Navigation 360 — pathways into a changing world

GMI — GLOBAL MENTORING INITIATIVE

## EVALUATING PEACE MEDIATION AND PEACEBUILDING in ONGOING CONFLICT

## What have we learned about good practices in peace mediation and peacebuilding?

**October 2023**

Peace mediation and peacebuilding are notoriously difficult endeavours. Many actors are definitely beyond the 'control' of the mediators or peacebuilders, very difficult to influence or even hard to reach. Most conflicts evolve into a set of interlocking conflict dynamics, with international, regional, national and local layers that are interconnected but also have somewhat different driving factors and key actors.

Yet donors, as well as mediators, want to assess, even 'evaluate' the 'effectiveness' and 'impact' of their actions. The question is: What is the reference, what are relevant criteria? Two main reference sources can be used: the OECD evaluation criteria, and what we have learned, from years of comparative experience, about practices that increase the likelihood of having some positive influence or impact.

A first briefing paper (June 2023) focused on the OECD evaluation criteria, how the OECD advises they be used and how applicable they are to peace mediation and peacebuilding. It concludes with the observation that using these criteria to evaluate this type of actions, is by no means only a matter of methodological competence. That has implications for the choice of reviewers and evaluators.

A clearer understanding of the meaning of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria is not however of direct help to peace actors who intervene in volatile and uncertain environments and try to figure out how they can be most relevant, effective, and efficient, nor for donors who try to assess the potential of different proposed interventions to be so. A second possible source of insight is what we have learned from the collective experiences in mediation and peacebuilding over the past 20 years.

This second briefing paper summarises key such insights. These are not 'best practices' that are valid across all contexts and at any moment. There is no blueprint design or technical-methodological manual that, if followed, is guaranteed to resolve the conflict. They constitute 'good practices' that seem to increase the *likelihood* that individual and collective efforts will, eventually (but no one can confidently predict when), have positive influences on a vicious circle of violence and distrust. When and how precisely to apply them will remain a matter of situational judgment by the peace actor.

## I. PEACE MEDIATION

### 1. Reaching agreement is no longer the measure of success

Mediation and mediation support to reach a peace agreement among the warring parties are one major type of peace process. Over the past two decades, international mediation capabilities have significantly increased. There are more mediation and mediation support actors and the mediation field has professionalised. There are now dedicated mediation support units in various multilateral and bilateral agencies, as well as different networks of mediators and mediation supporters. While this may have yielded many good practices – or at least clarity about poor practices – it should not imply there can be a single solution manual that fits all situations. In every negotiation process decisions needs to be made about the sequencing of the agenda items, who to include and when, what combination of dispute

resolution approaches to use when, and how to maximise the likelihood that an agreement will be implemented. (Ross & Schomerus 2020).

In contemporary conflicts, we see involvement of many more external actors, regional and international, than was the case during the Cold War. That means negotiated agreements take longer to reach, significant reversals must be expected in the negotiation process, and even when formal agreements are reached, they are harder to implement. In short, mediation processes (and peace processes more generally) are increasingly messy, not linear, reversible and no guarantees can be given that 'sustained results' will be 'delivered'. (PRSP 2020:2)[1] Sadly, competition among mediators can contribute to this. Nor is there a guarantee that politically appointed mediators have the required expertise or will follow the expert advice. Failed agreements carry a larger cost than only the fruitless investment of resources: it can decrease trust among all actors, including in a negotiated solution, and can often trigger new cycles of deadly violence and destruction. (Schirch 2009:1). The next attempt will be harder.

Reaching agreement is no longer seen as the end game or the ultimate measure of success. Given that agreements can fall apart when disputes arise over their implementation, there is a sense that more comprehensive and detailed agreements, widely known among many stakeholders who can act as informal monitors and guarantors, increase the probability they will be implemented. Already in 2010, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue talked about "*the acid test of implementation"* and prevention of recurring violence. (p. 17) In 2016, 'post-conflict peacebuilding' was reframed into '*sustaining peace'* by General Assembly Resolution 70/262 and Security Council Resolution 2282. (UN Peacebuilding Support Office 2017).

Even if the recurrence of significant violence can be avoided, the 'root causes' of the conflict are not necessarily addressed, and intense political power struggles may continue. "*Recent national-level peace processes have often 'locked in' disagreement rather than resolving it. Sometimes the need to compromise pushes conflict parties to agree on superficial or institutional reforms without tackling the root causes of a conflict. Power struggles are then carried forward into the new institutions, creating a form of 'formalised political unsettlement' in which conflict parties continue bargaining*." (PRSP 2020:2) This has led one experienced researcher to talk about the need for 'perpetual peacebuilding'. (Paffenholz 2021).

## 2. Enhancing the potential of mediation effectiveness

Comparative learning has identified several approaches and practices that are believed to *increase the potential* of mediation effectiveness – without, again, being able to *guarantee* success.

***More women mediators***

Following UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000, the demand has grown to have more women as chief mediators and in mediation and mediation-support teams.[2] Today, several women mediator networks have come into being. This goes together with a wider demand to better consider gender in peace processes, to include women's demands and rights in the agreements, and involve women in the implementation of these agreements. (e.g. Castillo Diaz & Tordjman 2012). This counterbalances the tendency to focus negotiations simply on a cessation of hostilities and power-



[1] Similarly, democratisation is not a linear progress. There will be periods of reversal, of 'de-democratisation' in Tilly's term. This has been a marked occurrence in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Western countries are not immune to it, as recent developments in e.g. Hungary, Poland and the USA show.

[2] There is also a demand for more proactive consultation with women's groups in society, and for more women in the delegations of the parties to the conflict, though it is recognised they may be bound by party discipline. (e.g. Castillo Diaz & Tordjman 2012:5-7) For six common objections to having more women involved, see Int. Civil Society Action Network 2015:11. "Between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average, 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories in major peace processes around the world. *While there has been some progress in women's participation, about seven out of every ten peace processes still did not include women mediators or women signatories—the latter indicating that few women participated in leadership roles as negotiators, guarantors, or witnesses. Peace efforts in 2020 have similarly struggled to include women. For example, women represented only around 10 percent of negotiators in the Afghan talks, just 20 percent of negotiators in Libya's political discussions, and 0 percent of negotiators in Libya's military talks and Yemen's recent process.*" Council on Foreign Relations (https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/)

sharing among key conflict actors and puts more emphasis on responsibilities towards survivors and social groups affected by war and on a more inclusive future governance. (Int. Civil Society Action Network 2015: 4)[3]

***Insider mediators***

Third party facilitators have tended to be people from outside the society, sometimes even outside the region where the conflict plays out. Appreciation has grown for what insider mediators can bring to such role. Insider mediators have a greater potential to understand 'from within' what drives the conflict and how to engage and influence the national and local actors. There is a perception that the combination of outsider and insider mediators is a stronger formula. (CHD 2017). But some insider mediators prefer to work separately, to avoid interference with their own approaches or to be seen as associated with a foreign authority. (CHD 2017:38-39; OSCE Berghof 2016:7/9). As is the case between outside mediators, tensions can also exist among insider mediators. (OSCE Berghof 2016:9)[4]

## 3. Broader inclusion and participation in political peace processes

***Opening up elite negotiations***

Historically, the international image and practice of peace mediation has been shaped by Track-thinking. Track 1 refers to the formal negotiation process between elite political and armed actors, sometimes supported by non-state actors in what is then called Track 1.5 work. Track 3 is local level peace work, typically undertaken by non-state actors, including what are generally seen as 'ordinary' people. Track 2 is peace work by and among larger societal organisations, which can refer to professional associations, the business sector, faith-groups, civil society associations and -organisations, trade unions etc. Though long criticised, segregated Track-approaches remain present in many minds and still shape practices.

Two critiques of classical Track 1 approaches are that they tend to reward those using violence with a seat at the table while their victims are absent, and that they lead to elite pacts. Elite pacts (agreements negotiated between political and military power brokers) may reduce the physical violence but perpetuate the structural violence that is a driver of conflict. Therefore, formal peace negotiations should no longer be affairs only for the military and political elites, whose interests and visions of the future do not necessarily coincide with those of most of the population. '*Inclusion means creating opportunities for people with a stake in lasting peace to shape that peace. It means ensuring the views and needs of elites do not drown out those of the wider population. The UN has defined 'inclusivity' as the extent and manner in which the views and needs of parties to conflict and other stakeholders are represented, heard and integrated into the peace process.*' (Dumasy 2021:4) Greater inclusion and meaningful participation particularly of civil actors '*is a means of making peace negotiations a societal process rather than a political and security-focused one.*' (ICSAN 2015:4).

> « *The broader processes of societal change required for lasting peace cannot hope to be captured within the confines of a formal peace process that is negotiated by a limited number of predominantly male, often armed, elites at the national level. The high failure rate of peace agreements – 40 percent collapse in the first two years and 60% in the first five years post-agreement -speaks to the limits of such an approach when it is not accompanied by efforts at different societal levels. Real transformation occurs as part of a society-wide sustained and inclusive effort to promote tolerance, diversity, understanding and cooperation*." (UNDP 2020:12)



[3] Only 371 out of 1868 agreements in the PA-X Peace Agreements Database (www.peaceagreements.org) covering 1990-2018, or just under 20% have provisions on women, gender, or sexual violence. Many of these are single line and tokenistic references. (PRSP 2020:2)

[4] There is some ambiguity in how the term 'insider mediator' is used. When used to refer to people operating at the local conflict-resolution level, the difference with 'local peacebuilder' tends to fade and indeed, the same individual can play different roles at different times. (Mason 2009:5-6) 'Insider- outsider' perceptions (and acceptance) will also take on different meanings in sub-national peace work: Someone from Shan State in Myanmar, for example, would not automatically be considered an 'insider mediator' in Rakhin State.

Some argue that wider stakeholder groups should not be left 'outside the room' but are brought into and can influence the process 'in the room'. (Altiok & Grizelj 2019:27). That can be practically and/or politically difficult: but there is a wide range of possible mechanisms that can (also) allow many more stakeholders to provide input, criticism, constructive feedback etc. (Overviews can be found in e.g. Schirch Dec. 2009; Paffenholz 2013, 2014 & 2015; Schirch 2018; Yousuf 2018).

***National dialogues***
National dialogues can be one approach to ensure broader participation. The Berghof Foundation defined them as "*nationally owned political processes aimed at generating consensus among a broad range of national stakeholders in times of deep political crisis, in post-war situations or during far-reaching political transitions*." (Berghof 2017:21) They are a particular form of formal process to create some breakthrough or come to agreements, with national actors center-stage. The idea is that they rely more on dialogue and hence persuasion, than on negotiation. (Blunck et al 2017:20) National dialogues come in different shapes and forms. Some have very limited participation and remain 'elite dialogues', others have very broad participation with hundreds of delegates. (Murray & Stigant 2020).

Comparative studies of national dialogue processes (17 in Paffenhold et al 2017, and 6 in Murray and Stigant 2020) provide various attention points that, taken together, can help to assess the *potential or probability for effectiveness* of such endeavour – at the beginning and during its course. The findings resonate well with attention points highlighted at the 4th Conference on National Dialogues and Non-Formal Dialogue Processes, in June 2019 in Helsinki (FELM 2019). Among them

- There is no blueprint design for dialogue processes, local or national. But key factors to create initial momentum and the potential for a meaningful dialogue process, will be who plays the roles of connector, convenor and facilitator, how these role holders are perceived by different sections of society, and how well they play their roles.
- Skillful facilitation, best by local/national facilitators with the right competencies, is a major factor in their strength or weakness. Facilitating with an eye to gender and age differences, majority and minority groups but also with recognition that people have multiple identities, is part of those competencies. Dealing with the emotional field is as important a skill, and at times even more so, than dealing with facts and reasoning among the participants. Because in situations of violent conflict, emotions run high and may influence behaviours more than dispassionate reason.
- Strong and broad ownership by the participants and stakeholders, of the agenda and the process is an important factor in the potential of a dialogue process to lead to positive outcomes beyond itself.

These observations show that national dialogues may have to be steered and facilitated as emerging - rather than overdesigned and over-planned processes, and that the process facilitators should not try to exercise too much power and influence to obtain their desired result. That, in fact, might turn out to be counterproductive.

Ultimately such formal national dialogues are political processes. No technical sophistication can control the political dynamics. Inclusion does not *automatically* mean more effectiveness in reaching agreements and/or and better agreements: often there is no binding formula to ensure that consultation results are taken up in the further process and its outcome documents. (Bramble & Paffenholz 2020:3)

Resistance to greater inclusivity, in national dialogues and during negotiations, and again during the agreement implementation, can come from one or more conflict parties who may want to limit who, how and when and if different actors are brought into the process.[5] Resistance can also come from the mediators, who must deal with the potential tension between inclusivity and efficiency. (UN Guidance 2012:11-12) Not all mediators are inclusion-friendly. In practice, inclusion tends to be concentrated on certain stages of a peace process, not all. Ceasefires are often negotiated between armed actors alone, creating a precedent for exclusion that subsequently may be harder to reverse. (PSRP 2020: 2)



[5] In Myanmar for example, it was surprisingly the National League for Democracy, after coming into government in 2016, which significantly reduced the space for inclusion of certain non-state armed actors and political parties, and of civil society groups. (Bramble & Paffenholz 2020:3)

***Local and locally negotiated agreements***
As comprehensive agreements or their implementation can remain elusive, there is now more attention and appreciation for limited and more local agreements. The Political Settlements Research Programme is the most comprehensive effort to study political settlements since 1990. One of their key findings is that '*L*ocal peace processes hold both opportunities and risks for wider peacemaking. Local peace agreements serve a variety of purposes, including halting violence, building momentum for national level peacemaking, or enabling humanitarian access. These agreements can reduce violence on the ground, build trust between conflict parties, and resolve disagreements that undermine national-level peace processes. However, local peace processes risk fracturing armed groups, potentially creating new forms of local autonomy and conflict.' (PRSP 2020b; see Turkmani 2022 for a review of six years of local talks in Homs, Syria).

Local negotiation processes are often led by local actors. That has given rise to the question how international actors, such as the UN, can support them and, when and where appropriate, connect them with other local level and national level actions for conflict management. Not surprisingly, the reflex is to see how their resources, capacities and expertise can provide support to those local level initiatives that seem politically significant. There is appreciation that local actors ought to be -and remain- the mediators, and awareness that "*UN involvement might overwhelm or be detrimental to local processes, for instance by drawing unwanted attention, raising expectations or impeding the flexibility of approaches. Consequently, it may be best for the UN to take a step back and help identify other actors who are better placed to effectively engage with local mediation processes*." (DPA 2020:11) On the other hand, the involvement of the UN may counterbalance the influence of armed actors in such local processes, for the greater protection of civilians. (Turkmani 2022:16)

## II. PEACEBUILDING

The above observations have signaled that there cannot and should not be a radical separation between levels or tracks of peace intervention nor a strict differentiation between '*peace making'* (through a formal political negotiation process) and *'peacebuilding'* (as a wider societal process).[6] Frustration with such framing of peace practices led to a broad consultative process involving many peace actors around the world. That resulted in the articulation of four key 'principles for peace'. (see textbox on p. 6)

### 1. Enable and support local/nationally led peacebuilding

Many, though not all, contemporary conflicts are rooted in internal divisions, tensions, and struggles, even if they involve regional and international actors. While it is critically important to get outsiders to stop putting oil on the fire or fight their proxy wars in someone else' territory, internal actors also have a role to play in reducing such negative interference. When it comes to negotiated agreements, sustained peace, particularly 'just peace', cannot be imported or imposed by outsiders on societal groups in conflict with each other– it is largely in the hands of the members of that society. Broad support for the process and the content increases the *chances of it being implemented and the peace holding*. Therefore, capacities for peace-making and sustained peace (at least non-violent means of dealing with contentious issues) need to be present at all levels and in all sectors of society.[7]



[6] Or does such difference remain relevant, in conflicts that have strong internal causes and drivers but have also become a battlefield for regional and wider international interests and confrontations, such as we see clearly in Syria and to a lesser degree also in Myanmar?

[7] Sustained peace requires more than renewed interpersonal and intergroup relations; it needs to be embedded in normative, legal and policy frameworks, supported and protected by the institutions of state and society. Outsiders can contribute to this as norm promotors and providers of comparative expertise. But it will not hold unless there is broad-based internal societal support and commitment to it.

**PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE**

The 'Principles for Peace' collaborative initiative started from an assessment of the weaknesses of prevailing peace practices that, cumulatively, reduce its potential effectiveness:

- Too often, peace processes are focused on negotiations 'at-the-table' aiming to end violence thereby trading short-term milestones for long-term prospects of sustainable peace
- Lack of real inclusivity
- Lack of local ownership
- Lack of implementation and long-term oversight
- Strategic deficit in international peace and security interventions
- Failure to address historical root causes, the fluid nature of conflict and grievances.
- Failure to understand and address the political economy of conflict

https://principlesforpeace.org/the-rationale/

The four core principles for better peace processes are

- Ensure inclusivity and fair representation of conflict-affected groups, civil society, and ordinary people in formal peace negotiations.
- Cultivate positive peace by committing to invest in sustainable peacebuilding work in the long-term as desired by local populations.
- Support efforts to build social peace at all levels of society, rather than focusing predominantly on achieving political peace.
- Center international involvement around the leadership and needs of local peacebuilders and peace architecture at all levels of the peace process. (Matheson et al 2021-13-17)

If the impact goal is sustained peace, then strong complementarity is required between internationally led and local/nationally led peacebuilding. International actors can focus on the areas where they have a distinctive value to add (e.g. getting all regional and international interveners to stop fueling the conflict; promoting and upholding international norms) but otherwise better play a supporting role to nationally and locally led processes. These may generate solutions that do not meet international actor's norms, but that have a chance to gain broader traction under the prevailing circumstances. International actors need to be humbler about their presumed expertise and ability to provide solutions and more flexible about how they support and reinforce local/nationally led peace processes. (e.g. Vernon 2019:55). Local/national actors in turn, can try to persuade their fellow-citizens to resist conflict-stimulating interference by regional/international actors, and support international mediators engaging the latter at higher political level.

## 2. Mobilise all actors for peace: women, youth, faith-based actors

Experience has shown that peace processes are more likely to have positive influence if they mobilise, and include women, as well as youth and faith-based actors.[8]

*As mentioned, the active involvement of women in peace negotiations is generally observed to lead to better agreements that go beyond power-sharing and seek to address the needs and demands of larger sections of society. (For a more detailed analysis, see PSRP 2020c). Women groups may influence new governance provisions in the agreement on the post-agreement governance reviews, e.g. related to women's rights (family codes, domestic violence, property ownership and inheritance rights etc.), a gender-balanced civil service (e.g. in the police) and gender-sensitive government institutions. (Conciliation Resources 2013:11).*

*This can formally create or strengthen the opportunities for women to play more active and central roles in politics e.g. political parties, constitution-making assemblies, parliament, the judiciary, senior government positions etc. (Bell & Forster 2019). Comparative case study analysis found that where women's groups (as different from individual women mediators or negotiators) have moderate to significant influence on the political negotiation process, it increases the probability that serious*



[8] Years later, that may still be ignored. For example, the negotiations between the USA and the Afghan Taliban, in Doha, did not include any representation of Afghan women, even though the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls remain one of the deeply contested issues.

*negotiations start, that an agreement is reached, and that it will last longer.*[9] *This goes contrary to the belief of some mediators that broader inclusion or that of women groups specifically, hinders rather than facilitates the process. (O'Reilly et al 2015:11-12) Deliberately designing for practical forms of inclusion is strongly recommended. (Close 2018:4; Avonius et al 2019).*

*Women are peace actors also when not connecting to or engaged in the political negotiations. In times of war (or prolonged forced displacement) they may become more important income-providers for the (extended) family, co-organisers of charitable/humanitarian relief and documenters of human rights abuses. They may negotiate with local power groups to protect civilians and non-combatants, remove roadblocks, release hostages, allow humanitarian access etc. They may act as intermediaries between opposing groups and help raise funds for local 'peace talks' or get directly involved in the negotiation of local ceasefires. They may persuade family members to put down arms and return home and help ex-combatants reintegrate. (e.g. Conciliation Resources 2013:11-12; Lindborg 2017)*

The inclusion of young people in peacebuilding was strongly legitimized and equally mandated by UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on Youth, Peace and Security. The first International Symposium on Youth Participation and Peace Processes took place in Helsinki, Finland, in 2019. The 'Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security' is a leading platform to shape policy and practice.[10] The inclusion of youth in peace (and security) processes intends to counter some negative patterns:

- While youth can be a demographic majority in a society, are the key stakeholders in the future and will provide future leadership, conflict and peace dynamics remain often dominated by older generations that exclude them.
- Youth in general can be seen in a negative light by older generations, as too driven by anger and ready to protest, and therefore in need of control and guidance.
- Young men can be broadly portrayed negatively, as the ready recruits for armed groups and perpetrators of violence and other abuses.

Including youth in peace processes and peacebuilding, not just marginally but centrally, therefore aims to shift negative perceptions and the resulting exclusion and discrimination. It also seeks to tap into the positive energy and commitment of many youths to play positive roles among their peers, in their own communities, and for their society. Kofi Annan put it strongly: "*Any society that does not succeed in tapping into the energy and creativity of its youth will be left behind*" (Annan 2013).

Many youths are involved in effective peacebuilding at local level (see e.g. Cito Cirhigiri 2019; Altiok & Grizelj 2019). But youth spaces must not be seen, or kept, in isolation from the rest of societal dynamics. There are strong examples of groups, clubs and networks of young people who have engaged with local traditional and governmental leaders, become active in political parties, and gained the attention of national leaderships, to the point they are now regularly consulted on larger issues of contention and conflict. In several instances, youth and women, and possibly other social groups that tend to be 7ecognized7n, have formed alliances to enhance their influence. (Mubashir & Grizelj 2018:41-42). A review of evaluations found overall two major impacts on young people themselves, from involving them as (potentially) positive actors: First, a reduced vulnerability to them being drawn into violence and secondly, an increased engagement as active citizens in building a peaceful society. (Vernon 2019:27-30).

Religion throughout history has often been used as a powerful mobiliser for conflict and violence. Deeper analyses tend to show that religion by itself is hardly ever a major driver. It becomes an



[9] 'Influence' was assessed as pushing for negotiations to start or an agreement to be reached, and the integration of topics addressing the causes of the conflict and their inclusion in the agreement. (O'Reilly 2015:11)

[10] It is co-chaired by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders, Search for Common Ground, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and the UN Population Fund UNFPA. While UNSCR 2250 defines 'youth' as between 18-29 years, it acknowledges that there are variable societal interpretations of this. In Conciliation Resources' experience, the youth age bracket can span from 16 to 36 years of age, though in some contexts older biological ages still count as 'youth', because 'adulthood' is determined by certain societal and cultural status, not primarily biological age. (Dumasy 2021:6).

important mobiliser and amplifier when it is interlinked with political and economic objectives.[11] Inter-religious dialogue has existed for centuries, and faith is also used as a source and resource for intra- and inter-religious peacebuilding. "*Religious communities have powerful potential to contribute to sustainable and peaceful societies and their contribution to and inclusion in peacebuilding has never been more critical.*" (Woodrow et al 2017, see also Trotta & Wilkinson 2019; Lyamourri & Schmauder 2021). They often already play roles of mediators and conciliators. They can be bridges across divides based on shared values. They may have deeper and wider reach into communities but also with power holders than many secular actors. They can be strong authorities based on moral and spiritual authority. They can be providers of meaning and emotional support, enablers of empathy and compassion, and forgiveness and reconciliation. And their religious institutions have a permanency of presence that is much longer than that of 'projects'. They offer, in other words, a great peace potential.

This is not to say that faith-based peace action always, and only, works on conflicts that have also been framed along lines of religious division. Interreligious action for peace "*is the engagement of actors from different faith-traditions, institutions, identities, narratives, and groups to support peace – whether or not the conflict itself involves religious groups or identities and where or not the methodology or operation of the intervention employs religious elements*." (Woodrow et al 2017: 11).

Active engagement and stabilization of the capacities for peace among women, youth and faith-actors increases the potential for effectiveness and possible, in the longer-term, for impact. It is the required action to enable the greater inclusion in political negotiation processes, mentioned earlier, and a key component of a peace making and sustainable peace, as a 'societal process'.

### 3. Connect top-down and bottom-up peace work

Political negotiations by and large are a top-down process. But over the years, a strong tradition has also developed around local peacebuilding processes. They come in different forms.

**Local peace committees (LPC)**

Local peace committees have become a popular component of peace interventions. They can emerge from local action or be created under impulse of an international intervener or the national and local authorities. Investing in and supporting LPCs and 'bottom-up peacebuilding' more generally, seems to go against the prevailing insights about why societies collapse into violence. "*The idea of peacebuilding from below competes with an understanding of reality where political elites and state representatives govern the behaviour of a conflict. This 'elite' approach to peacebuilding assumes that national political and ethnic 'entrepreneurs' alone determine the use and extent of violence. This theory implies that local communities are passive recipients, and victims of violence carried out by political elites. It also is based on the idea that local participants deserve to be only objects of humanitarian relief instead of active 'architects' of building their own peace*." (Odendaal 2010:4). But there are no leaders without followers, and local conflict entrepreneurs can see profit in driving violence at their level. At the same time, ignoring the commitment and actions of local level peacebuilders is depriving oneself of peace capacities in the society, that may not be sufficient but are still necessary to transform the local and wider conflict system.

**Horizontal and vertical networks of local peace actors**

International support actors have been cautious about LPCs, as they see them lacking scale and therefore influence and impact on the wider conflict dynamics. Progress at local level is also vulnerable to being undone by the wider dynamics. This is a valid concern and has led to efforts for broader horizontal and vertical connections of peacebuilding processes. Horizontal connections mean creating



[11] This is also a finding of the 'Contending Modernities' project of Catholic Relief Services: *"...the most successful examples of contemporary inter-religious action within broader processes of peacebuilding and conflict transformation address religion as situated within broader, complex constellations of identity-formation (including socio-economic, racial, ethnic, national, political, postcolonial, and myriad other factors). Such an approach marks positive progress away from historical attempts to extrude religion from other, overlapping socio-cultural identity categories for its ostensible role as a unique conflict driver, and conversely, related attempts at instrumentalizing a similarly decontextualized construction of religion to serve as a silver bullet cure for intractable conflict with religious dimensions (especially through elite-level inter-religious dialogue.*" (Fitzgerald 2016) The complexity of religion, conflict and peace, can currently be observed in the different positions of the leaders of the Russian Orthodox and the Ukranian Orthodox Churches.

linkages between local peace work in different parts of the country. Vertical connections mean creating linkages between national and even international peacebuilding processes, and these local ones.

**Infrastructures for peace (I4P)**

In a 2010 meeting in Kenya, representatives of governments, political parties, civil society, and UN Country Teams from 14 African countries agreed on a definition of an I4P*: "dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peace-building in a society."* The use of the term "infrastructures" does not necessarily relate to physical constructions, but rather refers to institutions, processes, policies, as well as constructive relationships.

The previously mentioned local peace committees and peace actor networks often are created and remain carried by non-state actors. I4P on the other hand tend to involve state actors and be part of official policy and practice. They can be a form of 'perpetual peacebuilding'. They can exist at local government level (Sangotegbe et al 2014; Tschudin 2018). There can also be a structured set of sustained capabilities from the local to the national level, possibly related to a formal, national apex structure such as a Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation or a National Peace Council. Such have been created e.g. in Kenya, Ghana and Nepal. However, in the face of a strong top-down governance tradition and political economy, local peacebuilding efforts sometimes prefer not to be vertically connected, as it renders them vulnerable to politicisation by the center. (Lundqvist & Öjendaal 2018:26).[12] This confirms, once again, the central importance of seeing peacebuilding as a contextually situated practice, which requires outsiders to learn about the historical and contemporary political economy. (Idem 2018:27)

I4P and national dialogues can potentially relate to each other: If horizontal and vertical connections have been created through a civil society sustained network or a government supported one, this provides the potential backbone for a 'national dialogue' across locations and across levels, that can take place also beyond central conferences. (Giesmann 2016:35-38) Alternatively, a national dialogue process can get consolidated into more formalised I4P.

### d. Aim for different types of change

The Reflecting on Peace Practice programme, led by CDA Inc., years ago found effective peace practice requires engaging '*key people*' and '*more people*'. Working with 'key people' only is necessary but not sufficient, just as working with 'more' people, i.e. ordinary people/citizens without much power or influence, is also not necessary but by itself insufficient. At first glance, this seems to correspond with so-called 'Track 1' approaches (political negotiation, focused on key people) and 'Track 3' work (peace work within and between local communities). That is not entirely correct: Key people are not only top people at national (or regional) level. It is 'key people' and 'more people' for any particular context, which can also be subnational or more local.[13] Within a small town or even a village, there will be 'key people' and 'more people'.

Another key finding of CDA's collaborative reflections was that individual change is required, but to make a more systemic and lasting impact this also needs to translate in socio-political change. On the other hand, apparent socio-political changes that are not underpinned by individual change, certainly in key people but also in their broader 'constituency' or among their 'supporters' ('more people') will



[12] Lundqvist and Öjendal (2018), based on a comparative assessment of Nepal and Cambodia, point out that the dynamics between the local and the national is not always constructive. Both countries have strong traditions of hierarchical and neo-patrimonial politics, and top-down governance. In both countries, these political traditions have survived the years of violence. In Nepal, (in 2017 before the subsequent decentralisation), it turns out that the (totally underfunded) local peace committees are not able to fulfil their mandates and ultimately have remained subordinate to and influenced by the national neopatrimonialist politics. The 'local' has not managed to establish any autonomy from the national, nor to connect horizontally for greater scale and influence. (see also Sapkota 2009; Bhattarai 2013; Tandukar et al 2016). In Cambodia, (in 2015-2016 when the research was carried out) local actors initially also remained very subordinate to the national level but managed to gain and use some more autonomy thanks to the Seila participatory rural development programme, which also provided them a source of funding not (fully) controlled by national powerbrokers.

[13] Note however that 'key people' are not necessarily physically present in the context: Modern communication technologies make it possible to be an influencer from afar.

remain tokenistic.[14] This is visualised in the Reflecting on Peace Practice Change Matrix Plus. (CDA 2014). It can be used for broad strategic planning, tactical intervention management and the evaluation of a peace programme. [15]

One intervention may not be able to cover all the spaces in the Matrix Plus. That is where the complementarities ('connectedness') between different interventions may come into play.

| | | MORE PEOPLE | KEY PEOPLE |
|---|---|---|---|
| INDIVIDUAL/ PERSONAL CHANGE | Healing/recovery<br>Perceptions<br>Attitudes<br>Skills | | |
| | Behavior<br>Individual relationships | | |
| SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE | Group behavior/ relationships<br>Public opinion<br>Social norms | | |
| | Institutional change | | |
| | Cultural or Structural change | | |

CDA 2014: Reflecting on Peace Practice. Change Matrix Plus



[14] And lead to what Andrews and his colleagues who studied the realities of internationally supported governance reforms have called '*isomorphic mimicry*'. This means that governmental counterparts will create or adjust institutions to look like what international actors want to see – without giving them the political will, power and resources to make them function effectively. (Andrews 2013) See also Whaites et al 2015

[15] It can be used in connection with Outcome Harvesting, as part of the inquiry into 'outcomes', and the reflection on those that have been harvested.

## III. WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

The learning from global experience indicates that the potential for effective and possibly sustainable and wider impactful peace work is higher if;

- It is grounded in a deepening analysis of what drives the conflict(s), at different levels, and what it is not about; and what factors support the dynamic of violence, but also and analysis of what and who can be drivers for peace. It will need to differentiate and gradually learn more about the dynamics at local, subnational, national, and regional/international level and how these may interconnect but also have a certain life of their own. That analysis accepts there will be different narratives and works with that diversity – it does not impose its own 'consolidating' narrative.
- Different peacebuilding processes, led by different peace actors, create connections across horizontal but also vertical divides, and top-down and bottom-up processes inform and directly or indirectly support each other. Roles of connector, convenor and facilitator are of critical importance here.
- Peacebuilding processes, at all levels, work with 'key people' but also 'more people', at the rational but also very much at the emotional-experiential level, while also being very attentive to the uses and abuses of hard and soft power, for narrow, group or wider public interests. For mediators of political negotiation processes, this also implies creating opportunities for direct or indirect input by wider sections of anti-violence, pro-peace actors in the society, beyond elites. This includes women, youth, and faith-actors, but also men who oppose the ongoing violence.
- The ultimate goal is to see an agreement implemented, that as much as possible addresses some or more of the root causes of the violence and hence is a step towards a just and sustainable peace. Different actors and stakeholders may have somewhat different theories about what can bring 'durable peace' to their society, although many probably have fairly convergent ideas about what practices would render that problematic. Imposed solutions can stop the violence, a worthwhile objective in its own right. But sustained peace will require solutions that get broad support and -ownership within the society.
- Key changes are (eventually) institutionalised, and protected by ongoing 'peace work', probably for years to come, even if not framed as 'peace' work anymore. However, while a conflict drags on, interim agreements, possibly more local and/or with limited focus, may be the more realistic ambition for a long time. Reversals must be expected.

None of that is easy, and none of that will be achieved quickly in complex, multi-layered and multi-actor conflicts. Conflicts tend to quickly evolve into vicious circles with different factors reinforcing that negative spiral. For every step and every action, peace makers and peacebuilders must ask themselves: what do we think can bring about positive change in this particular setting? No general theories of change will do: only very context- and even situation specific ones. Nor is it possible to anticipate, with confidence, what will work and what not, or when. Entry points will have to be found, strategies and tactics, and the assumptions on which they are based, will have to be tested. Good peace actors are highly reflective practitioners, who will adapt, cleverly, when required.

**In conclusion**: To credibly evaluate peace mediation and peacebuilding actions, we need the right team of evaluators (see Briefing Paper 1:9), a correct understanding and application of the OECD criteria, and an understanding of what – generically- we have found to be good practices that increase the *probability* of having positive influence. But no one can guarantee, let alone ''deliver', the desired result of sustained peace.

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