



**Inclusive Peace**  
setting change in motion

# National Dialogue and Peace Talks

Linkages and Potential Scenarios

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There have been numerous examples where National Dialogues and peace talks have taken place in close proximity to each other both in terms of timing and scope. The nature of this interaction can follow a number of scenarios which are outlined in this paper. This paper is intended to serve as an input for reflection and discussion amongst specific stakeholders, to reflect on the possible likelihood and implications of such scenarios in the Ethiopian context. The document describes key features of each scenario, complemented by comparative examples.

# Scenario 1: Peace talks feed into National Dialogue

## Key Features

- Peace talks take place and are concluded prior to the “dialogue phase” of National Dialogue taking place.
- Peace talks feed into the preparation of the process, reflected in the agenda and the participation of those groups who participated in peace talks. This can involve the “de-listing” of formally banned or “listed” groups, and the inclusion of such actors into the National Dialogue.

## Examples

Comprehensive peace and ceasefire agreements led to the initiation of National Dialogues in the cases of Afghanistan (Emergency Loya Jirga and Constitutional Loya Jirga), the DRC (Inter-Congolese Dialogue), and Nepal (Constituent Assembly). The provisions mandated inclusive negotiations in the transitioning political system to address causes of conflict.

## Scenario 2: Peace talks overlap with National Dialogue

### Key Features

- Peace talks are initiated prior to or during the “dialogue phase” of National Dialogue but for various reasons the peace talks are not concluded, with both peace talks and National Dialogue taking place simultaneously.
- The National Dialogue may therefore adopt a sequenced or staggered process, whereby preparatory and dialogue phase activities are undertaken with groups that are already “on board”, or in geographic areas not affected by the conflict which is the focus of the peace talks.
- It could also be possible for those actors involved in peace talks to also be engaged in the National Dialogue process, either as participants/ delegations or as observers, with a view to such actors achieving full participant status upon the conclusion of the peace talks.

### Examples

In **Central African Republic**, the National Dialogue adopted a staggered approach to conducting dialogue across different parts of the country, starting in the areas and with actors who weren’t engaged in violent conflict. At the same time, peace talks were taking place between the Government and armed groups, with a view to integrating such actors into the National Dialogue process. This did happen in some instances, though other groups refused to engage in peace talks and were thus also excluded from the National Dialogue process.

In **Myanmar**, the National Dialogue (Union Peace Conference) was part of the roadmap for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the government and ethnic armed groups. The National Dialogue was a part of the seven-step political roadmap for the peace process, providing a platform for the government, ethnic armed groups, and political parties to deliberate further on key thematic and political issues.

## Scenario 3: Peace talks collapse, National Dialogue proceeds

### Key Features

- In situations where parties to the conflict participating in peace talks initiated or continued with National Dialogue process in order to move beyond collapsed or dysfunctional peace talks, providing a vehicle to advance their own respective demands and interests, whether in support of the status quo or advocating change, while also seeking to strengthen the legitimacy of an alternate process.
- This could also see the agenda items from the peace talks being “transferred” and added to the National Dialogue process.

### Examples

In **Mexico**, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) wanted to avoid yet another round of exclusive negotiations. When talks resumed after the failed Cathedral Dialogue, they initiated a new National Dialogue but also broadened the negotiations by inviting more than 100 representatives of civil society as “advisors” and “guests” in an effort to increase their legitimacy and support for the talks.

In **South Sudan**, the National Dialogue was launched by President Salva Kiir in December 2016 following the collapse of the peace agreement and a spike in fighting between government and opposition forces. It was essentially viewed to be a dialogue amongst one set of elites, with key opposition groups as well as civil society being initially excluded and critical of the National Dialogue process. Subsequent moves by the President to distance himself from the direct oversight of the process ultimately encouraged greater inclusivity.

## Scenario 4: National Dialogue collapses, peace talks continue

### Key Features

- Peace talks between a smaller group of conflict parties proceed, addressing issues which are expected to be part of the National Dialogue process.
- The exclusion of some political, civic, and armed actors from the peace talks creates a situation where key political elites and other actors view the peace talks as a vehicle for those groups directly involved to achieve unfair gains or outcomes which pre-empt or undermine the National Dialogue process.
- This can lead to actors who were initially supportive of the National Dialogue process re-calculating their strategy and position and instead opposing the National Dialogue process, seeking to pursue other forms of dialogue or negotiation or reverting to other political or military tactics to advance their goals.

### Examples

There are a number of examples where broader National Dialogue processes have collapsed, or relied on a smaller, more exclusive dialogue between elites to address certain key issues in the absence of a broader process. This understanding has led to many approaches to breaking deadlocks, including creative formats such as the introduction of 'sufficient consensus' in the case of South Africa, or the 'Cyril–Roelf channel' between ANC and National Party negotiators activated when the talks in South Africa were at the brink of collapse.

## Scenario 5: National Dialogue collapses, Peace talks collapse, conflict relapses

### Key Features

- For various reasons, a National Dialogue process (either in the preparatory, dialogue, or implementation phase) collapses or is no longer seen to be legitimate or have the buy-in from key stakeholders.
- Parallel or subsequent efforts to pursue peace talks between two or more of the parties initially included in the National Dialogue process also stall, or do not lead to any sustained process or meaningful outcome.
- This may prompt conflict parties engaged in peace talks to pursuing armed violence as the primary tactic for achieving their goals, resulting in renewed conflict. Given the breakdown of the broader National Dialogue, it may also catalyse other actors to engage in armed violence, resulting in a proliferation of violence and fragmentation of armed actors.

### Examples

In **Yemen**, the National Dialogue was intended to make recommendations to advance national reconciliation and address the structural causes of conflict. However, the National Dialogue was not able to sustain momentum and involvement of key elites and armed actors, and the country experienced a relapse of conflict which ultimately led to the dissolution of the National Dialogue process. As such, while the National Dialogue process did reach its conclusions, the recommendations were not implemented. Successive rounds of peace talks since the National Dialogue process have also largely failed to reach a sustainable agreement between conflict parties, as the country has witnessed several years of violent conflict with significant fragmentation and proliferation of armed groups.

In **South Africa**, the National Dialogue (CODESA I and II) were initiated to promote the democratization of the country with equal rights for all citizens and to end violence. However, this process did not reduce violence and eventually ANC left the negotiations causing CODESA II to collapse. Nearly a year later, the parties initiated a new National Dialogue: the MPNP, which reached an agreement.