Civil Society Forum. Although the Forum is a formal body, the group of INGOs is quite informal and fluctuates slightly depending on which INGOs are most active at any time. The Forum is increasingly seen as the key platform for bringing together relevant civil society actors, including for the purposes of coordinating and aligning civil society engagement in peacemaking efforts.

The existence of the Forum has contributed to regular civil society participation, collaboration and cohesion through

agreement on the Forum's strategic priorities and on how its members can contribute to collective realisation of these priorities. In 2019, the Forum embarked on a strategic planning process which sought to leverage the key shared priorities of the member organisations. This has positioned the Forum to be more than an umbrella platform and to be able to move in a common direction when it comes to advocacy as well as activities. This could also potentially create a common entry point for donors to support the Forum and the work of its members, though this remains to be seen.

Conclusion and recommendations

In South Sudan there are many examples of rhetoric and policy commitments from international actors – whether in relation to localisation, conflict sensitivity, or the importance of civil society, especially women's engagement, in peace processes. Yet the inconsistency of concrete application undermines international intentions in support of civil society engagement. The incentives to compete for influence and visibility seem to be higher than those to collaborate. This has led to counterproductive consequences, exacerbating existing tensions within civil society and rendering the sum of efforts to support civil society less than its composite parts. While recognising the inherent tensions and difficulties of this task, not least in contexts where civil society dynamics mirror the complexity and divisions of the broader conflict at large, there are ways donors can adjust their behaviour both individually and collectively.

As argued elsewhere in this *Accord*, funding support to civil society needs to move above the activity and project level to include a pool of unearmarked funding providing CSOs and NGOs with the flexibility to seize opportunities and respond to emerging challenges and shifting circumstances. This could be tested with small budget lines that are unearmarked and spent following discussion with donors on emerging priorities. If these are not spent in a funding cycle, they could be converted to organisational development needs (eg strategic planning facilitation, supporting staff to participate in fee-based learning opportunities). This also relates to the need to provide sustained funding beyond any dialogue activities, and to enable, facilitate or encourage connections across and between tracks.

International actors can innovate in the ways we identify priorities for funding support. Donors including INGOs and the UN need to continue to prioritise finding ways to provide complementary and coordinated support that responds to the needs and priorities identified by civil society, not those pre-determined by external actors. This could involve more

active forms of consultation and soliciting of ideas. Some INGOs and UN actors (particularly political missions) are well-placed to convene and connect; if there is the political will to do so. Such outreach can also be complemented through social media polls, radio programming and talk shows, surveys and the like to tap into ideas beyond urban NGOs.

Smarter mapping of expertise can pinpoint up and coming as well as overlooked actors providing scope for support beyond the 'usual suspects' for funding support and learning opportunities. Collective and regularly updated mapping, now entirely possible through electronic tools, also cuts out the duplication and frayed will that constant mapping by international actors represents to many NGOs and CSOs. There are innovations to draw on such as the USAID-led electronic visualisation and mapping of women's expertise in Myanmar in 2018–19 (see further reading).

Many INGOs and UN agencies are uncomfortable with being regarded as donors. Yet trends in secondary contracting by these entities are well established. As such, those INGOs and UN entities involved in managing large grants and sub-contracting or spearheading consortia play a key role in shaping both the direction and the manner in which support is provided – the 'who' and the 'how'. Changes in practices from these agencies, from procurement to the way in which they interact with civil society actors on a personal basis, can have a big impact.

> **Smarter mapping of expertise can pinpoint up and coming as well as overlooked actors providing scope for support beyond the 'usual suspects'.**

Diverse civil society constituencies are essential for holding conflict parties to account and navigating new political realities particularly in the context of the shrinking political space for civil society. International actors can do more to support constituency-building alongside participation in peace processes. Participation support is vital but so too is longer and slower support for movement and alliance building. Nurturing such connections is an investment in civil society's role in the implementation of any agreements.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Oxfam.

Pathways to peace in Ogaden

Navigating symbolism in early peace talks

Aden Abdi is the Horn of Africa Programme Director at Conciliation Resources. From 2008–2012 Aden was a Senior Programme Officer in the UK Government Department for International Development Somali Programme in Nairobi. He has also worked with International Rescue Committee and CARE International. Aden holds an MA in International Studies from the University of Nairobi.

In 2011, Meles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, asked Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki to facilitate peace negotiations between the federal government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) after nearly 20 years of armed conflict in Ethiopia's Somali region (also known as the Ogaden region). A Kenyan government facilitation team convened the first formal round of talks in Nairobi in September 2012 despite Meles' death the month before.

At the Kenyans' request, Conciliation Resources (CR) provided technical advice to the facilitation team and accompanied the ONLF through peace dialogue with the Ethiopian government, including providing negotiation training, helping to refine positions on substantive issues, advising on process design, supporting consultations with diaspora and refugee communities, and providing inputs on drafting the peace deal.

Talks stopped and started over six years and were beset with difficulties. A window of opportunity opened suddenly in April 2018 after an unexpected and radical change of leadership in Addis Ababa, bringing a raft of rapid reforms including the delisting of the ONLF as a terrorist organisation in June and the removal from power and detention of the powerful Somali regional president, Abdi Mohamud Omer (Abdi 'Iley'), in August. The ONLF declared a unilateral ceasefire in July 2018 and agreed with the Ethiopian government and the new regional president, Mustafe Omer, to open dialogue to resolve core grievances. After several rounds of discussions in Dubai, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the two parties signed a peace declaration

in Asmara, Eritrea, in October 2018. ONLF leaders have since returned to the Somali Regional State (SRS), demobilised their fighters, registered as a political party and are currently in the process of preparing to take part in upcoming Ethiopian elections – which had been due in August 2020, but have been deferred indefinitely.

The path to these breakthroughs was long and steep. This article tracks the ways in which third-party support helped the conflict parties and the Kenya facilitation team to better prepare for and seize opportunities for dialogue. It focuses in particular on how two key sticking points that emerged in the early stages of peace talks in October 2012 and threatened to derail them were successfully navigated. The first was the government's demand that the talks be held within the framework of the constitution – a demand rejected by the ONLF as an affront to their self-determination claims. The second was whether the government negotiation team should include representation from the SRS government, which the ONLF saw as an attempt to characterise the conflict as 'intra- Somali infighting' rather than a self-determination struggle with the federal government.

Background

For more than two decades, the ONLF fought for self-determination for ethnic Somalis in the SRS. The ONLF formed as a secular, nationalist group in 1984. After the overthrow of the Ethiopian military regime in 1991, which brought about an ethnically based federal system, the ONLF won elections for the first SRS regional assembly in 1992. The group turned to armed insurgency in 1994 after the federal state moved against the ONLF-led regional
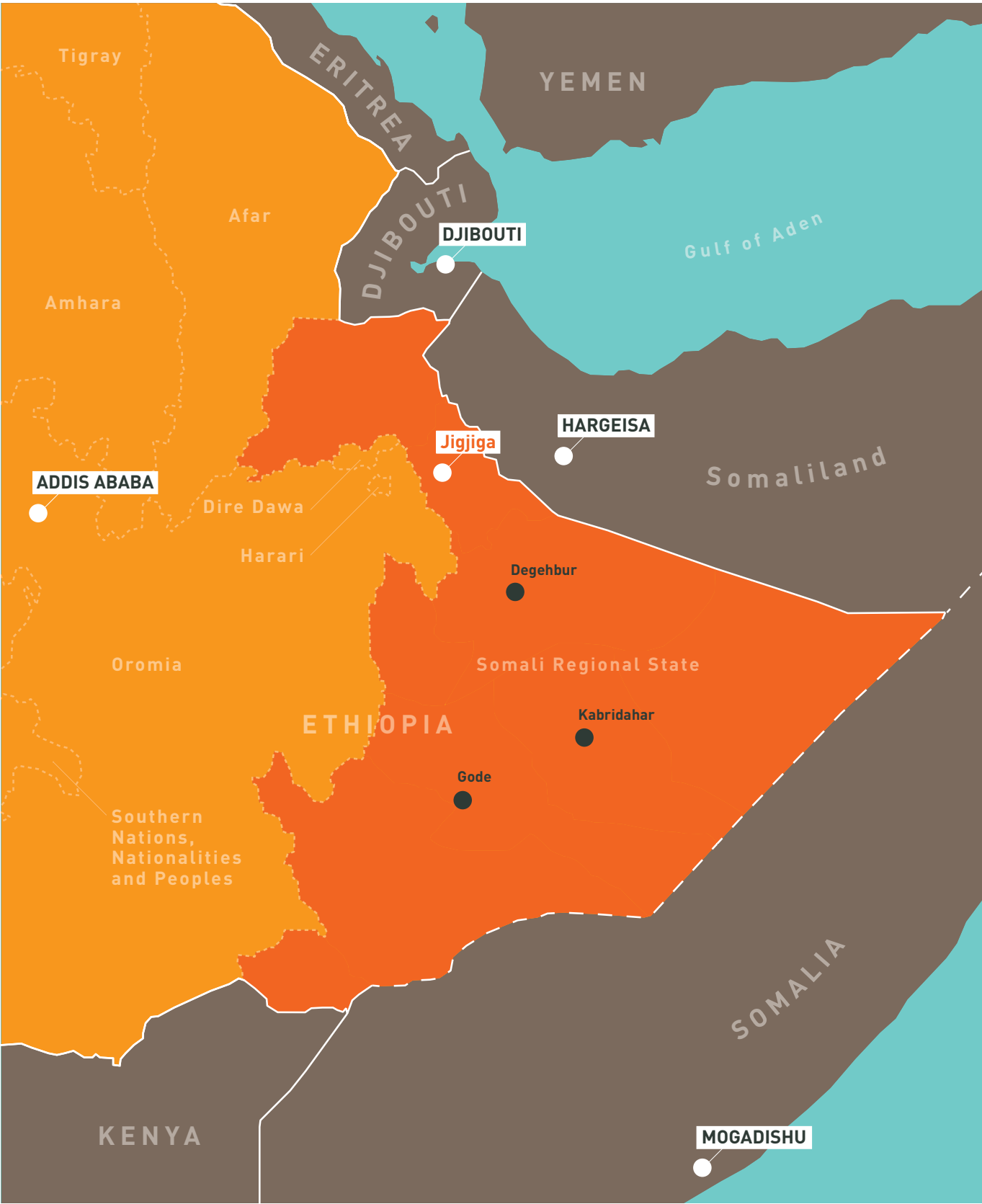
The Somali Regional State is often referred to as the Ogaden, after the majority Ogaden clan that inhabits the region.

This map is illustrative and does not imply the expression of an opinion on the part of Conciliation Resources concerning the delimitation of the borders of the countries and territories featured.

executive by removing the regional president and allegedly arresting and killing several ONLF leaders.

From that point, the region was marked by insecurity, rights violations against civilians, including extra-judicial killing, restricted space for civil society, forced displacement and economic restrictions. The conflict has been a major obstacle to development, including of one of the largest oil and gas reserves in the Horn of Africa. The SRS is consequently one of Ethiopia's poorest states, with a high dependency on food aid. Long-running insurgency and insecurity have led to rounds of displacement and the creation of large refugee and diaspora communities across Kenya, Somalia, Yemen, Eritrea, South Africa, Europe and the USA.

Choosing dialogue
Prime Minister Meles had numerous motives for seeking peace negotiations with the ONLF leadership in 2011 – including his desire for a positive legacy after a cancer diagnosis. The government had an image problem; its human rights record was coming under increased international scrutiny, and stability was needed to encourage foreign direct investment from the West and China, including untapped oil and gas resources in the Ogaden basin.

The increasingly apparent military imbalance contributed to ONLF political leadership pursuing negotiations. Arms supplies from Eritrea and Somalia were cut off as a result of UN sanctions and the Ethiopian military presence inside Somalia following their invasion in 2006. The '*Liyu*' (Amharic for 'special') – a local paramilitary police unit within the SRS created in 2009 and drawn largely from the Somali Ogadeen clan, with a policy of capturing and 'turning' ONLF fighters – was highly effective. Previously Addis Ababa had largely controlled major garrison towns while the ONLF maintained their power base in the hinterland. The arrival of the *Liyu* enabled the federal military to take a back seat, providing logistical support to the *Liyu* to pursue the ONLF in the hinterland. The ONLF also now had to fight fellow Somalis. Torture and collective punishments against civilian population were widespread. Many ONLF combatants retreated to southern Somalia and Kenyan refugee camps, while ONLF political leaders also left the region.

Kenyan facilitation
Kenya has a long history of supporting peace processes in the region, including the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement and Somalia Mbagathi peace process. Kenya was regarded by both sides as sufficiently neutral to play a facilitation role: it maintained a defence pact with Ethiopia, dating back to the 1960s when both states faced irredentist movements backed by Somalia. It also hosted refugees from the SRS, including ONLF leaders, and had been comparatively successful in integrating its ethnic Somalis.

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki appointed a four-person (all male) facilitation team comprising members of parliament and senior government officials, led by the Defence Minister, Mohamed Yusuf Haji, an ethnic Somali. Reporting directly to the president, it was structured to sit outside the national government's institutional framework as officials from key line ministries – foreign affairs, defence, interior and the office of the president – attended the talks as 'observers'. This formulation mitigated Addis Ababa's fears of internationalising the peace process, and the Kenyan government provided security and logistical support to the delegations.

Accompaniment, inclusion and diplomacy
In early 2012 the Kenyan government asked CR to provide technical support for the peace talks. CR provided training and advice to the Kenyan facilitators and helped set up a secretariat, including a dedicated stand-by team of Kenyan and international advisers with expertise in both mediation and the region. A separate team of experts was engaged to support the ONLF to avoid potential conflict of interest. Ahead of the first round of talks, the Kenyan team managed to successfully broker a 'Declaration of Principles' setting out the framework for the talks, and an agenda of substantive issues. The team created sufficient space for the delegations to build rapport in the early days of the talks, leading to good personal chemistry between the head of the Ethiopian delegation, Siraj Fegessa, and the Chair of the ONLF negotiation team, Abdirahman Mahdi. CR also provided research and analysis and organised expert sessions, for example linking Horn of Africa and Ethiopia experts with the Kenyan team to explore difficult issues.

Accompanying the ONLF
CR brought together a core group of senior ONLF leaders in London in June 2012 to discuss positions, needs and interests and reach consensus on the negotiation process. This included a simulation exercise designed to anticipate and work through challenges likely to arise in negotiations, as well as activities to share knowledge and experience. Negotiations training aimed to help redress the imbalance in experience between the ONLF and government delegations. The ONLF team were exposed to the vocabulary of negotiation, including how to articulate their interests and reframe maximal demands. A series of workshops organised by CR helped the ONLF refine positions on key issues as part of their negotiation strategy, for example by drawing on experience from Nepal, Sudan, Mindanao, Sri Lanka and elsewhere on negotiating security arrangements and exploring options for ceasefire and cessation of hostilities. Practical assistance included helping to organise logistical support to get the ONLF delegation to and from talks in Nairobi.

Expanding participation – engaging the diaspora and refugees
Access to the SRS was severely restricted. Efforts to broaden participation in the peace process in practice focused on helping to convene meetings among diaspora and refugee communities in the USA, UK and Kenya. The ONLF leaders also organised consultations in Nairobi, London, Berlin, Minneapolis, San Diego and Johannesburg with their cadres and supporters to update them on the status of negotiations and reassure them that they were committed to pursuing their core aim of self-determination through the talks. The message was intended to assuage fears of capitulation and defection, as had occurred in past talks when 'breakaway' groups had joined the government.

Many in the diaspora had suffered the consequences of conflict and favoured a peaceful resolution. They included professionals and exiled former government officials, including the current SRS president, Mustafe Omer, who were critical of both the government and the ONLF and saw poor governance and weak rule of law as the root of the conflict. CR was able to update the diaspora communities on progress in the talks and gather their reflections on the impact of the conflict and ideas for resolution. Engagement with the diaspora helped build confidence in the talks, evidenced by positive media reports in diaspora and Horn of Africa news outlets. CR was also able to reach out to communities that the ONLF negotiation team could not access due to security concerns, such as the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, and help feed their views and perspectives into the negotiations.

> **" Careful management is needed in the early pre-talks stage of a peace process, to navigate tensions between the requirements for secrecy and flexibility, and the constraints of formal diplomatic channels. "**

International funding and diplomatic support
CR helped to mobilise financial and diplomatic support for peace efforts at a time when resolving the protracted conflict was not an international priority. The UK and Swiss governments provided early funding and other support. CR and the Kenyan facilitation team also met with other states with an interest in peace in the region – Norway, the USA, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and South Africa – to raise diplomatic and financial assistance for the peace process.

Participants bearing the Ogaden flag at a conference organised by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) to discuss its peace deal with the Ethiopian government and transition from an armed group to a political party, April 2019. © Conciliation Resources

Careful management is needed in the early pre-talks stage of a peace process, to navigate tensions between the requirements for secrecy and flexibility, and the constraints of formal diplomatic channels. Challenges in this instance included that some donor governments engaged Ethiopian foreign ministry officials who were not even aware of the process, as it was run by the office of the Prime Minister and by the Ministry of Defence.

CR faced difficulties working with the ONLF, which until 2018 was designated by the Ethiopian government as a terrorist group. CR staff experienced significant risks travelling to Ethiopia and limitations were experienced with support for some ONLF activities. For example, a 2014 ONLF leadership meeting, which, as discussed below, was critical for building consensus on breaking the deadlock on the constitution, was regarded by donors as unsuitable for external support due to diplomatic sensitivities.

Formal talks and sticking points
Formal talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF began in September 2012. A second round took place in October 2012, and then a third in February 2015. The Declaration of Principles agreed before the first round of talks set out a four-point agenda focused on: political; security; human rights and humanitarian concerns; and wealth sharing and economic issues.

Problems arose from the start, relating to the status of the Kenyan team and the name of the region. These were successfully navigated, with the Kenyans operating as 'facilitators' rather than 'mediators', and the region being referred to as the 'Ogaden *in* Ethiopia' rather than the 'Ogaden *of* Ethiopia' – although surprisingly the government delegation did not suggest the constitutional name, the Somali Regional State.

Talks faced other hurdles, delays and misunderstandings. Ingrained mistrust between the parties was an ongoing impediment to progress. The death of Meles, the architect of the talks, was a severe blow. His successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, lacked the authority and mandate to build cross-government consensus to push through a deal or finish a process started by his powerful predecessor.

Other difficulties included an impasse over modalities, the kidnapping from Kenya of two ONLF senior officials, including a member of the negotiation team, and Kenyan elections in 2013 which distracted the facilitation team. The contrasting composition of the two delegations further invited clashes of negotiation styles and priorities: the Ethiopian government delegation comprised exclusively military and security personnel, headed by the Defence Minister – a civilian, Siraj Fegessa; with the exception

of one member, the ONLF delegation was drawn entirely from the diaspora-based political leadership.

Two key sticking points arose around the time of the second round of peace talks in October 2012: the status of the Ethiopian constitution in relation to the talks; and the composition of the Ethiopian government delegation. These apparently symbolic issues in fact had major implications for the ONLF's core claim to self-determination and caused serious impediment to the progress of the peace talks. In both cases the Kenyan facilitation team, through creative thinking, long-term engagement and powers of persuasion were instrumental in eventually overcoming these obstacles and moving the process forward.

Constitutional compromise
A major stumbling block in the talks was the Ethiopian government's demand that the ONLF accept the 1994 Ethiopian Constitution as the basis for negotiations. This issue became the focus of the second round of talks, which the Kenyan facilitators had expected to concentrate on security issues. While this was not a surprise for the ONLF, who had prior experience with the government's use of this language and rhetoric, they had yet to find a creative solution to the problem.

> " **'Constructive ambiguity' allowed each side to interpret the meaning of the compromise language in their own ways. "**

The Ethiopian constitution provides a robust right to self-determination (article 39) and sets out a process for the realisation of that right. However, for a long time the ONLF had refused to recognise or negotiate within the parameters of the constitution, arguing that the region's right to self-determination had colonial roots that predated the 1994 constitution. The ONLF leaders had also tried, unsuccessfully, to use constitutional means to get a vote for secession in 1994. Despite provisions for secession in the transitional charter (the provisional constitution from 1991–1994) and draft constitution (approved in December 1994 and officially announced in 1995), as well as the precedent of Eritrea seceding in 1993, the ONLF's demand for secession in 1994 was an 'autonomous step too far' for the new rulers in Addis Ababa, sparking the conflict.

Little trust and confidence had been established between the parties when the issue came up in the early stages of the talks in 2012. The Kenyan team attempted to reformulate Addis Ababa's demand and steer the talks

towards other, less contentious issues. This failed, however, and the next two years were spent trying to resolve the ensuing impasse. The issue was not only of symbolic importance but also had serious substantive implications. The ONLF leadership was concerned that any compromise would be viewed as capitulation. Equally, the government feared that this issue would be viewed as a second attempt to break up the country after Eritrea's secession, and wanted to avoid sending the wrong signal to other ethnic armed groups with self-determination claims.

Analysis of past agreements with armed groups, including breakaway factions of the ONLF, showed that the government had successfully insisted on this constitutional line before. To break the deadlock, CR commissioned an expert legal opinion which concluded there was a legal difference between *accepting* the constitution, and *accepting to negotiate within the frame* of the constitution. The government side had used the two phrases interchangeably, causing confusion. Acceptance of the constitution by the ONLF would reciprocally require Ethiopia's acceptance of the right to self-determination. But it would also require that the outcome on any substantive issue (eg wealth-sharing) would have to be in line with the constitution. Defining the constitution *as a framework* while seemingly symbolic, in fact would also allow for negotiation of extra-constitutional issues.

'Constructive ambiguity' allowed each side to interpret the meaning of the compromise language in their own ways and provided more room to bring along their constituencies in their efforts to navigate a constitutional compromise. The ONLF leadership convened a meeting of the ONLF central committee, a 34-member strategic decision-making body, and organised a series of consultations with cadres and the wider membership. After a series of shuttle meetings between Addis and Nairobi in late 2014, the diplomatic and political skills of the Kenyan team, combined with CR's technical support, succeeded in breaking the impasse on the constitution and brought the two parties to formal face-to-face talks in February 2015.

Regional representation
The talks faced another major hurdle that also came to the fore in the second round of talks in October 2012, when the federal government delegation unexpectedly included Moulid Hayir, a SRS government representative. The parties again sought to use another seemingly symbolic issue to gain the upper hand in the talks ahead of the substantive discussions.

The ONLF objected vociferously to the presence of the regional representative on the grounds that the Kenyan-led talks were between the federal government of Ethiopia and the ONLF, as agreed in the Declaration of Principles signed by the two parties in September 2012, and as stipulated in the ONLF's letter to Kenyan government agreeing to participate in the talks in 2011. The ONLF feared the conflict being portrayed as in-fighting among Somalis in Ethiopia, instead of as a self-determination dispute, and also resisted conferring legitimacy on the SRS administration that they saw as a 'puppet' of the federal government. The ONLF also cited precedent, saying the government delegation in the first rounds of talks did not include an SRS delegate.

The government delegation defended their decision to include Moulid Hayir on the grounds that the Ethiopian state was organised on a federal basis, that each side had the right to choose its delegates, and that the SRS leaders were well placed to speak on the security and political realities in the region. Addis Ababa saw the inclusion of the SRS as legitimate recognition of their representative in the region, and as a justified challenge to the ONLF positioning themselves as the sole representatives of the Somali people in the SRS.

The Kenyan facilitators were able to cleverly navigate around the issue, temporarily defusing the situation by persuading *both* parties to reduce their respective delegations from six to three members, which allowed the SRS representative to be quietly dropped. Progress was short-lived, however, and the issue resurfaced in 2015. After extensive discussions, the parties were unable to find a solution and the talks ended without an agreement.

> **Sticking points over the constitution and representation appeared symbolic but were in fact highly consequential.**

A more sustainable solution to the problem emerged from a re-examination of the political settlement in the SRS. Political dynamics in the SRS had been changing following the death of Meles. Multiple centres of power had begun to emerge at the federal level, which allowed for an increase in the power and influence of the Somali regional president, Abdi Iley, who at that time was allied to the Ethiopian military. Politics in the SRS had for many years involved successive regional presidents and governments that were largely maintained and controlled by the federal government and its agencies, albeit with the help of local political actors.

Iley's rise to the SRS presidency in 2010 and his longevity signalled a shift in the region's relationship with the central government from dependence to symbiosis. Research

commissioned by CR in late 2015 showed that, compared to previous regional executives, Iley had been adept at making himself indispensable to Addis Ababa, reinforcing both his own power and the region's relative autonomy. Questions remained over the sustainability of this arrangement however. The system was largely personalised and presidentially-led, had weak institutional roots and was reliant on heavy-handed security measures, including the *Liyu*. These factors contributed to the ease with which Iley was removed from power in August 2018; at the time of writing he remains on trial in Addis Ababa.

> **❝ ONLF engagement with constituencies helped identify agenda priorities for talks and potential solutions, and maintain internal cohesion. ❞**

CR shared its research findings in a series of dissemination meetings with ONLF leaders, the Kenyan facilitation team, community leaders and intellectuals. A CR-facilitated conference in February 2016 was attended by members of the diaspora and representatives from the Somali region, including civic leaders close to the ONLF. In January 2016 the Kenya facilitation team visited the SRS to assess the situation and consult with the regional president on his views about peace and dialogue in the region. These activities were influential in encouraging a rethink of the ONLF policy of non-engagement with the regional government. Following an overture from the government, the two parties held confidential talks in Dubai in November 2017 attended by the president of the SRS, Abdi Iley.

Conclusion

Third-party support was critical to sustain progress over six years of stop-start talks between the ONLF and the Ethiopian government. Sticking points over the constitution and representation appeared symbolic but were in fact highly consequential. Both parties understood the symbolism – acceptance or rejection of the constitutional status quo, or the categorisation of the conflict as either intra-Somali infighting or self-determination – which touched on the heart of the dispute and affected the outcome of negotiations.

With the support of the Kenyan team, the parties were able to agree the substantive agenda early on. Ways around the sticking points were eventually found, but not before significant momentum and opportunities to build trust between the conflict parties had been lost. Careful framing of the issues and use of language and

'constructive ambiguity' allowing parties to sell the process to their constituencies were integral to this process. Indeed, the 2018 Asmara peace declaration almost unravelled over whether or not to include explicit reference to self-determination, with both sides agreeing at the last minute on language that committed to tackle the 'root causes' of the conflict in implementing the deal as an acceptable allusion to this symbolic issue.

The Kenyan facilitation team were instrumental in overcoming these challenges. They invested significant effort in convincing the ONLF to take a long-term view of self-determination, focusing on enhancing regional autonomy that could provide a platform to strengthen and reform regional institutions. They also negotiated the return of kidnapped ONLF officials, and provided sufficient security and facilities for ONLF delegates during the talks.

For CR, perhaps one of the most important mediation support roles was to facilitate internal debate within the ONLF as they sought to build agreement around dialogue. Support for the development of pro-peace strategies and consensus within the ONLF helped to sustain momentum for talks through hurdles and setbacks. A series of informal reflection and brainstorming sessions with the chair of the negotiation team on possible solutions to the sticking points helped CR to better understand the interests behind the positions, and to help craft and test compromise language ahead of discussions with the wider ONLF negotiation team, or with the Kenyans or the Ethiopians. Trust and relationships built through sustained engagement allowed CR to act as a 'critical friend' to guide ONLF involvement in the peace process. As the dialogue evolved gradually from 2012, the process of accompanying, listening and relationship building meant that CR could provide space and expert feedback for ONLF critical reflection on contentious issues such as the constitution and self-determination. The investment of time, technical assistance and trust building meant that the ONLF were more open to challenges, counter-views, and learning from other contexts, all of which were essential for the movement to engage in the process more constructively.

ONLF engagement with constituencies helped identify agenda priorities for talks and potential solutions, and maintain internal cohesion and impetus for the ONLF to stick with the process through difficult stumbling blocks. The thinking, discussion and relationship-building processes forged during parallel peace talks within the ONLF have since formed an essential basis to support peace implementation following the Asmara peace declaration, not least as the ONLF leadership and many diaspora communities have returned to the SRS.

CR provision of timely and trusted analysis helped the mediation strategy to adapt to changes in the political economy, facilitating the involvement of the SRS administration. The influence of the Somali regional government and its president, Abdi Iley, had grown as the peace talks inched forward. It was hard for the ONLF to acknowledge the significance of these developments, not least as the ONLF political leadership and negotiation team lived outside the country, while the Kenyan team also struggled to overcome political and protocol sensitivities to engaging the SRS administration, which was not part of its mandate. CR's political analysis eventually facilitated a change of course to bring the SRS administration into the talks, but more structured, recurrent and rapid analysis could have informed smarter and faster adaptation of the peace support strategy had more dedicated resources been available.

Like most governments dealing with internal conflicts, Addis Ababa was sensitive to internationalising the peace process and refused external diplomatic, political, and financial support. The SRS conflict was low priority internationally, including for the relevant regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and many regional states deferred to Ethiopia's insistence on national sovereignty and non-interference. Western donors may also have been driven by geopolitical interests that favoured closer ties with Ethiopia – a key military ally in the fight against Al Shabaab. The proscription of the ONLF as a terrorist group was also a significant deterrent. But external partners, with the Ethiopian government's tacit approval, were able to provide discreet backing for the Kenyan facilitation team and CR's work, creating enough momentum to sustain the process and establish an enabling environment to seize peace opportunities when they arose.

Reflections from a donor-doer

Fostering pathways to peace in Southern Thailand

Maho Nakayama is Director of the Asia Peace Initiatives Department in the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Prior to this she spent a decade at the Japan Foundation including working in Indonesia to develop programmes to promote Japan's relationships with Asian countries, and supporting peace and reconciliation projects in Aceh. She holds an MA in social anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK.

Akiko Horiba is Program Director of the Asia Peace Initiative Department in the Sasakawa Peace Foundation with a focus on Southern Thailand, women's political participation in Asia and strengthening civil society networks in Southeast Asia. Previously Akiko worked as a policy secretary in the Japanese House of Representatives. She received a PhD in Area Studies (Indonesia, conflict analysis) from Sophia University, Japan and a Master of theological studies at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Massachusetts, USA.

The southern provinces of Thailand bordering Malaysia have been affected by violent conflict since the 19th century. Conflict has centred on self-determination, and since 2004 around 7,000 people have been killed in urban guerrilla warfare, bomb attacks and counter-insurgency operations.

Peace has proved elusive. The Thai government has taken an uncompromising attitude to territorial integrity and has rejected international peacemaking support. The armed opposition is secretive and factionalised and lacks a clear political agenda. The largest armed group, the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), has insisted on both formal talks and international involvement as prerequisites for dialogue. The Covid crisis has added another dimension to peace efforts, after the BRN announced that from 3 April it would 'cease all activities' in order to facilitate humanitarian access.

This article outlines the work of Japan's Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF), where the authors work, to support pathways to peace talks in southern Thailand, including mechanisms for more diverse representation and inclusion of conflict-affected communities in peace initiatives. It contextualises the SPF's efforts by outlining recent conflict dynamics and broader peace initiatives in the region.

Conflict background

The contemporary conflict in southern Thailand has pivoted on disagreement over the legitimacy of Thai state control of the northern Malay peninsula, and an underlying disconnect between Thai state discourse that asserts long-term jurisdiction over the region, and local history that emphasises Patani-Malay authority over it.

This article refers to border provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and the four districts of Songkhla province as 'Patani' (with a single 't'), the preferred form for Patani-Malay communities. This region comprises 80 per cent Malay-Muslims in a country of primarily Thai-speaking Buddhists. The Thai state emphasises 'Thai-ness' as a unifying concept encompassing Thai language, Buddhism, and the supremacy of the monarchy. It does not officially recognise the regional Malay dialect, Melayu, which many among the Malay-Muslim community in Patani see as indicative of their secondary status. Many Melayu-speakers enrol their children in Melayu-speaking religious and private Islamic schools, exacerbating social separation from Thai institutions and Thai-speaking populations,with further negative implications for livelihoods and labour market access.

BANGKOK

Pattaya City

MYANMAR

CAMBODIA

Gulf of Thailand

THAILAND

Phuket

Conflict-affected areas of southern Thailand.

This map is illustrative and does not imply the expression of an opinion on the part of Conciliation Resources concerning the delimitation of the borders of the countries and territories featured.

Pattani

Songkla

Pattani

South China Sea

Yala

Narathiwat

Strait of Malacca

MALAYSIA

Thai state policies of centralisation and modernisation at the turn of the 20th century were opposed by Patani-Muslims, unlike most non-Thai identity groups, which precipitated the launch of a Patani-Muslim resistance movement in the 1960s with a mix of ideological and separatist ambitions. Over time, these groups have adopted varying levels of militancy and different tactics such as guerrilla warfare.

The Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) was formed in 1960 and became the dominant movement after 2000, although their fully fledged armed struggle only started in 2004. The BRN is secretive, but observers describe an elaborate structure including political and military wings with well-developed outreach capacities to their supporters. The military units are decentralised and most of the fighters are part-time.

State responses to the insurgency have included a mix of counterinsurgency, securitisation measures and development assistance aimed at winning 'hearts and minds', with different governments fluctuating between harder and softer policies, including reconciliation and amnesties for surrendering fighters.

Peace initiatives: 2005–19
Informal peace efforts 2005–11
The state has largely resisted engaging in formal peace talks or allowing any international involvement in peace efforts, consistently portraying the conflict as an 'internal affair'. The enigmatic character of the BRN has helped the government to sustain this policy.

Nevertheless, several informal peace initiatives have been attempted, including with international involvement. Two significant efforts were initiated by leading Southeast Asian political figures: the Langkawi talks of 2005–06, promoted by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad; and talks in Bogor, West Java, in 2008 led by the then Vice President of Indonesia, Yusuf Kalla.

Neither of these initiatives ultimately succeeded, not least as they were not able to engage serious representation by the BRN – although there was some traction with other armed groups such as the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) and the Islamic Liberation Front of Patani (Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani – BIPP). Similar difficulties have undermined other international peace efforts, such as a 2009 initiative supported by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, as well as the 'Geneva Process' between 2005–11 by the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

Direct dialogue efforts 2013–14
In February 2013, the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and the BRN signed a 'General Consensus on Peace Dialogue Process' – the first time that the parties had reached an official agreement – which committed to pursue dialogue supported by Malaysian government facilitation.

However, the 'General Consensus' was agreed and published before all parties had sufficiently explored the details of how to organise negotiations in practice or prepare their constituencies for the process. The BRN subsequently released five 'preliminary demands', which mostly concerned securing their status as the sole representative of the 'Patani-Malay nation'. These demands were unacceptable to the Thai military, and the Yingluck government could not reframe them to secure military support and sustain the dialogue. The main achievement was a 40-day ceasefire during Ramadan, which collapsed after some Thai military resumed combat operations in the south. In August 2013, the BRN effectively retreated and has remained elusive.

In May 2014 Thai Army Chief General Prayut Chan-o-cha led a coup against the Yingluck government and installed the military-led National Council for Peace and Order. Prayut saw the necessity of maintaining the official peace efforts as a display of the military's good intentions, although he opposed the existing agreement with the BRN.

At the same time Patani opposition groups formed a new umbrella outfit, the Majelis Amanah Rakiyat Patani (MARA Patani), comprising several organisations and formally headed by a member of the BRN. The MARA Patani's objectives were to consolidate the priorities of Patani movements and to pursue dialogue while assessing the sincerity of the Thai state's commitment to peace. The MARA Patani maintained communication with the military wing of the BRN but had no control over the group's military engagement.

Violence reduction and backchannels 2015–20
From mid-2015 the military government's strategy shifted to reducing violence through the incremental establishment of local 'Safety Zones', starting in areas in which the MARA Patani claimed to have control. The Patani movements agreed to this strategy in the belief that it was a first step towards local ownership of peace efforts by communities in the Safety Zones.

However, implementation of the Safety Zones was interrupted due to leadership changes and internal disputes within both parties. Ultimately, despite some 20 meetings from 2015–18 between the parties' technical working teams,

no compromise was reached and the talks ground to a halt. The MARA Patani lost momentum and is no longer active.

The first national elections in Thailand since the 2014 coup were held in 2019. These were conducted under a controversial constitution and though contentious marked the 'official end' of direct military rule. The BRN subsequently returned to peace talks through backchannel communications assisted by some European NGOs and embassies. Concurrently, the Thai government accepted the BRN's request for the involvement of international mediation experts to observe the talks as long as they acted in a personal capacity.

> " **The failure of various peace efforts to deliver concrete results has resulted from shortcomings among both parties.** "

The failure of various peace efforts to deliver concrete results has resulted from shortcomings among both parties. The fragmented Patani movements have struggled to rally behind a unified peace strategy. The Thai military has exerted significant influence over national politics amid broader political turmoil within the Thai state. The military has not prioritised peace dialogue and there has been strong resistance to internationalising the process. Both sides have adopted a narrow top-down approach to peace talks, so far neglecting the diversity of Patani people's realities and needs.

However, on 3 April 2020 in the heat of the Covid-19 crisis, the BRN issued a unilateral declaration advising it was ceasing operations, on the proviso that there would no attacks by the Thai military. At the time of writing it is unclear what opportunities will result from this overture.

Peace support by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation
The SPF has been involved in supporting peace initiatives in southern Thailand since 2010. The fact that the SPF is a private foundation has allowed it significant flexibility in its programming and has made it less prone to shifting political currents. The programmes do not depend on fundraising, which has enabled it to pursue an approach of long-term engagement with key actors in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex and fluctuating situations in Patani. The SPF is therefore involved as a donor as well as an implementing agency, a 'donor-doer'.

The SPF approach prioritises 'accompaniment' at multiple levels with both conflict parties and with society more broadly: functioning as a 'critical friend' to explore and exchange ideas, discuss and analyse political developments, respond to emerging trends, and review cultural and religious sensitivities. Its long-term, ten-year engagement enables the Foundation to understand the local context through the knowledge that the Patani conflict primarily involves clashes between resistance movements comprising hybrid 'villager-fighters', and the Thai military at local level, rather than triggered in accordance with proclaimed higher-level political agenda – for example relating to self-determination. This provides clarity of purpose to SPF's 'bottom-up' focus in linking various segments of society and politics encouraging a more consolidated pro-peace constituency.

SPF approach
The Foundation has engaged with civil society in southern Thailand and with the conflict parties at multiple levels. Collaborations with Bangkok-based partners, including a Thai think-tank, have sought to promote dialogue and its benefits with the Thai government and military. This has enabled the Foundation to both fund and support backchannel communications for both parties' technical working teams – 'track 1.5' dialogues, particularly during the promising time of the Safety Zones process. Adopting the multi-track diplomacy concept, the support to communication spaces within and between both parties extended to track two and three engagements to help build and consolidate a wider base for peaceful change, involving journalists, lawyers, local politicians, local religious leaders, academics in Bangkok and Patani, civil society and community organisations.

> " **As with so many conflicts, a challenge has been to strengthen legitimate representation in peace talks.** "

The BRN leadership and decision-making structures are complex and secretive. Thorough dedicated analysis of the characteristics of the BRN is essential to overcome blockages that have undermined previous peace efforts, including over-reliance on a conventional 'top-down' dialogue model. As with so many conflicts, a challenge has been to strengthen legitimate representation in peace talks, as BRN delegates often lack authentic ties to Patani communities or other opposition movements or even other BRN actors. Many BRN leaders in Patani have not been able to attend peace talks due to fear of being arrested

or detained. Attendees may not be directly involved in movements' decision-making or have control over local commanders. This exacerbates divisions among BRN members – especially between those in political asylum in Malaysia and those who remain in Patani.

Civil society and community organisations can play a much wider range of roles in the Patani resistance. BRN members live among the Patani communities and are ideally placed to tap into villagers' needs and perspectives. A diversity of Patani communities including young people, women and those traditionally excluded from such processes are increasingly interested in peace and to see how they could benefit from peace talks and are looking to shape nonviolent solutions. Young people can potentially shift BRN attitudes towards making a clear commitment to peace talks and dialogue.

The SPF has been working with Patani civil society together with local experts and NGOs based in the Southeast Asian region, providing training courses to enhance communities' skills and capabilities, and facilitating discussions that help provide local communities with space to air their views.This has led to the development of a mechanism for collecting and presenting local people's aspirations to the BRN, serving as a channel to incorporate people's agendas into peace talks.

Looking ahead, finding the right balance of continuity of senior figures from the conflict parties and bringing forward newer faces and perspectives will be important. It is also important to nurture civic space to promote greater diversity of perspectives in discussions and decision-making. Of crucial relevance will also be how effective the international support can best be organised additional to Malaysia as a facilitator. Various entities can play a role providing valuable comparative insights for tracks one and 1.5 and encouraging context-specific confidence- and trust-building initiatives. It is incumbent upon international actors to play to our strengths and support this fragile process with strategic complementarity.

SECTION 3
Testing new approaches

The role of social media in early peacemaking

Help or hindrance?

Katrin Wittig is a Marie Sklodowska-Curie post-doctoral research fellow at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge. She specialises in peace and conflict studies, with a focus on mediation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and the analysis of rebel groups and violence patterns in armed conflicts. Katrin has worked in the African Great Lakes region, especially Burundi. Before joining Cambridge, Katrin worked with the United Nations in the fields of early warning and mediation. During her work with the UN Mediation Support Unit, she supported the development of the Secretary-General's 'Toolkit on Digital Technologies and Mediation in Armed Conflict'.

Sausan Ghosheh is a Senior Political Communications Strategist with two decades' experience working mainly in conflict and post-war settings. She worked for CNN, rising to Senior International Producer and reporting live during violent clashes and armed conflicts. In 2006, she joined the UN and held multiple positions, including Senior Adviser to several Special Representatives to the Secretary-General, Spokesperson, Director of Communications and Head of Strategic Planning and Analysis. She worked in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, USA and Yemen, as well as on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Sausan has contributed to reconciliation, dialogue facilitation, ceasefire mediation and peacebuilding processes. She advised on the development of the Secretary-General's 'Toolkit on Digital Technologies and Mediation in Armed Conflict'.

Social media has transformed the tools available to conflict parties, civil society, peace practitioners and the public at large to engage in both peace and war efforts. It has created opportunities in the early phases of peace processes, including assisting with data collection and analysis, bolstering peace messaging and diversifying dialogue. But it also brings risks. Violent conflicts have become increasingly complex and protracted, and harder to prevent or resolve. Information and communications technology, including social media, have added to this complexity in new ways. Social media can create new hierarchies due to discrepancies in internet access or exacerbate propaganda and hate speech.

The use of social media as a tool for peace is still in its infancy, but there is already much to learn from looking at the risks and benefits for early peacemaking and at how peace practitioners, including mediators, have been using it to advance dialogue and mediation processes.

Setting the stage: Pros and cons of social media

Social media is an umbrella term for a wide range of interactive websites and applications, which enable users to create and share content and ideas within an online community. According to We Are Social and Hootsuite's Digital 2019 Report, 56 per cent of the world's population is currently online, while 45 per cent use some form of social media platform, a proportion that is likely to at least double over the next 20 years. Young people between 18 and 34 constitute over half of the global social media audience, with those around the age of 30 currently accounting for the largest share of the world's social media users.

The media landscape is drastically changing with more and more people getting their information online. Social media has effectively challenged the role of traditional media, turning everyone into a potential creator, consumer and target of online content. Cyberspace has its own rules and norms. Social media is populated by virtual influencers who may be different from people who exert 'traditional' influence over political processes.

Understanding the virtual environment of a conflict and its impact on peace processes requires careful analysis of specific social media infrastructures. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have become important tools of public diplomacy, leaving peace practitioners struggling to catch up on how to use such tools, as David Lanz and Ahmed Eleiba have described (see further reading). Social media has become an important mobilising force: it drives debates, social movements and political change, but it is also used to divide societies, incite violence and as a key recruitment tool for armed groups.

Pros: States, armed groups, conflict-affected communities and mediators all use social media to present their own distinct narratives of conflict and peace efforts to influence national and international audiences directly, without any intermediary. Social media provides space to hear more, and more diverse, voices than traditional media outlets and can play an important role in 'levelling the playing field', allowing different state and non-state actors to share their narratives and perspectives. In turn, it provides new tools for fostering dialogue and enhancing data collection and conflict analysis.

By creating direct and inclusive channels of communication and dialogue between conflict parties, communities and mediators, social media can help build trust and confidence. This is especially significant in the early or pre-formal stages of dialogue and mediation when more conventional, diplomatic communication channels have tended to be much more exclusive. Social media can enable mediators to speak directly with a wide range of audiences to gather a more comprehensive understanding of different conflict narratives and potential entry points for peacemaking, including in very hard-to-reach areas. If applied carefully, mediators can also use social media to counter misinformation (false information disseminated unintentionally) or disinformation (false information disseminated intentionally).

Cons: Social media risks creating new hierarchies rooted in discrepancies in internet access, including gender and class imbalances across social media users and audiences. Social media, instead of creating a connected global community, often creates silos – with many users interacting predominantly with like-minded people, exacerbating polarisation of narratives and societal divisions. It can also be a breeding ground for extremist views and hate speech. The volume, variety and velocity of information available through social media has introduced new challenges for initiating and sustaining peace. Conflict parties sometimes use social media to leak information, spread disinformation or promote divisiveness, hate and violence. Online hate speech is on the rise, leading United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to launch a UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech in June 2019. The document identities social media as a key medium for enabling virulent hate speech and distributing it at lightning speed.

Disinformation in West Papua

In October 2019, an investigation by researchers at the BBC (Benjamin Strick) and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (Elise Thomas) uncovered an online information campaign to distort perceptions of the situation in West Papua – the highly contested province of Indonesia – where there is ongoing unrest and increasing violence over independence, underdevelopment, militarism and endemic racism. The campaign aimed to influence perceptions in support of a pro-Indonesian state narrative of the situation. There were also pro-independence information campaigns, but these were not the subject of this investigation.

The campaign was primarily promoted through 'branded' social media accounts that had professional logos. Each 'brand' had associated Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube accounts and standalone websites, presenting itself as a legitimate news platform. Notably the content was in English. In some cases, it comprised outright 'fake news', but in others it skewed or selectively presented real facts and events in ways that supported the interests of the Indonesian authorities.

The campaign included 'trolling' and harassment of government critics, journalists and supporters of independence. For example, multiple Twitter accounts were used to spam the same content attacking human rights advocates inside and outside West Papua. Some of these same accounts were also used to amplify the content of the news 'brands', strongly indicating that they are likely to be part of the same information campaign.

Digital forensic methods and open source intelligence identified a 'communications' company, InsightID, based in Jakarta as the source of the campaign. InsightID eventually acknowledged its responsibility and defended its actions by claiming to have been trying to counter anti-Indonesian bias. The client who commissioned the campaign has not been identified. While it remains extremely difficult to evaluate the impact of social media operations, this example illustrates how misinformation campaigns of all stripes risk further fuelling divisions among conflict actors.

Elise Thomas, Researcher, International Cyber Policy Institute, Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Online communications raise serious concerns about security and confidentiality in a mediation process. Hacking and cybersecurity attacks have increased. Sensitive information has been leaked, often via social media. This can quickly lead to a loss of trust among the conflict parties and mediators, especially during the early phases of a peacemaking process when confidence is low and conflict parties are suspicious of the motives of other parties and of mediators.

> ### Facebook issues apology for its role in the 2018 anti-Muslim riots in Sri Lanka
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> In May 2020, Facebook released the findings of three independent human rights impact assessments that the company had commissioned in 2018 to examine the degree it may or may not have contributed to human rights violations in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Cambodia.
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> The assessment on Sri Lanka prompted Facebook to issue an apology for its role in the violent communal unrest that afflicted Sri Lanka in 2018 after the investigation by Article One found that hate speech spread through the platform may have provoked anti-Muslim violence. In April 2019, Facebook Executive Mark Zuckerberg apologised to human rights groups in Myanmar for not devoting sufficient resources to take down hate speech content.
>
> These apologies provoke further discussions on the role and responsibility of social media platforms, like Facebook, and the policies that they need to implement to protect communities from content that risks inciting violence against them.

Empowering early peacemaking through social media
The negative impacts of social media may seem daunting for peace practitioners. Yet, social media is here to stay and will increasingly have an impact on conflict resolution. Peace practitioners therefore need to learn how to understand and employ these digital tools while at the same time responsibly mitigating associated risks. However, many practitioners, including mediation teams, lack the expertise and capacities to launch effective social media campaigns. These require dedicated communications experts, a strong understanding of the media landscape, a multilingual team as well as know-how on safely and astutely using digital tools. Before launching any social media campaign, practitioners need to carefully weigh the risks, benefits and appropriateness of taking this step, and evaluate whether they have the requisite personnel experienced in designing and administrating such campaigns.

In contrast to the humanitarian field, the peace and security sector is only starting to get a better sense of how to harness the potential of social media and how to mitigate its risks. This section traces social media's double-edged nature in three key areas crucial to the *early* or *pre-formal* phases of peacemaking: assisting data collection and conflict analysis; framing peace narratives and messaging through online targeted engagement; and shaping mediation agendas and fostering dialogue.

Data collection and analysis
Social media can be a tool for data collection and conflict analysis, including mapping different conflict stakeholders, tracking military movements and armaments, as well as monitoring public positions towards the peace process. It can provide insights into conflict dynamics and power balances, including military capacity or tactics that can potentially be leveraged in the process of persuading parties to agree to talk.

During the early phases of peacemaking, dealing with large amounts of data and developing an overview of the social media landscape can be especially challenging. The set-up of a social media monitoring system demands time, resources and careful adaptation to the local context. Analysis can be done manually or automatically using big data analytics technologies. Ideally, it should include a mapping of social media influencers, the extent of their impact and an assessment of whether they are or should be engaged in the efforts to build peace.

Early warning systems have received a lot of attention in terms of the possibility of identifying potential conflict patterns and risks, but their predictive capacities remain limited due to the complexities of processing large quantities of data. So far, social media has been most promising when used to complement traditional conflict analysis techniques. The field of election observation is probably the most advanced in monitoring and identifying hotspots for electoral violence using crowd-sourcing reports and geolocation technology. It has inspired many other fields, including, for example, ceasefire monitoring mechanisms.

The United Nations used social media analytics in Libya before, during and after the signing of the Tripoli Ceasefire Agreement in September 2018 to track armed groups' movements on the ground, which then had to be verified. In Syria, the opposition groups' access to heavy weaponry first became evident via social media in 2012, altering the scope of the conflict. In Colombia, many observers and mediation practitioners had not anticipated the scale of opposition to the 2016 Peace Agreement, as expressed in the subsequent referendum. Recent research indicates that social media analysis could have revealed critical views of the agreement, where traditional media analysis failed to. This knowledge, Aastha Nigam and others have argued, could have prodded

peace practitioners to better explain the peace accord to the Colombian people (see further reading).

Despite its great potential, complementing conflict analysis with social media poses significant challenges and risks. Social media data is skewed. Many users, according to We Are Social and Hootsuite research, are young and male. Media mapping assessments reveal that, in general, social media users predominantly use their platforms for social not political reasons – connecting with friends and family – while political content primarily comes from already politicised individuals, tilting the data gathering and analysis process. Social media includes distracting 'noise', especially computational propaganda distributed by fake accounts, bots and trolls, whose significance needs to be analysed and filtered. Finally, social media analytics programmes rely on algorithms distorted by cognitive and social biases. It is therefore important to identify these biases, to be candid about their origin and meaning as well to complement any social media analysis with other more traditional methods. (For more on the application of digital analysis in peacemaking, see the article 'Digital analysis – Peacemaking potential and promise' in this edition.)

Peace narratives
If used strategically, proactively and in a timely manner, social media can help peace practitioners to influence perspectives in favour of early engagement, dialogue, violence reduction and ceasefire. Social media allows practitioners direct access to the general public, unhindered by politicised state, opposition or regional media. Such direct engagement with communities enhances practitioners' understanding of people's priorities, concerns and views. It provides inclusive communication channels as well as direct and immediate feedback to the messages and actions of different actors, permitting practitioners to evaluate their course of action and adapt.

> **The shaping of narratives is a complex and challenging endeavour, particularly for mediators, who must maintain impartiality, integrity and credibility always.**

The shaping of narratives is a complex and challenging endeavour, particularly for mediators, who must maintain impartiality, integrity and credibility always. They must make sure to provide accurate and truthful information through constant triangulation of sources and data and to manage people's expectations. They should identify

reputable social media influencers who can champion and advocate a 'peace narrative'. Strategic communications should be included as a central pillar from the onset, not as an afterthought, and communication from day one should have the end goal in mind. The narrative of the mediators must anticipate any opportunities and challenges on the horizon and communicate accordingly.

This approach was used effectively by the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) in 2012 and was essential in helping the UN gain access to conflict areas to conduct fact-finding visits after security incidents had occurred to witness and monitor the implications of the incidents. Moreover, UNSMIS established a YouTube channel to bring to light the impact of the conflict on the Syrian people. According to journalists who cover the UN Security Council, pictures of the aftermath of the massacre of men, women and children in the Syrian village of Houla in May 2012, helped to convince China and Russia to support the Council's condemnation of the Syrian government for using heavy weaponry against civilians. This provided an all-too rare example of the Security Council sending a strong unified message on Syria.

Mediation agendas and dialogue
Social media has the potential to become an important tool in shaping the agenda for informal and formal peace talks. The use of social media analytics and digital platforms can help mediators consider a broad range of views, sustain an inclusive dialogue with the conflict stakeholders and modify the agenda.

Twitter feeds can help to gather different views on the issues to be covered in a mediation process. While mediation processes need to bring together the key warring factions to strike a peace deal compromise, social media can assist in bringing in civil society voices to flag key issues to be included in negotiations. Together with UN Women, Afghan journalist Farahnaz Forotan launched the Twitter campaign #MyRedLine to collect women's concerns on the peace negotiations with the Taliban. It is extremely difficult to assess its impact, but tweets were retweeted thousands of times, including by the Afghan president, and the campaign helped to protest the lack of adequate female representation at the peace talks. Several projects in Yemen, such as Manasati 30, provide online platforms for Yemenis to express their views and concerns. However, the low internet penetration in the country – the World Bank states that only 27 per cent of Yemenis currently have access to the internet – constitutes a significant challenge to widening participation virtually. This underscores the importance in many conflict-affected regions of complementing high-tech online tools with other low-tech, off-line activities, such as in-person surveys or focus groups.

Social media is increasingly used to complement face-to-face mediation and dialogue processes at the local and national level. From Kenya and Libya to Sri Lanka and Ukraine, digital platforms are being built to promote online dialogue among communities in or at risk of conflict, and to undertake online consultations. The Donbass Dialogue is one of the most prominent examples. Established in 2015, it currently connects around 400 people from divided Ukrainian communities into a shared 'virtual' space to consider issues of mutual concern that have been identified using sophisticated crowdsourcing methodology. The principal concerns are then discussed during a week-long 'offline dialogue', which is conducted using new talk service technology providing for anonymous connection and a safe environment for participants. Since the launch of the initiative, seven such dialogues have been organised, providing the opportunity to discuss issues usually considered taboo among the divided communities.

In 2018, the UN Support Mission in Libya and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue launched a face-to-face and online platform to give Libyans the opportunity to feed into the outcomes of the National Conference intended to assist in achieving national reconciliation in Libya. This was complemented with social media and provided the opportunity for around 131,000 followers to interact on Facebook and 1,800 on Twitter. In total, about one-sixth of the population from a broad cross-section, including from hard-to-reach areas, contributed to the online consultations, during which Libyans articulated their visions for the future, highlighting points of consensus and divergence.

> **Social media has clear potential to enhance peacemaking, including in the delicate early phases when space for dialogue is squeezed and relationships are formative and highly sensitive.**

Calling for a methodological shift
The growth in the importance of social media calls for a methodological shift in dialogue and mediation processes. Its relatively new role as a peace tool means that associated risks are acute, and so precautionary measures are essential. Peace practitioners need to capitalise on the strengths of social media while putting risk-mitigation mechanisms in place to protect the peace process.

Peace practitioners, including mediation teams, need to be trained in cybersecurity measures to ensure that their online interactions are protected from any potential

hackers. Even then, they are advised to operate on the assumption that everything could be leaked, and plan accordingly to mitigate associated fallout. They need to include social media in their scenario development and agenda planning.

Social media has clear potential to enhance peacemaking, including in the delicate early phases when space for dialogue is squeezed and relationships are formative and highly sensitive. It has been transforming data collection and analysis, enabling access to more and more granular information from different sources, and has been providing new avenues into peace dialogue, shaping conflict and peace narratives and diversifying participation.

A growing number of mediation practitioners are promoting the development of provisional codes of conduct on the use of social media to lay down some basic rules of external communication among the conflict parties and maintain a degree of confidentiality. The agreement on a provisional code of conduct can itself constitute a confidence-building measure and promote trust among the conflict parties and mediators as it signals the parties' commitment to the process. The compliance with the code can further strengthen confidence since it shows that the parties can be trusted to fulfill their commitments.

Many practitioners engaged in or supporting early dialogue and mediation processes shy away from interacting with both traditional and new media. They need the skills to know when to engage on social media and when their engagement will impede their efforts; when it will help them to shape the narrative, and when it will amplify anti-peace voices or hate speech. They need to ask challenging questions about local ownership, public perception, the social and political fabric of the country, and political sensitivities when deciding if and when to use social media to engage with the public and attempt to shape the narrative around the mediation process. Practitioners need to be thick-skinned enough to handle online attacks and should engage strategic communications experts who have worked on social media in conflict-affected countries and have sound experience in shaping narratives and countering disinformation.

This field is still in its infancy. Careful experimentation and practical research using a multidisciplinary approach can help to find out more about the potential and risks of social media in early peacemaking, and to further develop and expand toolkits for mediators. Increased interaction between peace practitioners, technology experts, communication specialists, policymakers and the owners and users of social media platforms, as well as parties and communities involved in or affected by violent conflict, will support effective and conscientious progress.

Digital analysis

Peacemaking potential and promise

Andreas T Hirblinger is a postdoctoral researcher at the Graduate Institute in Geneva where he conducts research on peacebuilding, with a special interest in the role of knowledge production. His most recent research project asked how information and communication technologies can support inclusive peace mediation. He currently explores opportunities and challenges of machine-supported argument analysis for peace mediation, as well as the role of technology in navigating uncertainty in peace processes.

Maude Morrison is Deputy Director of Build Up, an organisation that seeks to transform conflict in the digital age. She focuses on the role of social media in conflict, exploring opportunities for online spaces to both exacerbate and mitigate societal tensions. Previously, she was based in Myanmar addressing inter-communal conflict.

Helena Puig Larrauri is Co-founder and Director of Build Up. She has been advising and working in conflict contexts and polarised environments for over a decade. She specialises in the integration of digital technology and innovation processes to civic initiatives and is an Ashoka Fellow.

In recent years there has been a rapid growth of information and communication technologies and digitisation of elements of both armed conflict and peace processes. Digital tools are increasingly being deployed for political analysis, providing significant opportunities for innovation, promising to transform conventional approaches to analysis that often require a physical presence in conflict-affected contexts. They not only allow for remote operations, but enable participatory data gathering and analysis that can reduce information shortages and support peacemaking efforts, including early on in a peace process.

This article discusses how peace organisations can use digital technologies to inform planning and process design at the pre-formal or early stages of peace processes. It outlines three key advantages of digital analysis: to mitigate risk and reduce costs of data collection; to increase diversity of data sources; and to enhance the ownership of analysis and make it an integral part of the dialogue effort. The article further explains how advances in digital analysis can help collect data on relationships between groups, which is essential for understanding conflict dynamics and for mapping peace pathways. This potential of digital technologies is balanced by discussion of three key challenges: using digital data to understand both online and offline worlds; maintaining or enhancing meaningful participation in data collection and analysis; and keeping peace support actors engaged with increasingly automated data analysis processes.

Three advantages of digital conflict analysis

Digital conflict analysis provides three distinct advantages for early or pre-formal peacemaking. First, digitisation allows for remote data collection, which can reduce the security risks and costs associated with locally based data gathering. This enables more comprehensive, flexible, and sustained analysis that can provide valuable insights. Considering the Covid-19 pandemic, major events that negatively impact mediation entities' capacities to conduct in-person data collection further emphasise the value of remote digital analysis. In some cases, the need to maintain activities is balancing out concerns over data security. While mediators need to minimise the risks of data theft or leakages, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen an increasing willingness to use digital tools and navigate the associated risks.

Second, digital data collection and analysis can increase the diversity and quantity of voices considered, overcoming some of the barriers presented by physical data collection to enable a more comprehensive analysis. This can further help to mitigate data collection problems posed by the increasingly fractured nature of contemporary conflict and the myriad armed and other actors involved.

Conventional offline methods often only allow a limited number of people to join the process, and thus struggle with selecting representative informants. They are often stymied by physical security limitations and travel restrictions. By contrast, digital technologies can collect information from many conflict parties, communities, nonviolent movements, businesspeople, and others. This can be done through a variety of methods including mobile phone apps, interactive voice response surveys, WhatsApp surveys, online forms, chatbots or SMS systems. Although digital data collection can serve to reach many more people, mediation teams should consider digital access challenges (such as gender, age or geographic differences in access to and literacy around technology and fiscal connectivity costs) when designing data collection. In addition, they also should be mindful of the 'volume' challenge, further discussed below.

Third, digital analysis tools enable data to be scrutinised, visualised, and shared in new ways that are more accessible to different groups involved in a peace process, for example through visual data dashboards. This allows for process design experimentation, with analysis becoming a distinct part of dialogue and facilitation processes, for example through the visualisation of conflict narratives and alternatives, as well as the visualisation of scenarios. This dynamic use can help to overcome the tendency for analysis to be separated from the peace process it is designed to inform, in which analysis becomes a 'check-box' exercise, often as part of funding proposals, rather than an essential tool to inform process design and implementation.

Between 'hard' and 'soft' facts – the promise of relational data
A comprehensive understanding of a conflict and context is crucial to identifying viable entry points for peacemaking. Contemporary armed conflicts involve multiple dimensions, presenting peacemakers with major analytical challenges in understanding the complex interplay between the security, political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of conflict. Making sense of such complexity requires gathering and analysing 'soft' and 'hard' facts about conflict and peace indicators – factors which together affect the likelihood and character of the violence, conflict resolution and transformation.

Soft data provides insights into the attitudes of conflict parties and other key groups, which is conventionally collected through in-person contact such as interviews and workshops, as well as historical media data. This can be gathered by journalists and human rights organisations, peace activists, insider, or local mediators and, in some contexts, peacekeeping and regional organisation missions. Alternatively, generating analysis is often outsourced to private companies and consultants. Given that 'live' data

collection and initial analysis in conflict zones is difficult, this often becomes a bottleneck slowing down peacemaking design and implementation. As a result, peace initiatives often go ahead with insufficient or inaccurate information.

Digital analysis has until recently mainly been used in conflict early warning systems. These have predominantly focused on 'hard' indicators that could predict the onset or recurrence of armed conflict, along a variety of dimensions such as economic factors (blockades or sanctions, unemployment rates), environmental factors (rainfall, disasters), and insecurity (increased abductions, military mobilisation). Yet much of this data remains inaccessible to peace organisations and reveals little about the interests of and relationships between conflict parties, communities, and other stakeholders. By contrast, the distinct added value of digital tools for peacemaking lies in the scope to analyse and visualise current and potential relationships between conflict parties, civil society, the private sector, regional actors, and others.

Increasingly, peacemakers have instant access to public sources of information, including social media. Analysing large quantities of public social media content can ascertain the perceptions and preferences of groups and trace patterns of influence. Analysing radio content to assess public opinion can also be effective. Satellite imagery of movements of people, weather patterns or infrastructure development or damage can be added to build a more comprehensive contextual picture.

This combination of data collection methodologies and types offers myriad data points on social and political relationships underpinning conflict. It can also help make sense of the competing narratives, perceptions, or sentiments – vital at the pre-formal and early stages of a peace process. This data is 'relational', since it elucidates relationships between actors, in material, tangible and perceived dimensions.

> **" Digital analysis tools enable data to be scrutinised, visualised, and shared in new ways that are more accessible. "**

Network analysis (the mapping of connections between actors and groups) and 'text mining' (the process of deriving information from text), including the use of natural language processing (NLP), are rapidly advancing and hold promise for relational data analysis. But what does this mean in practice? The UN Department of Political and

Peacebuilding Affairs Middle Eastern Division provides one example. The Division is working with external tools that use data generated through online focus groups and apply 'sentiment analysis' to it – a form of text mining that automatically detects patterns in the text to measure trends in people's opinions. Content is coded according to various sentiments, to identify the mood of a conversation on a given topic. However, these tools come with significant challenges, further explored below.

Another example is the effort to identify digital influencers in relation to Syrian refugee integration in Lebanon. Commissioned by UNDP, Build Up used network analysis software like Networkx and Gephi to pick out and visualise networks of influence (see further reading). While the development of such tools requires time and resources, they can be used at early phases of mediation efforts to help understand complex conflict dynamics and to identify possible entry points for dialogue.

Triangulating online and offline data
The operational value of collected data depends on whether it can accurately inform mediators' understanding of parties' negotiation positions and behaviour. Although public online data can provide a useful addition to traditional data collection, its relationship to stakeholders' 'offline' behaviour and its ability to inform offline peace negotiations or 'talks about talks' needs to be further explored.

The use of NLP remains limited in its current applicability for mediation support as it is most beneficial when complemented by strong contextual analysis. Automated sentiment analysis often fails to capture the full complexity of conflict-laden discourse and can even be misleading, because individual speech is built on context and identity within complex and changing social systems. Furthermore, sentiments are often expressed through rhetorical devices such as jokes, sarcasm, and slang. This is difficult for a computer model to capture at all, let alone maintain pace within the rapid evolutions of online political speech.

In addition, publicly available information gathered through social media analysis may not be fully representative. During the social media analysis mentioned above, researchers seeking to understand perspectives of both Lebanese and Syrian communities in Lebanon found that publicly available information came predominantly from the Lebanese community. This was due to factors such as different digital platform preferences, as well as security and safety concerns that made Syrian communities reluctant to express their views publicly on social media. Public social media data was useful in capturing part of the story, but not all of it. Other demographic variables that can

foster exclusions such as by age, gender, sexuality, and location must also be considered when analysing public social media data, as differing access and attitudes towards social media will result in biases.

To mitigate this, there is a need to contextualise large amounts of publicly available data with data that is collected in a targeted manner. Digital technologies can support a more precise selection of target populations. For instance, online focus groups and surveys can serve to reveal participants' stances towards a negotiated settlement, or perceptions about other population groups. UNDP Lebanon used WhatsApp to collect perception data from 1,036 people, concerning topics ranging from local tensions to future priorities. Participants' phone numbers were collected from municipalities, NGOs and local community leaders and the survey was sent directly to people's WhatsApp, with recipients responding by voice or text message.

The Conflict Alert and Prevention Center (CENAP), a Burundian NGO, has also made use of digital tools for targeted data collection. CENAP used CSPro census analysis software to enumerate quantitative surveys on youth perceptions of the future of Burundi. A simple online visualisation dashboard enables young people and policymakers to explore and analyse the data collectively. This is complemented through focus group discussions to provide a more nuanced picture of young women and men's aspirations for the future.

Combining qualitative and quantitative techniques can enable peacemakers to better understand how attitudes reflect and affect political processes. However, this usually requires some time and preparation, particularly to identify, select or produce appropriate qualitative data sources. This can entail collecting data from a network of analysts through individual interviews or surveys to later feed it into a digital database. Peace process support actors may be concerned about confidentiality issues and the high degree of management needed to maintain such a network of analysts in a secure manner. As such, the promise of quick, easy, and accurate data remains somewhat elusive.

Participation in digital analysis
Digital data collection conducted *about* people but not *with* people risks being extractive, in turn threatening the legitimacy and value of the analysis. Where data is collected without the knowledge of the participants whose data is collected (eg sentiment analysis of tweets), there is a risk of undermining the analysis by missing nuances in perceptions of the conflict-affected population for the reasons discussed above. Extractive data collection processes in which participants are aware of their involvement can also be counter-productive, particularly

if expectations for that involvement are not met. Online focus groups, for example, where participants' views are not then integrated into a peace process, risk undermining the legitimacy of mediation efforts by raising the expectations of those whose data is collected.

> **Digital data collection conducted *about* people but not *with* people risks being extractive, in turn threatening the legitimacy and value of the analysis.**

Digital conflict analysis promises a more comprehensive link between data collection and broader mediation efforts. However, it is crucial that the data is provided intentionally by participants. In many conflicts, data gathering can be an integral part of the mediation process, in which inviting people to share their grievances, needs and positions is a vital first step. The collected data (or at least parts of it) should thus always contain the 'voice' of those actors who have provided information to influence what they perceive to be an objectionable state of affairs.

Traditional conflict analysis has often been an internal exercise by peacemaking entities, largely conducted at the start of a project or funding cycle, and not necessarily always seen as a living document or process. Digital tools provide opportunities to collect data in a more inclusive and participatory manner. For example, participatory 'barometers' – data collection processes that measure perceptions of a population on specific issues – have been used in Guinea Bissau and Burundi to involve communities in collecting and analysing the contextual factors at the heart of conflict. Local organisations facilitated the coming together of communities and policymakers to analyse data collected from communities, providing not only a nuanced definition of the problems at hand, but also prompting constructive dialogue based on this information. The analysis was conducted through a simple online dashboard, which enabled communities with limited quantitative analysis skills to both understand and interpret the data (see further reading).

Despite these opportunities, identifying and interpreting the political processes that lie behind the collected data remains a challenge. Participatory digital data is not 'objective' evidence but requires further interpretation. All data, including social media data, is 'situated' – directed to a specific audience. For example, a tweet collected through a large-scale social media monitoring effort, in which a user expresses frustration to get a reaction from their followers, might not be the same deliberated answer they would have provided if asked during a political dialogue. There is a human behind every data point, speaking from their point of view, interest, and circumstances. Even in the case of bots that are programmed to amplify specific messages or narratives, this point stands. These bots need to be identified and their data correctly interpreted: not as a direct representation of a single stakeholder's voice, but as the output of a political actor that aims to increase its visibility and impact.

Digital automated analysis – balancing benefits and risks
It is no longer sufficient to task political analysts with the manual screening of social media through their personal user accounts. The scale of digital data available requires significant capacity to analyse, understand and use it. Internet 'echo chambers', where opinions are magnified by repetition inside a 'closed' communication system, and 'filter bubbles', where personalised online experiences act to amplify particular beliefs, further complicate more conventional, interpretative forms of analysis. As such, manual analysis can only provide a limited picture of the online environment. Similar difficulties affect analysis of radio content, polling, or online comments.

Many sectors increasingly seek systematisation and automation of analytical tasks in response to these challenges, including using machine-learning tools. However, efforts to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for digital analysis for mediation are still in their infancy. This hesitancy is partly driven by the institutional cultures of many peace support organisations, which stress the human element of mediation, or seek to uphold mediators' authoritative position among the conflict parties, communities, and others.

Peacemakers also have ethical concerns about opaque 'black-box' digital applications such as neural networks, which mimic human brains by recognising patterns and 'learn' by themselves. Concerns range from data privacy to the legitimacy of the analysis as, like real humans, machines are prone to bias. Without understanding those biases, automated analysis risks being misleading. Tools such as StereoSet, which measures bias in applications used for text mining, can be of help for developers. Nonetheless, it is important that the results of automated analysis should be carefully assessed and interpreted to detect possible biases. Despite these concerns, applications in other fields show that machine-learning applications will augment rather than replace human expertise and can be designed in ways that keeps the mediator 'in the loop'.

In addition to these concerns, digital analysis tools pose several additional risks. Digital data collection tools must

be carefully selected and used to avoid privacy breaches, ensure confidentiality, and avoid leaking of data. Public scraping of data poses ethical challenges that risk undermining a mediator's legitimacy.

> **" Participatory approaches can play a role in reframing conflictual and negative perceptions. "**

There is also a risk of fragmentation and polarisation associated with enhanced participatory analysis enabled by digital tools and the representation of a greater range of perspectives in the data. To avoid this, careful facilitation is required to avoid further entrenching divisions between groups and to manage expectations. Inclusion of voice and perspective does not equate to everyone seeing their interests reflected or realised in the peace process. The sharing of data analysis through digital tools should also be carefully framed to avoid unintentionally supporting narratives that drive violence and repression. All these risks must be considered and mitigated through thorough design processes. Above all, data collection and analysis need to be as transparent and impartial as possible to avoid exacerbating conflict divides and to inform effective mediation that is impartial, professional, innovative and evidence based.

Looking ahead – integrating human and digital analysis
New approaches to digital data analysis are needed that can integrate human and machine capacities, guarantee diverse human oversight, and produce outputs that can immediately benefit a given peace process. The challenge is to develop analytical tools that can be trusted by mediators, conflict parties and communities affected by conflict, not only because they are able to provide accurate and trustworthy analysis, but because they inform strategies to move peace processes forward inclusively and sustainably.

However, more automated data analysis such as using AI requires time to develop – the machine needs to be trained on pre-existing datasets and established mediator knowledge. This means that efforts to prepare and improve digital analysis must start well before dialogue or facilitation starts or re-commences.

There are several steps that can be taken to move digital analysis forward as a viable tool for smarter peacemaking. Social media monitoring must go beyond simple keyword

searches and data that is taken out of context by an over-focus on content. In turn, digital analysis must go beyond social media monitoring. Mediators should ensure that large-scale analysis of publicly available data is complemented with curated data sources, such as form surveys or online focus groups. A strong assessment of the 'information ecosystem' – the way in which information moves between people in a particular context, both on and offline – should be conducted as part of the context analysis in order to understand biases that affect publicly available data.

Participatory data analysis methodologies should be integrated into peacemaking process design wherever possible. Such analysis can help identify entry points to further dialogue – for example involving different groups – as well as providing a more nuanced analysis of the conflict. In particular conditions, participatory approaches can play a role in reframing conflictual and negative perceptions. Mediators should experiment with the array of digital tools available to support analysing relationships between individuals, groups and institutions, and visualising scenarios and peacemaking pathways.

> **" Digital data collection tools must be carefully selected and used to avoid privacy breaches, ensure confidentiality, and avoid leaking of data. "**

Mediation support organisations should build capacity for digital analysis in conflict-prone contexts as part of conflict-prevention measures. The creation of shared, open source data bases that collect relational data, similar to what exists for hard conflict data, such as the Armed Conflict Location Events Data databases, should be explored. Mediators could then tap into these capacities at an early stage. Analysts, peace organisations, communities, conflict parties and others can work together to explore feasible options for integrating automated analysis, machine-learning applications and human input and oversight to guarantee that digital analysis is done with and for the humans affected by conflict.

An experiment in inclusion?

Informal peacemaking in Manbij, Syria

Aviva M. Stein specialises in the intersection between gender, democracy, violent extremism and human rights. With a particular interest in the Syrian civil war, rise of the Islamic State and emergence of new grassroots forms of democracy, the majority of her work has focused on diplomacy, development assistance and advocacy in Syria specifically and the Middle East and North Africa more broadly.

Adam H. Beek is an expert on conflict, human rights, and the Middle East and North Africa region, having focused on the Syrian civil war since its outbreak. He has worked on diplomatic negotiations, grassroots mobilisation, civil society empowerment and international peace interventions.

Examples of informal and localised peacemaking have emerged from within the chaos of the Syrian civil war and violent reign of the Islamic State (IS), and from outside formal peace initiatives. A model of inclusive, grassroots democracy has been instituted in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), which includes Manbij, an Arab-majority city. The AANES has achieved remarkable stability and prioritised women's equality. Yet challenges remain about the broader acceptance of the model by the local population, particularly in the light of inconsistencies in its ad hoc implementation and shifting regional and international power dynamics, which raise important questions over its sustainability and wider applicability. Significant tensions arise from the fact that the inclusive governance vision and model of AANES has links to particular Kurdish political movements and ideologies, notably the Democratic Unity Party (PYD).

Women's participation and representation has been a barometer for understanding and assessing the practical viability of the political system in the AANES and Manbij. This article examines the geopolitical and social context of the AANES 'experiment', and its potential as a formula both for 'inclusive stabilisation', and for sustaining peace through representative governance. A small number of interviews were conducted by the authors in Manbij in July and August 2019 to inform this article. These interviews were held through existing networks and

do not constitute a statistically relevant sample, but rather provide qualitative insights. Throughout 2019 and early 2020, the situation in North and East Syria was volatile. Extensive local research was not feasible due to security and access issues thus we also draw on secondary sources, media reporting and prior knowledge.

Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
Experimentation with autonomous governance in northern Syria predates the outbreak of the war in 2011. The withdrawal of the Syrian government from Kurdish-majority areas of northern Syria in 2012 left a governance vacuum. Since then, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria – known colloquially as Rojava, or 'west' in Kurdish – has been through several iterations. The Democratic Autonomous Administration was formed in 2014, expanding into the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria in 2016 and then into the AANES in September 2018 – by this time comprising six autonomous areas incorporating four million people.

The establishment of the AANES was driven by the Democratic Unity Party (PYD), which shares ideological ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. The AANES instituted an experimental governance system that had been developed by imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan called Democratic Confederalism. This proposes a network of popularly elected administrative

Map 3: The civil war in northern Syria

Arabs

Kurds and Arabs

Kurds

Turkmens

This map is illustrative and does not imply the expression of an opinion on the part of Conciliation Resources concerning the delimitation of the borders of the countries and territories featured.

At the time of publication (mid-2020), the situation in north-east Syria is in flux. This map was chosen to demonstrate the ethnic demographics and the development of democratic confederalism under the auspices of the AANES, rather than military control. Up to date information on lines of control can be found at https://syria.liveuamap.com

councils implemented through social revolution and built on direct democracy, gender equality, multiculturalism, environmentalism, and self-defence – whereby armed forces fall under direct control of local democratic institutions.

Democratic Confederalism asserts that it eschews Kurdish nationalism in favour of a communalist notion of a 'democratic nation'. However, within broader Syrian society the administrative regime is commonly perceived to be ethnically Kurdish. The connection between the PKK and PYD deepened pre-existing social and political fractures in Kurdish areas in northern Syria. Ruptures manifested locally, between older Syrian-Kurdish political organisations and the PYD, as well as regionally, between the three main Kurdish political parties in the region, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union Party (PUK) in Iraq, and the PKK in Turkey.

The PYD has drawn heavily on the model of PKK organisational capacities and resources. It formed armed People's Protection Units (YPG) in response to civil unrest in 2011. Women's Protection Units (YPJ) were further established in 2013 as the conflict spread. These Kurdish forces grew to be the pre-eminent military groups within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a north-eastern military alliance established in 2015 that became the main operational partner of the 'Global Coalition' against the Islamic State (Daesh). This international military alliance helped the AANES to increase its territory and influence outside of Kurdish-majority areas. However, at the same time, the AANES' association with the PKK has meant that many international actors have kept their distance from it politically, as much of the international community classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation. The AANES has also been excluded from international peace negotiations to resolve the Syrian crisis, despite ongoing requests to send representatives to the UN-led talks and other negotiations as a major internal actor.

An experiment in grassroots democracy?
Democratic Confederalism emphasises local-level decision-making and conflict resolution, as well as political inclusion and gender equality. However, perceptions that it has to an extent been imposed in the AANES 'top down' by the PYD has created tensions and resistance in practice, including in relation to its links with the ideology of PKK leader Öcalan.

Women's representation and participation in governance and decision-making has been institutionalised at all levels in the AANES, from local neighbourhood communes to the highest-ranking officials. All leadership positions are co-chaired by one woman and one man, often from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. All representational

bodies include a quota of 40 per cent female members and 30 per cent ethnoreligious minorities. A women's representational structure drafts laws, resolutions and programmes relating to women, manages safe houses for women escaping family and partner violence and develops the social science of jineology: women's perspectives on history and sociology.

The all-female YPJ allows women to hold equal rank with men. Schools and academies teach gender equality and women's rights to 'fast track' gender equality. New laws have given women rights in areas previously reserved for men, for example in relation to inheriting property, divorce, and custody of children. The Manbij Council of Women includes multiple women-only institutions, including a *Mala Jin* ('Women's House'), a women-centred economic institute and a centre for advancing jineology.

AANES institutions were implemented in response to pressing governance and service vacuums but have seen relative success in re-establishing or maintaining public services in majority-Kurdish areas, including public security. However, the reality of instituting political and cultural diversity in practice has created tensions and representational challenges in Kurdish-majority and more ethnically diverse areas.

Implementing Democratic Confederalism in practice has necessitated concessions and compromises, particularly in Arab-majority areas. Political groups that oppose governance dominated by the PYD have resisted the system's inclusion measures. For example, while new laws prohibit polygamous marriage, pre-existing arrangements are tolerated out of respect to local traditions. More broadly, Democratic Confederalism has been criticised by other Kurdish and Arab political parties for failing to extend power to communities not connected to the PYD.

Manbij – testing inclusive governance
The city of Manbij is a gateway between dislocated Kurdish majority regions of Afrin and Kobani (see Map 3: The civil war in northern Syria). It is also of strategic importance to the US, Turkey, the Syrian government, and other external actors, which have vied for influence over local factions. The town fell to Syrian rebel control in 2012, Daesh control in 2014, and then to the SDF in 2016. Arabs make up the majority in the town (approximately 80 per cent) and surrounding region, with Kurdish, Circassian and Turkmen minorities. Tribal structures remain relatively strong and have underpinned political allegiances and alliances. However, conflict has displaced several tribal and political groups with different ideological leanings, some of which view the AANES as another imposing force or entity.

Some analysts have hailed Manbij as a haven of stability established through the civil and military councils of the AANES, as well as a paragon of cross-ethnic and cross-cultural accord and cooperation. Indeed, extending the AANES outside Kurdish-majority areas necessitated broader military and political coalition-building, as well as an increase in diversity such as through the incorporation of local communities in decision-making and governance. After the SDF took control of Manbij from Daesh, arrangements between the AANES and local Arab leaders were negotiated around community needs and implementing Democratic Confederalism – although it should be noted that joining the AANES was widely seen by Manbij locals as the best of many poor options.

> **'Raising glamorous slogans, local and international forums can only bear fruit if coupled with practical application on the ground.'**

Limitations of access due to insecurity and other factors make it impossible to confirm the current circumstances of the AANES conclusively. But a small set of interviews in Manbij and the wider region conducted for this article in July and August 2019 provide some insights into life in the area – again, we do not claim these are fully representative. Contrary to AANES rhetoric of multi-ethnic participation and popular support, recent analysis by organisations like the Washington Institute suggest that the SDF tightly controls institutions, and that Arabs are in fact discriminated against, while anti-YPG and anti-Kurdish sentiment appears to have stimulated support for Syrian government return.

Our interviews reveal institutional bias in favour of supporters for Democratic Confederalism in several areas. Proportional representation was not fully applied in Manbij, while the Arab-majority Military Council is headed by two Kurds and two Arabs, all men, with an additional two female Kurdish advisors. A quota system for including women was implemented to some degree, with women present in each governing body – and sometimes outnumbering men. Yet ethnicity still influences divisions of power, with numerous sources suggesting that key positions are held by Kurds despite the Administration's emphasis on inclusion, equality, and ethnoreligious diversity. One interviewee lamented the difficulties of operationalising inclusion and stated: 'Raising glamorous slogans, local and international forums can only bear fruit if coupled with practical application on the ground'. Another commented that 'Leadership positions are [reserved for] Kurds while administrative ones are for Arabs'.

A Kurdish official claimed that 'all the [women's] committees and institutions have their own programmes and projects and include all women from all components of the society of Manbij without exception'. Nonetheless, Arab women in military roles are often employed in comparatively modest positions such as checkpoint guards, or traffic or general administration. PYD and YPG influence over decision-making feeds perceptions that these institutions are led by Kurds and are implementing 'Kurdish' ideas, including Democratic Confederalism, regardless of egalitarian rhetoric, local adaption, or the plurality of ideas within the Kurdish polity.

Women's inclusion in public life

Implementing institutional mechanisms for women's inclusion has in some instances been difficult, for example challenging deeply ingrained traditional inequalities and raising some men's fears of 'losing out'. Women are supported through empowerment processes and education, encouraging them to occupy non-traditional roles. One Arab male interviewee, the director of a teacher training institute, acknowledged that the traditional way of life for Arabs in Manbij prevented women from participating in many areas of life due to early marriage, stringent gender roles and limited educational opportunities.

There have been tensions between Arab men and Kurdish women in the public sphere, such as where Kurdish women have been employed or promoted over Arab men with better qualifications. Arab women who are willing to join the workforce also receive support, which many Arab men see as a slight against them, their culture, and traditions. Implementing such a system of 'fast tracking' gender equality may be more acceptable if accompanied by non-discriminatory power sharing. Women's inclusion in military life provides remarkable parity with men in a traditionally male-dominated sector, while Kurdish women's initiatives continue to reach out to Arab women. For example, one Arab woman interviewee lauded AANES institutions as providing safety, shelter, and positivity for women, saying that they were effective in promulgating and enacting laws that sponsor and regulate women's freedoms.

> **It remains to be seen whether this short-term relative stability can evolve into transformative and sustainable peace for all.**

Arab discontent and complaints of PYD and YPG domination are rife. But local resistance to the AANES has not significantly challenged its rule. There may be a few explanations for this: coincidence of interests in preventing Turkish inroads into the area; the radical Islamic orientation

of many Turkish-backed forces; or the political orientation of the tribal groupings involved in existing local governance. Also, many Manbij residents have welcomed the security and stability that SDF control has brought, especially when supported by the US. It remains to be seen whether this short-term relative stability can evolve into transformative and sustainable peace for all.

International involvement and the fall of Islamic State

US military support to the SDF facilitated the development of the AANES and deterred other international actors from seeking control there. This all changed with the fall of Daesh in March 2019 and the sudden withdrawal of US troops in October 2019: Turkey saw the opportunity to move against the perceived PKK threat in the area; and Syrian and Russian forces were increasingly deployed within SDF-controlled areas. The AANES was forced to prioritise self-defence, which curbed some ethnic tensions.

Military groups pledged in 2016 to remain under the SDF umbrella, to continue the fight against Daesh and resistance to Turkish incursions. Following agreements with the SDF in December 2018 and October 2019, the Syrian Army was deployed to the periphery of Manbij as a buffer against Turkish and other hostile forces. The incursion of Turkish and Syrian government forces has undermined advances by the AANES, which might result in a concomitant roll-back of women's rights in the area. PYD and YPJ forces may relinquish power to the Syrian government or its loyal local tribes, although the extent to which Damascus will be able to extend authority into northern Syria remains unclear. The most recent relevant UN Security Council Resolution was agreed in January 2020 (Resolution 2504). This limited humanitarian assistance border crossings from the previously agreed four points located in Jordan, Iraq and Turkey to just two points in Turkey, with requirements for permission from Damascus, and has resulted in significant diminution in humanitarian assistance funding and further increased pressure on the AANES.

Conclusions and recommendations

The AANES in northern Syria shows many encouraging signs of informal and inclusive peacebuilding in a highly volatile situation – outside of any formal talks to end the war or to map out a peaceful future for the country. The institutionalisation of women's representation at all levels of local governance is a remarkable example of mainstreaming gender equality, which has enabled Syrian women from a range of backgrounds to participate more meaningfully in public life. In Manbij, solidarity among local leaders against Daesh and Turkey coincided with the ambitions of YPG/SDF. Women's inclusion in early phases of local institution-building and policy implementation demonstrated a level of acceptance in some quarters, despite cultural, ethnic, and religious disparities.

However, inconsistencies in the realisation of the AANES and the ideologies that underpin it have also caused friction. The rhetoric of inclusion has not materialised equitably for all communities and identities. The ideological hegemony of the PYD and YPG and the entanglement of women's rights with the complexities of Democratic Confederalism in practice have increased ethnocultural and political tensions. Women's equal participation and representation has come up against cultural resistance to change in a largely conservative and semi-tribal society.

These contradictions raise questions about how parties to conflict, practitioners and policymakers can facilitate inclusive peace in northern Syria without exacerbating power inequalities. The international community and practitioners in Syria nationally and in local affairs have significant roles in promoting meaningful and complex inclusion. In the case of Manbij, as elsewhere, obvious disparities in distribution of power exist and international alignments contribute to these. The contribution of outside powers' and actors' policies to creating uneven distributions of power and to increasing local tensions along ethnic and religious lines must be considered. As the region enters yet another new phase in the Covid-19 era, a critical step towards international support for stability and peace could lie in the reopening of border crossings for humanitarian assistance not contingent on Turkish or Syrian regime permission, providing a pathway for essential humanitarian medical equipment and assistance that will prove crucial, as yet another threat looms over the Syrian people.

Young people and pre-formal peacemaking

Tapping into technology

Irena Grizelj focuses on youth-inclusive peace and mediation processes. Irena has researched and consulted for multilateral and non-governmental institutions and co-authored the first UN global policy paper on youth participation in peace processes (*We are Here*). Irena has an MA in International Relations and Conflict Management from Johns Hopkins University and is undertaking an MA on Mediation in Peace Processes at the Centre for Security Studies in Zurich.

Michael Frank Alar is a consultant on conflict transformation, dialogue and peace processes. Currently he consults for the World Bank's Fragility, Conflict and Violence team in the Philippines and he has also consulted for the UNFPA on Youth, Peace and Security and worked on the Mindanao peace process. Michael holds an MA in International Peace Studies (Japan), an Advanced Specialist Degree in Peace and Development Studies (Spain), and a diploma in Islamic Studies and Interfaith Relations (India).

Ayak Chol Deng Alak is the Head of Research at the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board, an implementation mechanism of the revitalised South Sudan peace agreement. She is former deputy coordinator of the South Sudan Civil Society Forum, and co-founder of Anataban, a youth-led political movement. Ayak is a certified facilitator at the National Transformational Leadership Institute.

Young people are a majority in many countries affected by violent conflict. Yet they are seldom included in peace processes. Following United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on Youth, Peace and Security, the UN commissioned a global policy paper called *We are here: an integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes* (2019) – one of the contributors is also an author of this *Accord* article. The policy paper proposes three ways to understand young people's involvement in peace processes – 'in', 'around' and 'outside' the peace 'room'. However, it also stresses that youth *involvement* in peace processes does not equate to youth *influence*.

Young people's involvement in peace initiatives needs to be approached through an intersectional lens, inclusive of identity, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic status and disability, among other factors. Common stereotypes portray young men as perpetrators of violence and young women as passive victims. Young women are often marginalised from peace spaces earmarked both for women and for youth – deemed too young for the Women, Peace and Security agenda, while not considered in youth-related issues where young men tend to dominate. The definition of youth is itself contested: UNSCR 2250 describes young people as aged 18–29, however there are significant definitional and cultural differences across the world.

In reality, in many conflict-affected societies young people are at the forefront in mobilising for peace through rallies and demonstrations, leading efforts for community-level reconciliation, or using arts, social media and information

technology. This article describes some roles that young women and men have played in helping to cultivate peace processes and initiatives in South Sudan, the Philippines and Kenya, looking particularly at their use of information technology.

Broadening participation

Young people have helped to broaden participation in peace dialogue. In South Sudan, following the failure of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) of August 2015, a High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) was initiated in 2017 in response to advocacy and demand from civil society. Learning from previous mistakes, civil society coordinated to ensure their participation in the HLRF. A core coordination group was established, which consisted of the South Sudan Civil Society Forum (SSCSF), the South Sudan Women's Coalition for Peace (SSWCP) and the South Sudan Coalition of Youth Organisations (SSCoYO). (For more detail, see the article 'International support for civil society involvement in peacemaking in South Sudan' in this edition.)

The coordination group demanded that civil society be accredited as delegates to the peace negotiation, rather than observers as in the ARCSS process. This was important because it enabled civil society, including young people and women, to have a more equal footing in the process. As observers, civil society had had limited influence, but as delegates representatives could make proposals that would be heard in the room by the political negotiating parties. Civil society presence and competence met a degree of respect and even healthy fear on the part of the political parties, who had little exposure to their way of working.

> " **The coordination of youth in civil society in the early phases in 2017 helped to diversify the South Sudan talks.** "

The coordination group established a technical support team in January 2018 with sub-groups looking at youth concerns, women's rights and inclusion, security, governance and media. Tech-savvy young women and men were able to encourage public engagement in the process, for example by organising daily public updates through social media channels, including Facebook and WhatsApp. Young people created a virtual 'E-Delegates Forum', which facilitated information flows from the negotiation table to regional capitals, and to designated youth civil society focal points who could communicate with local communities. The media team organised radio interviews with civil society delegates inside the peace negotiations in order to update

the public, and the credibility of civil society helped counter misinformation by some politicians.

The coordination of youth in civil society in the early phases in 2017 helped to diversify the talks. Following lobbying for parity in representation, the parties agreed to women's representation at 35 per cent and youth involvement at 20 per cent. Importantly, this was in all the mechanisms of the peace negotiations and agreement implementation. Young people close to the talks lobbied for wider youth constituencies to be included, 'naming and shaming' parties that did not involve women and young people. Despite being largely confined to supporting roles and with limited funding, young people's technological know-how enabled them to challenge the established hierarchy of the talks.

Mobilising the masses

Young people in Kenya have used information technology and social media to mobilise their peers for peace, subsequently influencing more established peace negotiators. Violence related to the disputed 2007 presidential elections left over 1,100 people dead and more than 600,000 displaced. Nakuru County was a flashpoint for fighting, much of which manifested through the incitement of young people to violence by political elites.

In 2010, in anticipation of another cycle of violence in the upcoming 2013 elections, young people formed the Nakuru County Youth Bunge Association (NCYBA – *bunge* is Swahili for parliament), which represented over 350,000 young people across 1,300 *bunges*. The NCYBA brought together peers from warring communities, acknowledging that both communities had engaged in violence and suffered as a result. When a more formal peace process was initiated by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission in 2010, the NCYBA advocated and negotiated for youth voices to be represented in the talks.

The Nakuru County Peace Accord, signed in August 2012, consequently included clauses for youth participation in decision-making structures, as well as investment in business and education in order to mitigate socio-political drivers of youth engagement in electoral violence. The NCYBA was further able to use its peer-to-peer mobile phone network to dispel inflammatory misinformation, and initiated peace caravans to spread pro-peace messages. As recounted by Alice Nderitu, the 2013 elections were the most peaceful since 1992, with no injuries or deaths.

In South Sudan, young artists created the #Anataban ('I am tired' in Arabic) campaign in 2016 in response to the civil war. In 2017, they launched the 'South Sudan is Watching' public social media campaign to put pressure on the negotiating

parties to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. These campaigns were popular with young people and the South Sudanese diaspora, and referred to by several policymakers, including tweets from the Chair of the African Union, Moussa Faki Mahamat. These creative approaches underscore young people's capacities to generate alternative channels to build public demand for peace before and during formal talks.

Connecting negotiators

In societies where age hierarchy is the norm, it is difficult for young people to get a seat at the negotiating table; where they do, their presence is often tokenistic. Through early engagement in pre-formal phases of peace processes, young women and men can overcome age-related barriers to engage in negotiations, playing critical institutional roles such as providing administrative and technical support, or influencing the substance of the talks and the content of the agreement.

Peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) went on for 17 years following the first round of talks in 1997, culminating in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) signed in March 2014. This was never a straight path to peace and there were several 'early phases', as negotiations were subsequently 'rebooted' at least twice – once when a major war erupted in 2000, and again after violence broke out in 2008 with the botched signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD).

In all three early phases of the talks, young women and men played important administrative and technical supporting roles in the negotiating secretariats of both the MILF and the government. The presence of young people in the technical secretariat teams supported informal youth-led backchannels between the two negotiating parties, which helped advance trust and understanding.

The story of Johaira Wahab-Manantan is illustrative. Wahab-Manantan was 25 years old when she joined the Government Peace Panel as head of its legal team when talks restarted in 2010. She had previously been involved in civil society advocacy, including making recommendations to the government administration on legal issues relating to the Agreement on Ancestral Domain. One of her key substantive contributions to the dialogue was to ensure the 'right of women to *meaningful* political participation' (emphasis added) when the 'Decision Points on Principles of April 2012' was being negotiated. This principle served as common ground from which the parties launched intense negotiations that led to the CAB in March 2014. This required that women not only be present in talks but that their concerns be heard and taken on board.

A few young people with close informal connections to the MILF played similar supporting roles. Esmael Pasigan, the 26-year-old son of one of the group's ideological founders, for example, was the only person among the elder MILF negotiators who knew how to operate a laptop when peace talks were being explored in 1996. His technological skills gave him early access before a formal process had been fully established. His sustained presence throughout the evolution of the talks meant that he led the MILF in the drafting and negotiation of the Decision Points on Principles at the Technical Committee level in 2012.

Conclusion and recommendations

More and more the focus is shifting from 'why' young people should be involved in peace processes to 'how' they can engage meaningfully – outside, around and in the 'room' where formal negotiations are happening. Experiences of young people in early peace dialogue discussed above stress the significance of technology to open pathways to peace talks. As a generation born into everyday use of information technology, young people have harnessed digital tools and platforms to bring inclusivity and diversity into peace processes that may previously have not been possible. As peacemaking evolves and embraces more use of technology, tech-savvy young people are an asset.

> **Young people can act as informal links ('backchannels'), which are often unencumbered by strict rules, codes of conduct and protocols.**

Outside the room: Young people often use alternative, informal and innovative approaches to influence formal talks from the outside – creating bridges that, for example, connect negotiators in the room to communities affected by violence. Young people have also used these informal spaces to consolidate substantive inputs from youth and women representatives into formal peace talks. Formal peace process actors should see young people as a necessary channel in linking talks to a larger number of actors rather than just as a vulnerable sector that needs to be appeased. The first step to enabling this is by recognising the legitimacy and leverage of youth voices outside the room and using digital technology to open multi-level channels for engagement.

Inside and around the room: It is important to provide spaces for talented young women and men both around and inside the room to provide substantive contributions to the negotiations. This has already been demonstrated by youth movements and leaders who have channelled technological

tools to facilitate inclusion and mediation efforts. Young people can act as informal links ('backchannels'), which are often unencumbered by strict rules, codes of conduct and protocols. The relationships young people create with peers on the other side can serve as important channels for clarifying issues to avoid possible misunderstandings during formal talks. Mediators and facilitators should create spaces and opportunities for young people inside and around the room to engage informally across conflict divides during, before and after formal talks, such as providing them roles in technical committees, a conducive environment for informal engagement, and opportunities to work together and communicate outside the talks.

> **Patriarchal dynamics in youth movements can create cyclical exclusionary norms if not addressed intentionally.**

Address the exclusions within: Patriarchal dynamics in youth movements can create profound exclusionary norms if not addressed intentionally. When participating in peace processes, young women more often undertake administrative or secretarial work, while young men are already subtly prepared for substantive roles, regardless of their competencies, on an invisible path to leadership positions. Young women, however, gain more confidence in 'engendering' processes if there are more women in the room, as evidenced by research on critical masses. Peace process actors, including mediators and facilitators, should enable an atmosphere during talks that encourages young women in the room to participate substantively, especially – but not only – on issues that will affect them. This can be supported by maintaining a substantial number of women both within and around the room, and ensuring enabling measures for young women to lower the barriers to their inclusion and meaningful participation.

From ceasefire to disarmament without states

Lessons from the Basque Country

Vlad Corbu is Chief Programme Manager at the Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG). He joined DAG in early 2011, after finishing his MA in International Relations (cum laude) at the University of Amsterdam. He was part of the DAG team working in the Basque Country from 2011 to 2017. He has been involved in DAG's dialogues in Libya, the Great Lakes and Sri Lanka, among others, working with governments, armed groups and the United Nations on issues of disarmament, political understanding and reconciliation.

On 8 April 2017, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), the last autochthonous armed group in Europe, gave up its weapons. Formed in 1959, ETA fought for the unification of the 'Basque homeland' (four provinces in Spain, including Navarre, and three in France) and self-determination. After almost 60 years of armed activity, ETA disarmed unilaterally. More than 3.5 tonnes of weapons and explosives were picked up by French security forces. This was hailed as a 'great step' towards peace and security in Europe by Matthias Fekl, then the French Minister of Interior. ETA's disarmament came without any negotiations with the Spanish government and more than six years after ETA announced an end to violence. Throughout these six years, the governments in Spain (where ETA killed over 800 people) and France (where it had operated clandestinely and hidden its weapons) refused to engage directly or indirectly with ETA. While this position, combined with intense police pressure, served to further debilitate an already weak ETA, it also complicated its disarmament.

A combination of actors, including the Basque government, civil society organisations in the Spanish and French Basque Country, and unofficial international actors, emerged to make ETA's disarmament possible. Among these and as described in more detail below, the International Verification Commission (IVC), set up by the Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG), a Netherlands-based

mediation organisation, played a key role in monitoring ETA's 2011 ceasefire and helping to facilitate its unilateral disarmament. The ceasefire and disarmament processes were unique. But there are lessons that could apply beyond the Basque Country and indeed beyond Europe. In situations where states are politically constrained in engaging with armed groups, inspiration may be drawn from this experience where a regional government took the political lead and civil society and international actors played active roles in giving the process broader legitimacy.

This article explores the specific conditions and the constellation of actors that facilitated ETA's unilateral disarmament in a process marked by informality. It reflects on the informal pathways for dialogue and the creative thinking that made disarmament possible in the absence of a formal process. While recognising the crucial efforts of various official and unofficial actors in the years that led to ETA's 2011 ceasefire, the article focuses on the road from ceasefire to disarmament, from 2011 to 2017. Given the author's personal involvement in the process, it also centres on the role played by DAG and the IVC.

The absence of state involvement
Since the 1980s, different Spanish governments had combined a policy of tough counterterrorism measures with discreet talks at specific stages to try to bring an end to ETA's violence.

The area claimed as the Basque homeland by the Basque pro-independence movement.

This map is illustrative and does not imply the expression of an opinion on the part of Conciliation Resources concerning the delimitation of the borders of the countries and territories featured.

In November 2011, the return to power of the conservative Partido Popular (PP), led by Mariano Rajoy, ushered in a period in which there would be no talks. The government also rejected all international overtures for engagement on ETA and refused to relocate ETA prisoners closer to the Basque Country, a central issue for the armed group. This would create a unique situation. Jonathan Powell, chief of staff to former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair and Director of InterMediate, a private diplomacy organisation, described in the *Financial Times* in 2014 how, 'no government in the world has ever said no when a terrorist group offered unilaterally to get rid of its weapons'.

The PP's position was largely a result of its vocal criticism of the previous Socialist government's (2004–11) talks with ETA and the intractable opposition of parts of its support base, including ETA victims' associations and right-wing media, to any engagement with ETA. The experience of failed talks in 2006 – and ETA's bombing of Barajas airport in Madrid in December the same year – also still loomed large. Perhaps most importantly, ETA was so weakened by arrests that PP leaders and most of the public believed it to be on the verge of defeat.

In the final year of the Socialist government's tenure, on 10 January 2011, ETA announced a 'permanent', 'general' ceasefire. Such ceasefires had been announced before, in 1989 and 2006, eventually collapsing into renewed violence. However, this was the first time ETA called for the ceasefire to be verified by the international community and offered it without conditions. The ceasefire would remain in place until ETA's disarmament in 2017.

> " **This was the first time ETA called for the ceasefire to be verified by the international community and offered it without conditions.** "

While the Socialist administration had not been willing to re-engage directly with ETA, it had given space for international actors to do so openly. A 'semi-formal' process had thus emerged, where internationals could negotiate a choreographed, confidential 'road map' for ending violence with ETA. This envisaged prominent international figures publicly calling for action from ETA, ETA promptly responding, and the Socialist government making (ostensibly) un-connected changes in policies affecting ETA prisoners within the scope of the existing laws. In October 2011, international notables led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened at the Aiete Palace in San Sebastián to call on ETA to end its armed operations. The Socialist government did not participate but allowed

the conference to take place. As then-Interior Minister Rubalcaba noted, 'if the price to pay for ETA to abandon its violence is that Kofi Annan comes to San Sebastián, I would buy the ticket myself.' Three days after the Aiete conference, ETA announced the end of its armed activities.

As part of this 'road map', ETA expected a 'peace for prisoners' process, where ETA steps would lead to changes in the government's policy on ETA prisoners. Yet all space for a semi-formal process evaporated with the PP's victory at the polls a month after the Aiete conference. Those seeking to end the violence had to revert to an exclusively informal process, with no state involvement. This effectively meant a return to a very preliminary stage of the process, where dialogue with ETA was politically and legally contentious, trust had to be (re-)built and creative ways identified to move forward.

Other actors step in to fill the vacuum

Where the central government in Madrid was absent after November 2011, regional authorities stepped in to offer institutional leadership and legitimacy. The Basque government (the governing body of the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain) – both Socialist and, following regional elections in 2012, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) – engaged publicly in the verification of the ceasefire. In late 2014, the Basque government presented a proposal for an 'orderly ETA disarmament', which included some of the elements of ETA's eventual disarmament in 2017. Basque President Iñigo Urkullu maintained a communication channel with Prime Minister Rajoy, informing him of developments and calling for greater flexibility on issues of prisoners and disarmament. Urkullu was also a key supporter of the IVC, travelling to Madrid to publicly stand with members of the IVC when they were called to testify before the High Court in 2014 (see section on IVC below).

Where regional authorities provided political cover from above, Basque civil society infused ideas and broader support from below. Grassroots organisations like Lokarri – a citizen's network established in 2006 to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation in the Basque country that had worked to delegitimise ETA's use of violence – now organised public events seeking to generate momentum and ideas by learning from other peace processes. A Social Forum was created in 2013 resulting in recommendations on various issues, including the key idea that ETA symbolically hand its weapons over to civil society. [Lokarri founder Paul Rios describes in *Accord* 25 in 2014 how the Social Forum was part of efforts by Basque social movements to mobilise support for a more participatory peace process – see further reading]. French Basque activists later took this idea to the extreme, assuming a risky, direct operational role in advancing ETA's

disarmament. In December 2016, several activists were arrested in France in the process of disabling 15 per cent of ETA's weapons.

Basque political pro-independence forces historically associated with ETA had played a key role in convincing ETA to move unilaterally towards ending violence. Since the breakdown of direct talks between the Socialist government and ETA in 2007, pro-independence (*Abertzale*) left leaders such as Arnaldo Otegi and Rufi Etxeberria embarked on a long negotiation process with ETA to persuade them to take unilateral steps towards peace. They understood that elections and not violence would be the best way to reach their objectives. By 2012, a year after ETA's ceasefire, the *Abertzale* left alliance had already become the second-largest political force in the Basque Country. A key challenge at this point was to prevent dissident factions from breaking away, as had happened in the Northern Ireland peace process with the emergence of the Real Irish Republican Army. The move to nonviolence took time, through broad internal consultations and strict internal discipline, but the different steps needed were finally taken. Delays caused frustration within Basque society but helped give confidence that the end of violence would be definitive.

> " **The move to nonviolence took time, through broad internal consultations and strict internal discipline.** "

Finally, a range of international actors, working both publicly and privately, completed the picture. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a Swiss-based 'private diplomacy organisation', had been working discreetly in the Basque Country since the early 2000s, facilitating confidential talks between ETA and the Socialist government in 2006 and continuing to engage ETA on ending violence. An International Contact Group, which was created by South African lawyer Brian Currin in 2011, had a more public role, seeking international support for a negotiated solution and calling for an ETA ceasefire. Jonathan Powell worked publicly and privately, helping to make the Aiete conference possible and confidentially engaging significant actors up to the time ETA gave up its weapons. As described below, the IVC helped verify ETA's ceasefire and facilitate its disarmament.

In the absence of state involvement, ETA could respond to international demands and internally claim international recognition for progress. Importantly for the Spanish government, the fact that these were all unofficial actors allowed Madrid to dismiss them publicly as 'ill-advised' private enterprises and maintain its uncompromising position.

The International Verification Commission
When it announced a 'permanent, internationally verifiable' ceasefire in January 2011, ETA still held some hope for official UN or EU international monitoring. As this was unacceptable for Spain, Basque and international actors conceived an unofficial body with the technical mandate of monitoring the ceasefire, which subsequently received the tacit approval of the Socialist government.

The IVC was set up in September 2011 by DAG. DAG had experience with sensitive informal political dialogues, particularly in Northern Ireland where it had facilitated the decommissioning of the second largest 'dissident republican' group in 2010. DAG Director Ram Manikkalingam and Assistant-Director Fleur Ravensbergen would serve as Chair and Coordinator, respectively.

Other IVC members included a former South African Intelligence Minister and the former British head of prisons in Northern Ireland, giving the IVC expertise and placing it beyond suspicion of partiality. The IVC quickly received the support of a cross-section of Basque actors, including the Basque government, all political parties except the PP, the Catholic Church, business and trade unions.

In practice, the IVC's added value would become its contact with ETA and with all the relevant Basque stakeholders. The IVC's way of working collectively with different Basque actors, including some who had not sat together in years, helped build trust that the 2011 ceasefire would not fail as previous ones had. As the public face of the ceasefire, the IVC steered away from political issues such as prisoners and reported publicly on the outcomes of its consultations on the state of the ceasefire. This moved a previously opaque, secretive process out into the open.

The IVC engaged with Basque stakeholders to directly address contentious issues, such as whether ETA members continuing to carry weapons, or supporters engaging in violent protests, constituted ceasefire violations. More importantly, the IVC helped manage the extremely tense relationships between some Basque actors, sometimes sending messages between groups or testing ideas informally.

The IVC's relationship with ETA was challenging. While the IVC commended ETA in public for sticking to its ceasefire commitments, in private it was very critical of ETA stalling on further unilateral steps. The IVC did not hesitate to use the limited leverage it had to apply pressure on ETA,

including by publicly threatening to end its role if there was no further movement towards disarmament. In early 2014, ETA released a video to the BBC showing two IVC members witnessing the first sealing of ETA weapons in an undisclosed safehouse. Members of the IVC were then summoned to testify before the High Court in Madrid about their engagement with ETA. While the sealing did not meet public expectations of complete disarmament – which affected the Commission's standing with Basque stakeholders and the broader public – the IVC proved to ETA that it was willing to take personal and political risk to advance the process. Thereafter, ETA announced a new role for the IVC – to verify that all ETA weapons would be 'put beyond operational use'.

A formula for disarmament

In April 2017 a window of opportunity for disarmament emerged. Since the general election in October 2016, the PP had been in a minority government that depended on PNV votes in Parliament. Basque President Urkullu thus sought assurances that the Spanish government would at least not create obstacles for disarmament, mainly by not blocking the minimal cooperation needed from the French government to make disarmament operationally feasible. The Basque and Navarre governments passed official resolutions through their respective parliaments calling for an orderly disarmament facilitated by the IVC. The French Basque region's president, together with Basque civil society activists, assumed a key role engaging other French authorities to convince France to treat disarmament as a pressing internal security issue.

In this context, ETA accepted a formula where it would hand over the locations of its arms caches to French Basque civil society representatives, who would hand the information over to the IVC. The IVC would then immediately give this information to French legal authorities. Although symbolic, this formula permitted ETA not to lose face by saying they were responding to a call for disarmament from the Basque society they claimed to fight for. Their decision to finally disarm was also likely the result of a little-known concern: the fear that Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front would win the upcoming elections in France, leading to a security crackdown.

> " **Traditional approaches to ending violence, involving formal negotiations between conflict parties, under a lead mediator, are no longer realistic or politically feasible.** "

On 8 April 2017, a small ceremony took place in the city hall of Bayonne. Matteo Zuppi, the Archbishop of Bologna and member of the Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community, and the Reverend Harold Good, former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland who had also been involved in decommissioning in Northern Ireland, participated as international witnesses. Hours later, French police were arriving to eight arms caches in southern France, where

Mayor of Bayonne Jean-René Etchegaray, DAG Director Ram Manikkalingam, French activist Michel Tubiana and international witnesses Cardinal Matteo Zuppi and Reverend Harold Good during handover of the location of ETA's weapons, 8 April 2017. © Iban Gonzalez

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

Basque civil society had symbolically positioned themselves. ETA had finally disarmed. One year later, it would declare its own dissolution.

Lessons for other processes

In many contexts, traditional approaches to ending violence, involving formal negotiations between conflict parties, under a lead mediator, are no longer realistic or politically feasible. In such situations, informal, creative and cooperative solutions are needed. The unilateral process that successfully led to the end of ETA occurred without the involvement of states, but with the active participation of both local political actors and civil society, and international partners acting unofficially. However, it was a difficult process with significant drawbacks and risks. It is therefore important to learn both the positive and negative lessons of the Basque Country experience.

Negotiations with the state may not be necessary for an armed group to disarm. Where a state conflict party will not engage in dialogue with a non-state armed group, a minimum practical requirement is that the state does not block others from supporting the peace process. In the context of the Spanish government's 'no talking to terrorists' policy and a highly debilitated ETA, others engaged with ETA to facilitate its disarmament and dissolution. Expanding the number of actors involved may have brought some complications and delays, but the role of the Basque government, Basque civil society and non-official international actors was enough to push ETA towards disarmament. Together, they provided alternative interlocutors to ETA and helped identify a practical avenue for ETA to disarm.

Regional governments can fill the political void left by absent or resistant national authorities. The Basque government's willingness to support a process to end violence was key. Not only did this bring legitimacy to the process and thus encouraged others to support it, but it also ensured that the Spanish state could keep its distance while maintaining official channels through which to be kept informed. In many countries, regional governments have extensive powers and stronger public support locally than central governments. This can allow the central government to avoid playing a direct role or to use the regional government as a 'buffer' between itself and the peace process.

An active civil society can help overcome obstacles and identify creative solutions to advance peace processes. Basque civil society played a key role in delegitimising violence and supporting an orderly disarmament process. With ETA frustrated over the government's refusal to engage on disarmament, Basque civil society actors provided a platform whereby ETA could present this step as giving up its weapons to the Basque people. Civil society actors often have stronger local legitimacy and sometimes personal relationships with armed group members and can become important agents who are able to put pressure on both armed groups and governments to facilitate disarmament.

Informal international involvement can provide critical support at lower political cost when formal involvement is not possible or acceptable. ETA always aspired to have United Nations or European Union involvement in a dialogue process, but this was politically impossible. However, other external actors were able to provide vital support – such as through the discreet engagement of the Centre for

Humanitarian Dialogue over many years, the participation of key individuals such as Kofi Annan in the Aiete conference, and the involvement of the IVC in the ceasefire and disarmament of ETA. Informal international participation can encourage armed groups to give up their weapons, help facilitate contact between opponents and enhance public confidence in a process. Coordination between these actors and a clear understanding of their roles is essential.

> ❝ **Unofficial actors need to prepare adequately to take on such processes by bringing on the appropriate expertise, local knowledge and necessary support.** ❞

Ceasefire verification and controlled disarmament are difficult without the support of state police and security forces. The IVC was able to provide support for ETA's disarmament but would have struggled to address more contentious issues had they arisen. The IVC had neither the capacity nor legal status to play a more direct, operational role in the disarmament process (for example to safely handle and dispose of weapons and explosives). By nature, such processes are highly technical and potentially dangerous, with aspects that can only be managed adequately by police and security forces. Unofficial actors need state support to effectively help verification and disarmament – even if not provided publicly.

Unofficial actors face serious challenges in verification and disarmament processes, such as intense media scrutiny and legal obstacles. As the main actor behind the IVC, DAG faced unanticipated difficulties managing a politically charged summons to the High Court in Madrid in 2014, as well as sustained media scrutiny. Maintaining communication with an armed group on a terrorist list operating clandestinely also proved extremely challenging. Exchanges were mostly indirect, and it was often difficult to determine how closely aligned the positions of ETA and the political actors around it really were. Unofficial actors need to prepare adequately to take on such processes by bringing on the appropriate expertise, local knowledge and necessary support – legal, logistical, security or media.

Peace processes without state participation can lead to local frustration and bring risks for the long-term consolidation of peace. In maintaining its position against engaging with ETA, even when it wanted to disarm, the Spanish government created resentment and frustration in a wide section of Basque society. While the Spanish government could consider its strategy successful because ETA has disarmed and dissolved, the yardstick for success will ultimately be the consolidation of the end of violence in the Basque Country. The Northern Ireland experience shows how even formal disarmament processes can see residual violence continuing to affect society. It is therefore crucial for those actors involved to manage public expectations and create realistic objectives, particularly when state actors are not involved and where, consequently, the process may take longer.

Rethinking peace processes

Preventing electoral crisis in Kenya

Prisca Kamungi is a peacebuilding scholar and practitioner. She works in the Kenyan National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in the Ministry of Interior and part-time at the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies, University of Nairobi.

Florence N. Mpaayei is a peace practitioner working with civil society globally to design strategies for peace interventions. She provides training to actors on dialogue and mediation with a special focus on women. Affiliated to Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations-Kenya (HIPSIR), Florence is a guest lecturer/facilitator on the MA in Peace Practice and leadership courses.

Thania Paffenholz is the Director of InclusivePeace. With almost 30 years of experience as both an academic and policy adviser, she is internationally renowned for work on and in support of peace processes, focusing on mediation and process design, roles of civil society and women, inclusion and participation, and the conditions for sustainable peace. Thania received the prestigious Wihuri International Prize in 2015.

Kenya's recent political history challenges conventional understanding of peace processes prevalent since the 1990s as linear and sequenced, and occurring in set phases – pre-negotiation, negotiation and implementation. Peace processes are complex, circular, uncertain and disorderly. Transition out of violent conflict encounters recurrent resistance by people invested in the status quo and requires ongoing efforts to (re-)negotiate the social and political contract. Opportunities for change often happen in bursts during 'critical junctures', as identified in the seminal 2017 United Nations and World Bank report, *Pathways for Peace*.

Kenya has experienced recurrent election-related violence since the mid-1990s. A key driver of conflict and violence has been a deep-rooted fear among Kenya's largest ethnic groups of exclusion from influence and power, and thus from access to resources. Exclusion is exacerbated by politicised ethnicity, corruption and clientelism, which undermine issue-based politics and leave peace and reform processes open to elite capture. Drivers of peace involve an active civil society, including women's groups, activist movements, a strong legal and democratic foundation, a vibrant economy, and a supportive international environment – as well as Kenyan elites' ability to negotiate deals.

Building peace demands fluid and adaptive processes. We advocate a paradigm shift in peace process support and mediation towards creating pathways to inclusive societies. Applying an implicit 'sustaining peace' lens means supporting locally owned formal and informal processes that reduce or prevent violence by simultaneously tackling the drivers of conflict, promoting the drivers of peace and addressing resistance to change as it arises.

This article reflects on the periods before and after the 2017 general election. These illustrate how iterative peace initiatives and processes of negotiation can forge pathways towards a just, peaceful and inclusive society, and provide insights into the current process to prevent violence in Kenya's next general election in 2022.

Critical junctures for peace and change

Independence

A multi-ethnic society with a population of 52 million, Kenya has 42 tribes, but the six largest make up almost 80 per cent of the population – Kikuyu 22 per cent, Luhya 14 per cent, Luo 13 per cent, Kalenjin 12 per cent, Kamba 11 per cent and Kisii 6 per cent. Kenya is a majority Christian country with around 10 per cent Muslims and other faiths.

The country's independence in 1963 following a rebellion against British colonial rule was a major step for sovereign emancipation, but also a missed opportunity. Little was done to change the abiding colonial system of divide and rule that privileged some ethnic groups over others, creating the conditions for politicised ethnicity. Up until 1991 Kenya was a single-party state.

Multiparty system

In the early 1990s, sustained pressure by an active civil society succeeded in replacing the one-party system with a multiparty system. Nevertheless, it took more than a decade for the opposition to unite and defeat the incumbent party, the Kenya African National Union, in the 2002 general elections.

2002 elections

Longstanding and controversial president Daniel arap Moi retired ahead of the 2002 elections and introduced Uhuru Kenyatta as his successor. Opposition leader Mwai Kibaki won the elections and was widely perceived as a symbol of inclusion and change. This was a time of great optimism for many Kenyans. Yet politics continued to pivot on power-plays, corruption and ethnic status, combining to undermine reform efforts. Critics of Moi believed he should have been held accountable for human rights abuses and saw the failure to prosecute him as a significant flaw in the transition.

Other efforts sought to address needs for justice and related drivers of conflict. These included reparations programmes for victims and survivors of torture and detention, the start of the constitutional review process, the establishment of national human rights and anti-corruption commissions, and follow-up on recommendations made under the civil society initiative 'Bring Our Money Back'. The decision not to set up a Truth Commission or prosecute the outgoing regime, and instead prioritise securing compromise, highlights the mix of formal and informal initiatives that avoided acrimonious prosecutions and the granting of amnesty to people who returned money stolen from government coffers.

2007–08 post-election violence crisis

Kenya experienced its most intense election-related violence following the December 2007 elections in which more than 1,000 people were killed and 600,000 displaced, as well as many instances of sexual and gender-based violence such as rape and forced male circumcision. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan led an African Union-mandated initiative, the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR), to facilitate dialogue between incumbent President Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga.

Informal, civil society-driven initiatives already launched prior to the KNDR, including the Concerned Citizens for Peace, Kenyans for Peace with Truth and Justice, and a Women's Alliance, all helped pave the way for formal negotiations and promoted substantial agenda points, data on human rights violations and public campaigning. In six weeks a peace deal was reached that brought about a government of national unity and a complex peace architecture that included commitments to establish four commissions: the Independent Review Commission on the 2007 elections; the Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence; the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission; and the National Integration and Cohesion Commission, which was introduced as a permanent government body to inculcate a culture of inclusion into Kenyan institutions and society.

> **Negotiated elite deals on power sharing have undermined the fight against corruption and entrenched identity as the main factor for political mobilisation.**

2010 constitution

In 2010 a new constitution was promulgated, anchoring most of the reforms of the KNDR process, including decentralising power and resources to devolved governance units. The constitution further provided for the election of six elective positions, five of which were at the county level and one of which, at the very least, must be held by a woman – Governor, Senator, Member of Parliament, County Woman Member of National Assembly, and Member of County Assembly. Competition for the positions stimulated the practice of 'negotiated democracy' or informal negotiations between community leaders on how to share the seats. Informal agreements to apportion these county-level positions – and modalities for rotation – began to diffuse contestation over access to power and minimise ethnopolitical hostility and the risk of election violence.

Negotiated democracy and elite bargains at the national and sub-national level have since led to the formation of inclusive political coalitions and representation of Kenyans in both the incumbent and opposition political parties, assuaging grievances over political marginalisation. At the same time, however, negotiated elite deals on power sharing have undermined the fight against corruption and entrenched identity as the main factor for political mobilisation, as positions are linked and ascribed to identity groups.

A key principle of Kenya's devolution is fiscal decentralisation or revenue sharing between national and devolved units to promote equitable access to national revenues and address regional development imbalances. While the constitution provides for a 15 per cent total revenue share to counties, political parties began renegotiations for constitutional amendments to provide for 45 per cent and for increased civil society oversight of devolved units.

2013 elections
The Uwiano Platform for Peace was launched in 2010 to prevent conditions that led to the 2007 post-election violence and mend relations between communities. Comprising 12 lead state institutions, NGOs and donors, it intended to enhance formal and informal violence prevention processes. However, opportunities for institutional reform and reconciliation were missed. Key political figures feared prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for their role in the 2007–08 violence, which would have hampered their running for the highest offices in the 2013 elections. This resulted in their resistance to further implementation of key elements of the constitution, notably on dealing with the past, and on Chapter 6 of the statute on Leadership and Integrity.

Revised political coalitions succeeded in diluting reform commitments or capturing institutions that had been set up to advance political and social inclusion. The Truth Commission report was not adopted, and major recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission and other independent bodies were not implemented. While specialised bodies and oversight mechanisms were set up to address agenda item four of the 2008 agreement on 'Long-term issues and solutions', no substantial changes have been undertaken to date.

2017 elections and beyond
The 2017 election was marred by irregularities. The results of the presidential election were annulled by the Supreme Court – a first in African history – and there was a call for new elections. Opposition leader Raila Odinga boycotted the second presidential election round and was later sworn in by his supporters as the 'People's President' on 30 January 2018.

These developments led to a tense situation in the country and brought the economy almost to a standstill. Informal dialogue processes started at the national and sub-national level to address the crisis. Religious leaders, peace groups, human rights activists, women's coalitions, youth groups, academics, former politicians and elders, the private sector and institutions related to political parties all held separate deliberations about addressing the immediate crisis and the long-standing issues. The religious leaders of Kenya united under the 'Dialogue Reference Group' to consolidate the various initiatives and coordinate one national dialogue process. The diplomatic community provided political support to the various mediation and negotiation efforts throughout the crisis. What started as crisis management developed into a renegotiation of major reforms that had been set in motion after the 2008 peace deal and the 2010 constitution.

Building Bridges for a New Kenya
The immediate crisis came to an end with a conciliatory handshake in March 2018 between Kenyatta and Odinga. The handshake was symbolic and took place at the site of the 2008 peace agreement. This signalled the end of the highly divisive political stalemate and a new deal to work together to unite the country.

The two leaders agreed on a formal political reform process, the Building Bridges for a New Kenya Initiative (BBI). The BBI outlined nine underlying issues to address and prevent recurrent election-related crisis and violence, including ethnic antagonism and competition, a lack of national ethos, inclusivity, devolution, divisive elections, safety and security, corruption, shared prosperity, and responsibilities and rights. A 14-member taskforce was appointed comprising 10 men and four women from different ethnic groups to steer a process of nationwide consultations, which made proposals for reform in a report released in December 2019.

Dialogue ecosystem
In parallel to the BBI, a dialogue 'ecosystem' generated reform proposals that overlap with and add different dimensions to the BBI, while some even oppose it. This has created an environment in which the nation is in a (at times tense) dialogue process on how to address the causes of crisis in Kenya in a sustainable way. Proposals vary from executive power sharing, to political, security and social reforms, to everyday inclusion through education. The discussion oscillates between substantial proposals for transformative change and politicised statements to position for the 2022 elections with. Examples of key initiatives are listed below:

» The Punguza Mzigo Initiative is an informal, popular campaign led by one of the opposition parties, the Third

Way Alliance Kenya. It proposes to amend the 2010 constitution to reduce the cost of running parliament, address political over-representation by reducing the number of elective positions and representatives, end historical gender inequality and strengthen efforts to address corruption. Proposals from the initiative were debated in County Assemblies, helping to build substantial public support. However, the initiative has been fiercely resisted by many politicians who fear 'cost cutting' will abolish their positions.

» Religious actors have also been active. Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Hindu faiths have come together in a remarkable attempt to unite to prevent election violence. The Dialogue Reference Group (DRG) takes stock of the state of the nation and engages citizens and the political class in peaceful resolution of crisis. The DRG built on 2016 achievements when religious leaders mediated in the conflict over electoral body reform. The DRG launched a national dialogue process inviting other civil society groups to participate. Country-wide dialogues resulted in a package of reform proposals. The DRG aims to mediate a national consensus agreement to bring the proposals from the BBI, the religious actors and others together.

» Many women's organisations and networks have been instrumental in contributing to conflict prevention and resolution in both formal and informal spaces. Kenyan women provided informal mediation during pre-negotiations to reach the 2018 'handshake'. Different civil society and political women's platforms have been formed and have grappled with how to meaningfully engage as a collective and leave political differences aside. While some see the BBI as a timely political settlement to improve inclusion and unite the country, others see it as a strategic renegotiation of the pre-2017 political deal to the disadvantage of some political leaders over others. Some women feel strongly that the same political group that is promoting the BBI is also undermining the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule, and that this negates any genuine reforms. As stipulated by the 2010 constitution, composition of all elective bodies, including the national assembly and senate, is limited to no more than two-thirds of members from one gender. At the end of 2019 the various groups came together to agree on a minimum consensus under the umbrella of 'Kenyan Women's Agenda' in order to continue dialogue and engagement on national issues with concrete actions to promote women's and youth inclusion in decision-making spaces.

» Civil society initiatives including youth organisations have informed the BBI process. For example, the National Mediation Forum brings professional peace NGOs together. Many initiatives meet as part of the Hekima Process, run by the Institute of Peace Studies at the Jesuit University in Nairobi, which provides a platform and safe space to talk.

» The Kenya Tuitakayo Movement (KTM) is opposed to the BBI and has developed a 10-point agenda to focus on human rights, poverty, corruption and social service delivery. Unlike most other initiatives, the KTM does not want to collaborate with government agencies or the political establishment but aims to build a citizens' movement for change.

» The international community has played a constructive supporting role since the 2017 election crisis. A group of Western Ambassadors, the EU and the UN came together to coordinate their support and provide behind-the-scenes facilitation of dialogue. Donors support various aforementioned initiatives, albeit not in a coordinated fashion. The Swiss think-tank 'InclusivePeace' is accompanying civil society, governmental and international actors by providing comparative expertise on both process and substance, facilitating between and within actor groups, helping individual actors to strategise, and providing neutral spaces for joint dialogue in cooperation with the Kenyan and international actors involved.

" Drivers of change vary from juncture to juncture. "

Lessons learned and looking ahead

Dialogue processes for peace in Kenya involve continuous renegotiation of formal and informal governance, responding to the ever-evolving political environment. Agreements between political actors in formal and informal processes serve as both destinations and points of departure for discourse and change. Transition processes are precipitated at critical junctures and challenge a straightforward logic of success and failure in achieving desired reform, as the realities of change are entangled in the fluctuating push-and-pull of different interests that support and resist it.

Exclusion and power both drive and control processes of change, which evolve according to how much compromise groups are prepared to make to advance inclusion, democratic values and justice. Drivers of change vary from juncture to juncture – the religious actors who were at the forefront of the democratisation movement in the 1990s lobbied against the new constitution in 2010 and became politically divided. Since 2016 they have once again formed a united front, as has the women's movement since the end of 2019.

Each epoch has brought some progress. The 1990s saw the democratisation process set in motion. The change

in power in 2003 started the anti-corruption movement. The 2008 peace process fundamentally advanced the institutional set up for reconciliation and inclusion. And the current, post-2017 environment has shown Kenyans that sustainable conflict prevention is essential, that devolution is here to stay, and that essential international support must remain 'light touch' to enable and maintain national ownership. The politicisation of the reform process for the 2022 elections is a significant challenge as Kenya reaches its next major point in the long pathway to peace.

The Kenyan case clearly demonstrates that pathways to peace involve massive efforts by a diversity of actors and are not linear. Phases of peace processes are indefinite.

'Pre-negotiations' that nominally precede formal peace talks are in fact often a permanent feature and become interchangeable with 're-negotiations'.

This has implications for the way peace processes are supported. Our understanding of peace processes needs to be changed from the linear model to a more adaptive fluid model to operationalise the sustaining peace agenda. This means not only identifying and supporting change agents, but also facilitating or counteracting the conditions under which they can operate. It is essential to work with a 'prevention lens' today to prepare for times of critical juncture that can enable key elements for pathways for inclusive societies.

Walking for peace

Camel Caravan in northern Kenya

Malih J.N. Ole Kaunga is Director of IMPACT Trust in Nanyuki, an indigenous human rights organisation active in northern Kenya. A Laikipia Maasai, he has been a human rights activist for over 20 years. IMPACT works with pastoralist groups across northern Kenya.

Tim Bunke is a social anthropologist and has been a representative of the German NGO Weltfriedensdienst within the Civil Peace Service Programme in Kenya since 2016. He supports Kenyan organisations in their work to prevent and resolve conflict in the northern Kenya. He received his PhD from the University of Konstanz in 2017.

Northern Kenya has a history of neglect and violent conflict. Many ethnic communities are pastoralists and some adhere to cultural norms and conflict-prone practices such as cattle raiding. More recent sources of conflict have stemmed from infrastructure projects and wildlife conservation, as the accompanying increase in government and private security has exacerbated competition for scarce resources and tensions between state and traditional methods of conflict management.

This article recounts efforts to build and maintain pathways to peaceful coexistence with an original approach: an annual camel-led 'peace walk', known as the Camel Caravan. This is occurring in a context of multiple security actors. Government security in the region includes various entities, including rapid deployment units, wildlife rangers and a growing military presence in conflict hotspots. International conservation organisations employ private security personnel to protect endangered wildlife and 'restore peace' by force.

Ewaso Ng'iro River and Camel Caravan
The Ewaso Ng'iro River is a source of livelihood for roughly seven million people. The river crosses 10 counties and various habitats, with different and competing community needs and economic activities.

The annual Camel Caravan by community members is an innovative peace initiative. Taking place along 300 kilometres of riverway, the Caravan emphasises the importance of water to this arid area and its dual role as a connector of people and source of conflict.

Camels are a symbol of resilience and tolerance, signifying the multi-ethnic pastoral lifestyle of northern Kenya. At least six ethnic groups participate; communities that often clash when competing for natural resources, especially during the dry season, when groups trek far in search of pasture and water. Conflicts erupt regularly during this time in areas with continuous water supply.

The Caravan facilitates two types of community interaction. First, it is a shared space in which communities meet and come to see that they share problems. Second, it offers political and traditional leaders an opportunity to discuss issues and reach a wider national and international audience and effect political change. Communities also showcase their individual cultures through awareness meetings held along the river.

Caravan goals and tactics
The Caravan has three goals: highlighting issues facing the river, including proposed infrastructure projects; exposing illegal activities by agricultural and horticultural companies; and promoting sustainable national water management approaches in the face of ever-increasing international demand for flowers and organic food.

The Caravan route traverses the terrain of various ethnic groups and provides opportunities for encounters, chipping away at stereotypes that groups may have of one another. It also creates a platform to jointly address issues of marginalisation, using the river as a starting point.

Cultivating trust between communities that are fighting over natural resources requires a combination of strategies

and approaches. Before the Caravan, time and resources were spent on open community peace forums organised by civil society. These helped to identify positive community influencers, and over the years a cohort of these 'peace ambassadors' emerged to link communities, civil society and the state. They are trained in methods of conflict transformation and especially conflict monitoring.

The Camel Caravan has become an ongoing process with river-basin communities. It has spillover effects with community-based peace initiatives and helps to foster mediation in cases of conflict, sometimes without the involvement of state security actors. This informal space for encounter has increased interaction between the river's various ethnic groups and, equally, enabled communities to speak with one voice against external threats to their livelihoods. This has culminated in a regular political dialogue between county leaders along the river.

> " **Informal spaces have enabled formal and government-acknowledged agreements between communities.** "

Impacts

The Camel Caravan has had two major outcomes to date. First, the ongoing contact has stimulated community-based initiatives and connections. An outstanding example is a peace accord formulated between the Ilngewsi Maasai and the Samburu. This protracted conflict between two ethnic groups was resolved in 2017 using traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and the involvement of the peace ambassadors.

Second, informal spaces have enabled formal and government-acknowledged agreements between communities. Community-initiated success stories include water resource user associations as first monitors of cattle raiding, which has reduced the number of protracted conflicts.

The Camel Caravan has lobbied successfully for the removal of illegal water obstructions by government security agencies. Also, counties have ratified legislation to outlaw practices harmful to the river such as sand harvesting, and established a forum to liaise in efforts to protect natural resources. By connecting decision-makers and local people, leading to formal measure such as this, the Camel Caravan has proved an unusual but effective conflict resolution initiative.

Preparing the Camel Caravan outside Ewaso, Laikipia County, Kenya, 5 August 2019. © IMPACT Trust

Conclusion and recommendations

Making connections to end violence

Cate Buchanan is Issue Editor of this *Accord*. See the Introduction for her biography.

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

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

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

> **Early and pre-formal peacemaking is hard to pinpoint due to its secrecy, denial, discretion, and incrementalism.**

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

1. **Context, actors and factors**

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

2. **Complexity and peace pathways**

» Promoting peace ecosystems
» Conflict party preparedness for dialogue

3. **Responsive and accountable peace process support**

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

4. **Evolving practice**

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

Theme 1. *Contexts, actors and factors*

Rethinking political analysis

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

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

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

> " **Too much mainstream analysis still focuses on established elites and male powerholders.** "

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

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

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

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

> " **Joint analysis in the early phases of peace processes is challenging, but it is not impossible.** "

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

Sensitivity to political dynamics and hidden peace pathways

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

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

> ❝ **Seeing and valuing local peace capacities in practice means adjusting frameworks of who powerholders are – or could be.** ❞

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

Theme 2. *Complexity and peace pathways*
Promoting peace ecosystems
Linear, orderly peace processes – from 'getting to the table', to reaching a deal and implementing it – are a relic of the past. While there is considerable focus on the non-linearity of political transitions, there is far less clarity on what to do in practice to facilitate these types of process. Understanding the **'ecosystem' of potential and actual spaces for dialogue** is leading to a reconceptualisation of both the end goal and the procedures of peace processes. This *Accord* has highlighted examples of peace process innovation that have blurred the boundaries between discrete phases:

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

> ❝ **Linear, orderly peace processes – from 'getting to the table', to reaching a deal and implementing it – are a relic of the past.** ❞

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

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

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

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

> **Wartime demonisation of the enemy is a major deterrent to moving towards dialogue and is especially hard to reverse when framed in counter-terrorism rhetoric.**

Theme 3. *Responsive and accountable peace process support*
Collaborative coordination
The peace support community increasingly references the need for coordination. Here we emphasise **collaborative coordination**, moving beyond perfunctory technical exchange of information to identifying organisations' respective advantages, mandates and commitment to *strategic division of labour* towards effective process support. However, the impulses of many peace process support organisations are in fact 'counter-collaborative' – to 'go it alone', to see others as rivals in a culture of competitiveness, or to be involved in *all* issues. Reinvigorating our approaches to emphasise collaboration first and foremost is a critical step.

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

> **The impulses of many peace process support organisations are in fact 'counter-collaborative' – to 'go it alone'.**

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

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

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

Impact measurement and communication

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

> ❝ **Exclusive beginnings set the logic of future phases, making it increasingly difficult to inject inclusion later.** ❞

Theme 4. *Evolving practice*

Elevating inclusion

Early phase inclusion is critical to initiate positive path dependency. We now know that exclusive beginnings set the logic of future phases, making it increasingly difficult to inject inclusion later. This is important for principled and pragmatic reasons. Yet inclusion in peace processes means different things to different people. Inclusion is not a 'settled norm', as the continuing exclusion that is embedded in most peace processes makes clear. It is perhaps best understood as a 'rising norm'. In recent decades it has become more and more associated with representation and participation of half the population – women – and increasingly with overlooked identity groups such as young people, or religious and ethnic minorities. Many of the world's most lethal conflicts are predicated on tensions over exclusions and identity issues as either a principal or secondary factor. Understanding and effectively addressing the underlying causes of such conflicts is central to durable and stable peace and can only be achieved if marginalised, minority and indigenous groups enjoy meaningful participation.

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

Smart use of information technology and social media

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

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

Further reading

Suggestions for further reading are provided across two axes:

Country-specific
» Afghanistan
» Basque Country
» Colombia
» Kenya
» Myanmar
» Somali Regional State in Ethiopia
» South Sudan
» Southern Thailand
» Syria

Thematic
» Global politics and peacemaking
» Nonviolent movements
» Self-determination
» Gender perspectives and women's participation in peace processes
» Digital political analysis
» Social media
» Youth inclusion in peace processes
» Infrastructure for peace
» Natural resource management and peacebuilding

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Accord series

Insight

INSIGHT ISSUE 4 (2018)

Borderlands and peace processes

Accord Insight 4 looks at peacebuilding in borderlands and how peace and transition processes address the interests of borderland communities.

INSIGHT ISSUE 3 (2016)

Reconciliation and peace processes

Accord Insight 3 examines reconciliation in peace processes. Case studies from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, Colombia, Mindanao (Philippines) and Northern Ireland offer insights from initiatives to transform relationships horizontally, among communities, and vertically, between society and the state.

INSIGHT ISSUE 2 (2015)

Local engagement with armed groups

This second Accord Insight publication looks at the interactions between armed groups and local populations. Case studies from Colombia, northern Uganda, Syria and Northern Ireland document the experiences of communities who have organised to influence the behaviour of armed groups – often in advance of more formal negotiations and in situations of intense violence and embedded conflict.
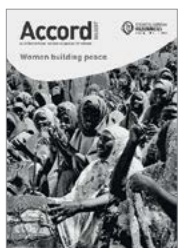
INSIGHT ISSUE 1 (2013)

Women building peace

Most peace agreements do not address the specific concerns of women, and women are still excluded from political processes. The first Accord Insight presents nine articles and new analysis drawn from the Accord series from 1998 to 2010, which examine the roles women have played in addressing violence and building peace – from Bougainville and Sierra Leone to Aceh and Northern Ireland.

Accord

ISSUE 28 (2019)

Inclusion in peace processes

There is a broad global consensus that inclusion matters in peace processes. Now, we need to better understand what this means in practice. This Accord explores who should be involved in a peace process, the challenges this creates and how these can be overcome.

ISSUE 27 (2018)

Incremental peace in Afghanistan

Accord 27 suggests a new, phased approach to peace in Afghanistan: short-term, to achieve a reduction of violence; and long-term, to achieve a more broadly inclusive social contract.

ISSUE 26 (2017)

Two steps forward, one step back: The Nepal peace process

Accord 26 includes over 30 articles and interviews from Nepali and international experts focusing on the progress of inclusion and the function of power, and how peace and political negotiations in various forms and forums have facilitated transition from negative to positive peace.

ISSUE 25 (2014)

Legitimacy and peace processes: from coercion to consent

Accord 25 focuses on the practical ways that legitimacy can contribute to building more sustainable peace: national dialogue; constitutional reform; local governance; and transforming coercive actors.

ISSUE 24 (2012)

Reconciliation, reform and resilience: positive peace for Lebanon

Accord 24 includes more than 30 articles and interviews on peacebuilding in Lebanon: from diverse perspectives and from inside and outside the country. Together they show that the Lebanese are not passive victims of a violent fate determined beyond their country's borders. Many are actively pursuing opportunities for change.

ISSUE 23 (2012)

Consolidating peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone

A decade after the official end of wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Accord 23 draws on respective societies' experiences and insights to ask what headway has been made to consolidate peace, what challenges lie ahead and what lessons can be learnt. It argues that policy needs to focus on people, on repairing relationships and promoting inclusion, and that traditional mechanisms can play a crucial role.

ISSUE 22 (2011)

Paix sans frontières: building peace across borders

War does not respect political or territorial boundaries. This twenty-second Accord publication, looks at how peacebuilding strategies and capacity can 'think outside the state': *beyond* it, through regional engagement, and *below* it, through cross-border community or trade networks.

ISSUE 21 (2010)

Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking

Accord 21 contains over 30 articles including interviews with Somali elders and senior diplomats with the African Union, the UN and IGAD, and contributions from Somali and international peacemaking practitioners, academics, involved parties, civil society and women's organisations.
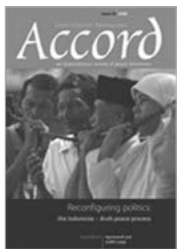
ISSUE 20 (2008)

Reconfiguring politics: the Indonesia-Aceh peace process

In 2005, the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) agreed a settlement ending 30 years of armed conflict. Accord 20 explores how that agreement was reached and subsequent challenges to its implementation.

ISSUE 19 (2008)

Powers of persuasion: incentives, sanctions and conditionality in peacemaking

International policymakers frequently use incentives, sanctions and conditionality as tools to influence intra-state conflicts. Using a range of case studies, Accord 19 asks whether and how these tools can constructively influence conflict parties' engagement in peacemaking initiatives.

ISSUE 18 (2006)

Peace by piece: addressing Sudan's conflicts

This Accord publication reviews the peace process that led to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan. It also explores questions that remain to be tackled, arguing that future Sudanese initiatives must be more inclusive and better coordinated.

ISSUE 17 (2005)

The limits of leadership elites and societies in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process

Since the 1994 ceasefire, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorny Karabakh has remained deadlocked. Accord 17 explores the dynamics of polarisation, the obstacles to a sustainable agreement and the challenge of overcoming resistance to compromise.
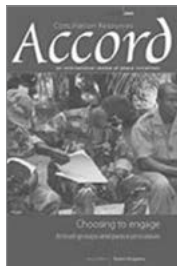
ISSUE 16 (2005)

Choosing to engage: armed groups and peace processes

Non-state armed groups, key actors in many internal armed conflicts, have participated in peace processes across the world. Accord 16 draws on these experiences to explore the case for engaging with armed groups, and the different options, roles and challenges for such engagement.

ISSUE 15 (2004)

From military peace to social justice? The Angolan peace process

The Luena Memorandum of 2002 brought an end to Angola's 27-year civil war. Accord 15 reviews the history of peacemaking efforts in Angola, and analyses challenges that remain if the absence of violence is to develop into a sustainable and just peace.

ISSUE 14 (2004)

Alternatives to war: Colombia's peace processes

This Accord publication provides an overview of more than 25 years of peace initiatives with Colombia's guerrilla and paramilitary groups. It includes analysis of civil society efforts at local, regional and national levels and identifies the necessary elements of a new model of conflict resolution.

ISSUE 13 (2002)

Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking

This first thematic Accord publication documents mechanisms for public participation in peacemaking. It features extended studies looking at how people were empowered to participate in political processes in Guatemala, Mali and South Africa. It also contains shorter pieces from Colombia, Northern Ireland and the Philippines.

ISSUE 12 (2002)

Weaving consensus: the Papua New Guinea – Bougainville peace process

This Accord publication documents efforts leading to the Bougainville Peace Agreement of 2001. It describes an indigenous process that drew on the strengths of Melanesian traditions, as well as innovative roles played by international third parties.

ISSUE 11 (2002)

**Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda**

While a meaningful peace process in northern Uganda remains elusive, Accord 11 documents significant peacemaking initiatives undertaken by internal and external actors and analyses their impact on the dynamics of the conflict.

ISSUE 10 (2001)

**Politics of compromise: the Tajikistan peace process**

This publication describes the aspirations of the parties to the conflict in Tajikistan. It documents the negotiation process leading to the General Agreement of June 1997, looking at the role of the international community, led by the UN, and of local civil society.
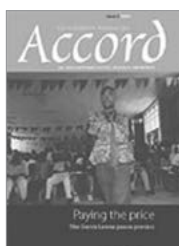
ISSUE 9 (2000)

Paying the price: the Sierra Leone peace process

The Lomé Peace Agreement of July 1999 sought to bring an end to armed conflict in Sierra Leone: one of the most brutal civil wars of recent times. Accord 9 explores the Lomé process and earlier attempts to resolve the conflict, and draws lessons for Sierra Leone's transition.
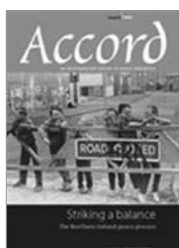
ISSUE 8 (1999)

Striking a balance: the Northern Ireland peace process

This publication examines the factors that led to the negotiations resulting in the 1998 *Belfast Agreement*. It describes the complex underlying forces and the development of an environment for peace. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index).

ISSUE 7 (1999)

A question of sovereignty: the Georgia-Abkhazia peace process

This publication explores the background and issues at the heart of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, providing a unique insight into a political stalemate and pointing towards possible avenues out of deadlock.

ISSUE 6 (1999)

Compromising on autonomy: Mindanao in transition

The GRP-MNLF 1996 Peace Agreement was a milestone, as all previous peacemaking attempts over 24 years had failed. Accord 6 analyses elements of peacemaking in Mindanao and examines the challenges of implementation. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index).

ISSUE 5 (1998)

**Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge**

This publication documents issues around the signing of the 1991 Paris agreements that officially ended Cambodia's long war, and the subsequent violent collapse of the country's governing coalition in July 1997.

ISSUE 4 (1998)

**Demanding sacrifice: war and negotiation in Sri Lanka**

This publication documents the cycles of ethnic/national conflict that have blighted Sri Lanka since 1983. It analyses negotiations and other peace initiatives, and outlines fundamental concerns that need to be confronted in future peacemaking efforts.
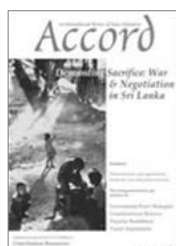
ISSUE 3 (1998)

The Mozambican peace process in perspective

This publication documents the diverse initiatives that drove the parties to a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Mozambique. It further illustrates the impact on the country of changing regional and international political dynamics.
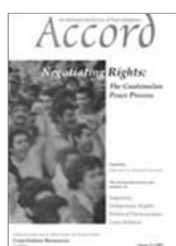
ISSUE 2 (1997)

Negotiating rights: the Guatemalan peace process

The signing of the peace agreement in 1996 brought an end to 36 years of civil war in Guatemala. Accord 2 analyses issues of impunity, indigenous rights, political participation and land reform.

ISSUE 1 (1996)

The Liberian peace process 1990–1996

This first Accord publication documents the lengthy and fractious Liberian peace process and provides insight into why thirteen individual peace accords collapsed in half as many years.

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Conciliation Resources is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. We work with people impacted by war and violence, bringing diverse voices together to make change that lasts.

Our programme and policy work focuses on eight regions globally: Horn of Africa, East and Central Africa, Caucasus, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Pacific, Latin America and West Africa.

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» **Challenge** – We are not afraid to face difficult conversations and defy convention.

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Conciliation Resources, Burghley Yard,
106 Burghley Road, London NW5 1AL UK

@ cr@c-r.org

☎ +44 (0)20 7359 7728

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What are the 'essential ingredients' to foster peace dialogue in violent conflict? *Accord* 29 reflects on how societies and conflict parties try to move from fighting to talking, and how policymakers and peace practitioners can accompany and support them effectively.

Initiating peace processes is hard to *do* – and not easy to *document* or *analyse*. Formative dialogue initiatives are largely informal, opaque and secret. The reality of peace processes is messy and 'phases' criss-cross one another. Armed actors talk and fight at the same time. Negotiations stop, start and mutate over many years. 'Early' peacemaking is invariably 'too late', as violence and repression are embedded in societies and political systems. These challenges all collide in an era of tense and toxic geopolitics, proxy violence, 'nested conflicts' and information warfare.

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» *Perspectives on peacemaking practice* – insights on ways to initiate and sustain peacemaking

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