

Dialogues in Peace and Mediation Processes: Definitions, type, goals, and success factors for sustainability

March 2016

This Report is based on results from two multi-year research projects led by Dr. Thania Paffenholz at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland.

The “Broadening Participation” project analyses how and under what conditions various actors in addition to the main negotiating parties have participated in and influenced peace processes and political transitions, by comparing more than 40 in-depth qualitative case studies of peace and constitution-making multi-stakeholder negotiations, and the implementation of negotiated agreements, ranging from 1989 to the present.

The Civil Society and Peacebuilding project investigated whether, how, when, and under what circumstances civil society can fulfill a peace supporting role. It analyzed in 13 in-depth qualitative case studies, the performance of civil society with regard to 7 peacebuilding functions in 4 phases of conflict and peace processes.

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Introduction: Different Types of Dialogues

Inclusive dialogues are an important process of formal as well as non-formal negotiations and discussions often used to overcome conflict of a national scope and chart the future direction of a country on a consensual basis. Though inclusive dialogues are among the oldest forms of decision-making, only recently have diverse dialogue formats ranging from the community level to national peace and transition processes been conceptualized as varieties of a single phenomenon.

Dialogues vary according to type, goal, and actors involved; the table below provides an overview:

TYPE	GOAL	ACTORS
National Dialogues (Track 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Elite-based dialogues – Broad-based dialogues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Political reform – Constitution-making – Peace-making 	Governments, non-state armed groups, political parties, and organized civil society, including women's groups and networks, representatives of minority groups, traditional and faith-based actors and organizations, eminent persons, business actors and networks, etc.
High-level problem-solving workshops (Track 1.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide alternative channels for negotiations – Allow discussions without pressure to reach an agreement – Provide opportunities to test ideas – Conduct joint analysis – Facilitate discussions on controversial issues – Change attitudes and behaviour on each side – Negotiate with non-state armed groups that are officially excluded from formal negotiations 	Typically representatives close to decision makers of the conflict parties. Women are often underrepresented in these workshops unless they focus on women.
Consultations (Track 2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Official – Non or semi-official – Public (track 2 or 3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve understanding of other people's views – Transfer/link results of consultations to influence negotiations 	Civil society organizations, such as women's groups and networks, representatives of minority groups, and traditional and faith-based organizations, or business actors and networks, conflict affected groups, internally displaced persons, and representatives of particular geographical regions.
Civil society problem-solving workshops (Track 2): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Peace and reconciliation workshops – Work- or issue-oriented problem-solving workshops 	<u>Peace and reconciliation goals:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop concrete peace proposals and reconcile divided groups in society <u>Work- or issue-oriented goals:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bring conflicting groups together for a common cause (often more technical and hence workable) 	Groups of representatives from civil society, women's groups, professional associations, unions, faith-based actors and organizations, non-state armed actors, business, etc.
People-to-people dialogues (Track 3)	To advance reconciliation and peace-making by bringing people together	Mostly individuals, grassroots, communities, youth, professionals.
Community relations meetings (Track 3)	To bring people from adversarial groups together to help learn how to peacefully coexist	Local communities.

This report provides an overview of National Dialogues, as well as other types of non-formal dialogues, including high-level problem-solving workshops (track 1.5), consultations and civil society dialogues (track 2), and people-to-people dialogues and local community relations meetings (track 3). It looks at the purposes of these dialogues, the actors involved, as well as the constraining and enabling factors that make different types of dialogues effective in reaching and sustaining agreements.

In this report, formal and non-formal dialogues are distinguished from each other in the following way. Formal dialogues refer to track 1 processes, such as National Dialogues, which are often established to facilitate formal negotiations that aim to produce a concrete outcome or agreement, for example on a new constitution, a transitional government, or political reform recommendations. In contrast, non-formal dialogues do not involve formal negotiations, and may not necessarily aim to produce a concrete negotiated outcome or final agreement.

This report is structured in two parts. The first part focuses on formal National Dialogues, while the second part considers non-formal types of dialogues. It builds on the insights and evidence generated by two large multi-year, qualitative, comparative research projects comprised of a series of in-depth case studies of peace and political transition processes: the “Civil Society and Peacebuilding” project and the “Broadening Participation in Peace Negotiations” project. Both research projects were conducted at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, and have gathered the largest datasets on these issues to date. The results from these two research projects form the knowledge base of the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, also based at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland.

Part One: National Dialogues

1. Understanding National Dialogues: The essentials

National Dialogues are political negotiation processes institutionalized over an extended period of time in order to solve major political issues of national concern. They are inclusive multi-stakeholder negotiations in which large segments of society are represented, including government actors, political elites, political parties, non-state armed groups, organized civil society (such as women, youth, business, traditional and faith-based organizations, minority group representatives, eminent persons, etc), and any other relevant social groups. Typically, National Dialogues receive a mandate to make political reforms, to draft constitutions, and/or to advance peace-making processes. Often, the inclusive nature of National Dialogues increases the legitimacy of any ongoing parallel processes and helps ensure public buy-in.

On a practical level, National Dialogues are formally-mandated public forums with a structure establishing clear rules and procedures for dialogue and decision-making. These negotiations typically take place on an official “track 1” level. Track 1 negotiations involve decision-makers, including state representatives and other official actors. National Dialogues may be convened over the course of several days, weeks, or even months. They address a broad range of social, political, and/or economic issues concerning the entire country. The size and composition of a forum can vary considerably, ranging between as few as 100 delegates to as many as several thousand. In terms of logistics and organization, National Dialogues are usually supported by a secretariat and often discuss key issues within thematic working groups involving a subset of the total participants.

National Dialogues can be either elite-based or broad-based, depending on the actors included. For example, the Northern Irish National Dialogue that led to the Good Friday Agreement (1998) was elite-based because it included only actors from the government and the main political parties. In contrast, the Yemeni

National Dialogue that took place from 2013 to 2014 was an example of a broad-based dialogue because it included government actors, all political parties, women, civil society organizations, youth, and minorities.

2. Goals of National Dialogues

National Dialogues can serve different goals and be convened under different mandates aiming at one or multiple objectives. They are typically initiated to facilitate political reforms, to draft constitutions, or to promote peace-making. For example, the National Dialogue in Egypt was initiated to facilitate a political reform process in response to the mass demonstrations that had unfolded across all major cities between January and March 2011. For the first time in Egypt, this dialogue had the mandate to gather a range of political actors and civil society organizations in order to negotiate a national agenda for political transition and reform, as an alternative to continuing large-scale public demonstrations. The 1990 National Dialogue in Benin was an example of a constitution-making dialogue (the first held in Africa, under the name 'National Conference'), established to address the pressures generated by deep economic crisis and the parallel erosion of political legitimacy. Finally, the Good Friday Agreement and St. Andrews Talks in Northern Ireland exemplify a peace-making National Dialogue. The talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the St. Andrews Agreement in 2006 ended the sectarian violence which unfolded in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 2001, and established the sustainable peace that holds today.

Though normative reasons for implementing National Dialogues are often put forward, the "Broadening Participation" project has found that inclusive negotiations also have pragmatic benefits in terms of both reaching and sustaining agreements. This research project found that - when included actors were able to genuinely influence the quality of the final agreement (assessed by the extent to which it addresses the causes of conflict) and its subsequent implementation - a higher rate of peace agreements were reached and eventually implemented. In many cases, inclusive negotiations were also found to have contributed to building sufficient political consensus and the societal momentum necessary to initiate democratic reform processes. These long-term effects, such as indirectly generating a democratic culture of participation, were found even in cases where negotiations ultimately failed.

Other recent research supports these findings. In their recent study of participatory constitution-making, Eisenstadt, Le Van, and Maboudi (2015) found that increased public participation in the drafting stage of a constitution is associated with a far greater increase in measured levels of democracy after the constitutional agreement. By contrast, in situations where public participation is confined to the "back end" of the constitution-making process through consultations or referenda, the same increase was not observed. This effect holds true independently of the specific provisions included in the final constitutional document. Eisenstadt, Le Van, and Maboudi's findings support the importance of substantive procedural inclusion for the promotion of long-term democratic culture.

3. Included actors

Who is included in National Dialogues is a crucial question that can affect the degree of legitimacy and effectiveness of the entire process. Inclusion should encompass all relevant actors that matter for reaching and implementing an agreement in a sustainable manner, as well as actors who might be able to block agreements or their implementation. However, who to include in a particular case is highly context-specific. Included actors may range from government representatives, armed groups (also non-state actors and extremists), political parties, and organized civil society groups, such as women, business,

representatives of minority groups, traditional and faith-based organizations, eminent persons, local communities, as well as the public at large (e.g. if national referenda occur).

4. Core enabling or constraining factors for successful National Dialogues

A variety of factors in National Dialogues can influence their success in reaching an agreement, and in sustaining these outcomes during the implementation phase. The “Broadening Participation”¹ research project identified a set of potentially enabling and constraining factors. These are divided in two main categories: process factors and context factors. Process factors are linked to either the choices made in designing the National Dialogue or the choices of the participants (delegates, mediators, etc.). Context factors are external to the process. The most influential context factors in National Dialogues concern the levels of political support emanating from important political actors, such as relevant elites and the public, as well as regional actors.

4.1 Process factors

Mandate and goal: The first step in designing a National Dialogue is to set a clear goal (i.e. peace-making, constitution-making, and/or political reforms). The mandate then follows from this goal and refers to the objective(s) of the dialogue process, as well as any legal powers delegated. For example, the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference (NDC, 2013-2014) was convened under the broad mandate of initiating an “open conversation about the future of the country”. The Yemeni NDC was also given a range of items to discuss, including the process of drafting a new constitution; the establishment of a Constitutional Drafting Committee and its membership; and, addressing the structure of the state and political system. These findings were intended to feed into a subsequent constitution-drafting process in a non-binding manner.

Selection: Who is included and who is excluded is an essential dimension of any National Dialogue. Criteria on selection define which groups or segments of society will be included in the Dialogue; whereas selection procedures determine how individual representatives from those included groups will be chosen. Criteria used to select participants of National Dialogues are often based on context-specific socio-demographic features, such as ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, and/or geographical location. Selection criteria can also be merit- or reputation-based, or linked to specific organizational membership.

Selection procedures refer to how representatives are chosen from within their constituency. Participants can be selected upon invitation, nomination, election, or self-selection within participating constituencies, or the process can simply be open to the public. Most National Dialogues combine multiple membership criteria and procedures of selection. Whatever combination of criteria and procedures is chosen, transparency regarding selection increases the perceived legitimacy of the overall process.

The individuals designated to represent included groups themselves also need to be perceived as representative and legitimate by society. For example, in Burundi the Hutu negotiators rejected the participation of women’s groups not because they were women, but because many of them were perceived as representing only the Tutsi community. Inversely, in Afghanistan, the selection of traditional religious actors, the ulama, was a deliberate move to gain political legitimacy in the

¹ Successful dialogues are dialogues which achieve their goals (i.e. reach an outcome document), as well as sustain the implementation of these outcomes/agreements over time.

negotiations. Their knowledge and authority over the tenets of Islam lent symbolic value to the National Dialogue Emergency Loya Jirga by bestowing on it the traditional name “Loya Jirga”, which originally is an institution embedded within Afghan political traditions.

Decision-making: Poorly designed rules and procedures can negate the benefits of National Dialogues. All included actors need to have some measure of decision-making power, either by vote or representation in a decision-making body of the National Dialogue; otherwise they may find their contributions marginalized or overruled, at the cost of the overall credibility of the Dialogue, and therefore also of the respect for and sustainability of any decisions made.

In almost all National Dialogues, despite apparently broad participation, ultimate decision-making power rested with a small group of already-powerful actors – thereby negating the benefits of multi-stakeholder participation in National Dialogues. For example, in the National Dialogues of Nepal, all important decisions were made outside the Constituent Assembly which in turn undermined the Dialogue and the drafting of a new constitution. Similarly, in the Egyptian National Dialogue of 2011, the military leadership of the country at the time (the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, or SCAF) did not take the process seriously. Decision-making within the working groups was held by single individuals appointed by the National Dialogue chair (who was in turn appointed by the SCAF). Moreover, the mandate of the dialogue did not specify any follow-up mechanisms or obligations on the part of the SCAF to respond to the content of the discussions. Hence, even though an agreement was reached it had no impact on the political reform process in the country.

Transfer and linking strategies: If there are other dialogue processes taking place in a country at the national, regional, or local levels, then it is essential that the National Dialogue be linked to them so that results agreed there are effectively communicated and transferred to any other parallel processes. For instance, local or regional ceasefire agreements and confidence-building measures might have direct implications for national-level processes (e.g. parliamentary dialogues), and vice versa. Non-formal dialogues, such as consultative forums or problem-solving workshops taking place alongside the National Dialogues, are also possible alternatives to having everybody at the table. These can bolster legitimacy by including multiple actors and voices if the transfer strategies between parallel forums are well-established and coherent.

Role of facilitator: National Dialogues are almost always facilitated by a chairperson or facilitator. Facilitators are typically persons with a high degree of political legitimacy in society. In a few cases, facilitators may even be external mediators. Facilitators or mediators are most effective when they are perceived to be unbiased, flexible, open to inclusion, and committed to finding innovative ways of channeling the diverse voices of the included actors. Nelson Mandela, for example, played a decisive role in the national dialogue of Burundi, where his neutrality, coercive tone, and international standing helped deliver a successful outcome.

Coalition-building: Constituencies within National Dialogues, such as civil society groups, can increase their influence if they manage to overcome their divisions through coalition building and joint positioning. In the Yemeni NDC, women across delegations did not manage to form a unified voice as a group and they rarely voted as a block. They therefore failed to pass many of the issues of shared concern, despite the fact that they had benefitted from a 30 per cent quota. In Somalia, on the other hand, women unilaterally formed a coalition and agreed to vote as a single block in order to break away from their respective clan lines which led to the adoption of a 10 per cent women quota in the Transitional National Assembly. Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), women not

only produced a joint document with statements and demands for all women, but also blocked the exits of the committee room to make sure the 2003 peace agreement was signed by reluctant male delegates.

Support structures: Support structures for included actors prior to and during National Dialogues can substantially enhance the quality of their influence on the negotiations. Support structures can include access to expert support, assistance in drafting contributions to agreements, and/or other types of structures that aim to prepare participants. For example, in Somalia (2002-2004) the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the IIDA Women's Development Organisation provided funding and capacity-building training sessions to civil society groups, and in particular to women groups.

Communication strategy: Visibility and transparency are important in National Dialogues and successful processes typically involve a strong media campaign. Securing public support and ensuring the legitimacy of agreements requires more than the inclusion of selected representatives of all major groups. Informing and engaging with the broader population can be decisive to create an active peace constituency.

4.2 Why political support and context matters

Besides the aforementioned process factors enabling or constraining National Dialogues in reaching and sustaining outcomes, political support is also essential in order to start, conduct, and implement the results of a National Dialogue. Political support can be internal or external, elite-based or public.

Support from economic, political, and social elites: The support or resistance of the elite can have a great influence on the success of a National Dialogue. For example, in Afghanistan, support from the United States and the UN throughout the constitutional process fostered elite suspicions, and this consequently damaged the credibility of the entire National Dialogue. On the other hand, elite cooperation can boost the success of a Dialogue; for example the national dialogue in South Africa (1990-1993) had the support of the key opponents, Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk, which was an important enabling factor.

Public buy-in: Public support for the National Dialogue and its eventual results is also important, and is influenced by the country's political climate and the attitude of powerful actors. The case of Northern Ireland shows that public buy-in can also be created. In the run-up to the referendum on the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement (an elite-based National Dialogue comprised of all political parties), a massive civil society campaign managed to successfully push for a positive referendum outcome.

Powerful regional actors and organizations: Regional actors often have important national interests at stake, and may therefore be prepared to exert substantial political pressure in support of (or against) a particular process or outcome. Hence, the respective interests of relevant regional actors need to be taken into account and addressed in one way or another. For example, in the last phase of the Arusha peace negotiations addressing the conflict in Burundi (2000), regional actors Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and DRC pushed for an inclusive process. Throughout, Tanzania and South Africa facilitated dialogues or monitoring efforts. This example contrasts with that of the Somali National Dialogue mentioned above, where Ethiopia acted as a spoiler and intentionally undermined the process, fearing that peace in neighboring Somalia would eventually lead to the restoration of a strong state rival.

International actors: Powerful non-regional actors generally have less important interests at stake, but where they are engaged they may have substantial diplomatic, economic, and military power (such as sanctions) to exert pressure either in favor of or against a process. For example, in Benin (1990) and Togo (1991), France put substantial pressure on those governments to adopt democratic reforms, which influenced the inception of their respective national dialogues and political transition processes.

Preparedness of included actors: The organizational readiness of included actors to meet the formal requirements of participation in a process is another key contextual factor. Preparedness depends on the prior organizational experience of included actors, on the existing tradition of these organizations in their specific context, and/or on any targeted training and support strategies. In Mali, for example, a long tradition of mediation, peaceful resolution of conflict, and reconciliation was beneficial to prepare the included actors.

Funding: Sufficient funds to cover all sorts of expenses associated with a formal National Dialogue - from the venue (which may be located abroad for security reasons) and transport, to financial support for essential support structures - are an additional dimension to be considered. External financial support can come from foreign governments, regional organizations (such as the European Union or the African Union), UN agencies (such as UNDP), NGOs, faith-based groups, or a diaspora community. For example, the processes in Burundi, Egypt, Nepal, Somalia, and Somaliland were partly funded by external actors. Lack of funding was a hindering factor for the cash-strapped Liberian transitional government (2003-2005). It is also important to secure funding for all invited actors, not only for the main parties involved.

Part Two: Non-Formal Types of Dialogues

1. Understanding non-formal dialogues

National Dialogues are not the only way to achieve nationally-owned, legitimate, publically-supported, and sustainable processes that address the grievances of a conflict. Non-formal dialogues, such as problem-solving workshops or consultations, can be alternative or complementary forums for dialogue, either replacing or co-existing in parallel with National Dialogues. Non-formal dialogues are often referred to as track 1.5, track 2, or track 3 dialogues.

High-level problem-solving workshops (track 1.5) typically bring together representatives close to the leaders of the conflict parties. These workshops can take place prior to, or in parallel with, official negotiations and they often involve parties compromising on positions that had previously been viewed as non-negotiable. The transfer of ideas to decision-making forums is essential for these workshops to have influence, and high-level problem-solving workshops are sometimes transformed into the main negotiations. These workshops can last several years and, hence, often overlap with multiple different negotiation formats. Compared to National Dialogues, problem-solving workshops tend to be less transparent.

Civil society dialogues (track 2) are either reconciliation-/peace-oriented, or work-/issue-oriented. The reconciliation- or peace-oriented workshops try to bring groups together to facilitate a general process of reconciliation; whereas the work- or issue-oriented workshops bring professional groups together to solve more specific, technical objectives (e.g. urban planning). Reconciliation-oriented workshops are often organized and facilitated by INGOs or academic institutions, sometimes in cooperation with local partners. The work- and issue-oriented workshops are typically organized by professional associations, sometimes with international conflict resolution NGO partners.

Consultations are the most common form of inclusion in peace processes. Consultations can be elite-based, broad-based, or even open to the general public, and they can take place at different moments of the negotiation process (i.e. prior to, in parallel with, or after negotiations). In addition, consultations can have a formal or non-formal relationship to these negotiation processes.

People-to-people projects (P2P) and community relations meetings try to bring together individuals or communities from adversarial parties, often on a more grassroots level or in local communities (track 3). They mostly target individuals from grassroots movements or particular members of communities, such as youth or professional groups.

2. What is the purpose of non-formal dialogues?

Non-formal dialogues can be initiated to allow inclusive dialogues as a supplement or alternative to track 1 negotiations, such as National Dialogues. Where non-formal dialogues are intended as alternatives to track 1 negotiations, they are often pursued in order to foster a general climate of cooperation, and to build or maintain channels of communication between adversarial groups in the absence of a formal negotiation process. These 'alternative' goals may also be effective when non-formal dialogues are used to supplement track 1 negotiations. Where intended to supplement track 1 negotiations, they are initiated to ensure sustainability; to avoid the problem of "spoilers"; to establish public buy-in and national ownership; to obtain local knowledge and expertise; and/or to make final agreements more durable.

High-level problem-solving workshops allow the participants to discuss controversial issues without the pressure to reach an agreement, which might also provide opportunities to test out new ideas, conduct joint analysis, or contribute to shifts in the political culture on each side. However, the secrecy of such workshops can create or worsen a legitimacy deficit.

Consultations improve negotiators' and political elites' understandings of people's grievances and concerns, and strengthen their influence on the negotiation agenda. Consultations have the advantage of including a wide range of perspectives that reinforce the legitimacy of the negotiation process. They can also facilitate discussions on controversial issues, which can provide an alternative channel for negotiations. However, the "Civil Society and Peacebuilding" project found that in cases where consultations were not all-inclusive, groups supporting the peace process were generally invited while group opposing it were often excluded, thereby rendering the forums unrepresentative and vulnerable to charges of illegitimacy. Moreover, in comparison with National Dialogues, actors participating in consultations typically have few decision-making powers such as the ability to adopt binding resolutions. Track 1 negotiators may be obliged to acknowledge the receipt of recommendations resulting from a consultation process, but they are almost never then obliged to fully reflect these recommendations in their own official agreements.

Reconciliation-oriented workshops aim at directly using the dialogues to develop concrete peace proposals and reconcile divided groups in society. However, the project "Civil Society and Peacebuilding" shows that the results of these initiatives have been limited, as they often only focus on the main conflict lines and try to change general attitudes rather than behavior.

Work- or issue-oriented problem-solving workshops are often initiated with the purpose of promoting reconciliation or achieving social cohesion in an indirect way. They bring conflicting groups together for common cause objectives other than peace. For example, multi-ethnic chambers of commerce and water-user groups that consist of two or more conflicting groups who are brought together to

provide specific services, such as water systems, rather than political goals such as peace and reconciliation. Non-formal dialogues have in several cases been successful in achieving social cohesion through means other than changing attitudes, because they have been able to facilitate the control of violence.

People-to-people dialogues aim at advancing reconciliation and peace-making in a conflict-affected society. Their objective is to address divisions within a community or between groups that may be rooted in collective differences such as ethnicity or religion, or related to an individual's status as a returning ex-combatant, displaced person, or refugee. People-to-people dialogues ameliorate the prejudice and demonization that reinforce perceived differences within and between groups. The aim is to create opportunities for interactions that would ultimately lead to changes in both attitude and behavior.

3. Who is included?

Civil society groups are an integral part of non-formal dialogues and substantial attention has been paid to building and strengthening civil society, especially in countries experiencing or emerging from situations of armed conflict. In such environments, civil society is understood as playing an important role in reducing violence, and in facilitating the conditions necessary for the sustainability of agreements. Civil society is understood to encompass a wide range of actors from professional associations, clubs, unions, faith-based organizations (such as churches or Islamic charities), non-governmental organizations, as well as traditional and clan groups. Additionally, non-formal dialogues can also include organized youth and women's groups, minority groups, representatives close to decision-makers, non-state armed actors, local communities, grassroots movements, or the general public as such. Inclusion in non-formal dialogues can yield the same positive effects as inclusion in National Dialogues: as mentioned above, when included actors were able to influence the quality of agreements (defined as addressing the causes of conflict), whether through direct or indirect representation, the rate of peace agreements being reached and implemented was much higher.

Faith-based organizations are important, broad-based socialization institutions. Their reach into communities and societies writ large often grants them a high degree of legitimacy to influence the beliefs and opinions of their membership. This is the case even when faith-based actors are polarized or implicated in the conflict. They are therefore significant actors in negotiations processes, yet should not be assumed to be automatically in favor of reaching an agreement. Faith-based actors are often just as polarized as broader society, as demonstrated by the example of Sri Lankan Buddhist monks openly protesting against peace talks during the Norwegian-led peace process between 2000 and 2004, which contributed to the ultimate breakdown of mediation efforts.

Research indicates that there are certain preconditions for religious actors to assume a peace-supporting role, such as a firm internal commitment to engage in the peace process. For example, the Catholic bishop conferences in El Salvador and Mozambique in the early 1990s were both divided on their role in their respective peace process. Only when they each found common ground with other participants could they begin to take an important and constructive role in their own peace processes.

In cases where civil society is weak or non-existent, religious groups may be among the only non-governmental groups with any legitimate claim to represent the perspectives and interests of the population. Additionally, religious and traditional actors are often well positioned, credible, and well-educated relative to other actors. For example, in the DRC which has a strong culture of associational life around Catholic, Protestant, and Kimbanguiste churches, it was therefore

unsurprising that these religious actors were included among the 'Forces Vives' in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue between 1999 and 2003.

4. Core enabling or constraining factors for successful non-formal dialogues

A variety of factors can also influence the level of effectiveness non-formal dialogues might have, and their ability to reach and sustain negotiated outcomes. In the study of cases of non-formal dialogues, a full set of potentially enabling and constraining factors that affect different civil society roles in non-formal dialogues have been identified. These include both process factors and context factors.

4.1. Process factors

Structure of dialogue: Reconciliation and social cohesion dialogues are often scattered and short-term, limiting their ability to produce meaningful change. Long-term systematic initiatives which address all relevant social cleavages (not just the current armed conflict) tend to be more effective.

Changing behavior not attitudes: Many non-formal initiatives aim at changing attitudes, yet even over the long-term, this seems ineffective. Existing evidence from Bosnia, Cyprus, and Israel/Palestine demonstrates that attitude change might not be necessary for behavior change. Instead, work-related activities, which brought people from different groups together, proved to be more successful than peace-related work. Here people expressed positive experiences gained from working with the other group, often producing concrete outcomes or common work initiatives.

Broader inclusion of issues and groups: Research shows that if social cleavages are not adequately addressed, there is a risk that new conflicts may emerge. The understanding and identification of different involved groups must go beyond the main adversarial groups. The uprising of violence in the Terai region of Nepal immediately after the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006 is a case in point. The focus on the main conflict line between the Maoist movement and the government obviously neglected other tensions, and may even have reinforced ethnic divides.

Selection of participants: The selection of participants to problem-solving workshops is most effective when it addresses a variety of social constituencies, including non-elite and polarized groups. Problem-solving workshops often engage elite, English-speaking constituencies that have already been converted to positive images of the other side. For example, an evaluation of peace workshops in Cyprus showed that most participants had a positive attitude towards the other group even before the workshop; in contrast, a representative survey sample of the population revealed strong polarization.

Timing of dialogue initiatives: Non-formal dialogue activities are not relevant in every phase of a conflict cycle. For example, while protection and monitoring are always highly relevant during armed conflict and war, many organizations also focus on social cohesion and socialization initiatives during these phases, including organizing dialogue projects and conflict resolution workshops, even though these have been shown to be more relevant after large-scale violence has ended.

4.2. Why context matters

The behavior of the state: The institution of the state is crucial for both conflict and peacebuilding. First, the state largely determines the space in which civil society can operate. Second, the behavior of the government in particular can become a source of conflict, especially when it excludes a certain group from decision-

making, thereby depriving them of political, social, and economic power. Such marginalized groups often turn to violence. Third, the state's effectiveness in fulfilling its functions, such as protection or service delivery, can also have an effect on civil society's capacity to fulfill other functions.

The level of violence: With the increase of violence, the space for civil society peacebuilding decreases. First, violence destroys and disrupts existing forms of social organizations and social networks by spreading fear, distrust, and intimidation. It is important to note that violence-induced changes not only affect the possibilities of civil society peacebuilding at a particular moment, but may also change the very structure of civil society. Second, violence limits the possibilities of civil society actors in fulfilling their respective roles, as many become targets of violence.

At the same time, violence can be a central motive for civil society organizations to advocate for peace. In many armed conflicts and wars, the spill-over of violence onto everyday life subsequently led to the establishment of human rights groups, victims' organizations, and even peace movements.

Behavior and composition of civil society: Civil society tends to be a mirror of society. Thus, it should be expected that civil society organizations will be just as divided as society itself is along salient power, hierarchy, ethnic, or gender lines, and have the potential to display both moderate and radical opinions and behaviors. Civil society should not only be seen as the 'good society' that is pro-peace, pro-democracy, and therefore an automatically reliable supporter of peace processes. Civil society should instead be understood within its particular context.

External Political Actors: There are many important external political actors that can influence war or peace. In the cases of non-formal dialogues, mostly strong regional political actors were found to have the power to create suitable conditions for civil society peacebuilding. They can do so in two main ways: first by influencing the peace process, and second by using political influence and donor support to push for more space for civil society to act.

Funding: Donor resources are a key element that enables civil society initiatives. Different civil society actors, however, depend on donor support in very different ways. Mass-based membership organizations, as well as social movements, hardly depend on external funding. Still, their resources also decrease in times of armed conflicts, when members are less able to pay their dues. Modern NGOs are the groups most dependent on external funding. Although many NGOs work with volunteers, many activities would simply not take place without additional external funding.

The media: Research examining previous cases of non-formal dialogues show that the media may play an important role in reconciliation by strengthening particular images and positive stereotypes in society. However, most analyzed cases also showed that the media has often contributed to reinforcing enemy images and enhancing radicalization.

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This paper has been prepared as a background report for the Second National Dialogue Conference in Helsinki, Finland (16 - 18 November 2015), by Anne Zachariassen, Nicholas Ross, Thania Paffenholz and Farrah Hawana.

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Suggested citation: "Dialogues in Peace and Mediation Processes: Definitions, type, goals, and success factors for sustainability", Geneva: Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies), March 2016

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