The Role of Political Dialogue in Peacebuilding and Statebuilding:
An Interpretation of Current Experience

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This report has been written by Andries Odendaal. He is an independent consultant from South-Africa. He also serves on the Mediation Roster of the UN DPA Mediation Support Unit, as well as on the Expert Roster of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery of UNDP.

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- Existing analysis and literature has been used as per the report's references.

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Executive summary

Political dialogue refers to a wide range of activities, from high-level negotiations to mediation to community attempts at reconciliation. These processes of political dialogue are complementary and normally run in parallel. In this report political dialogue will be used in a flexible manner, but the parameters are that the dialogue must be political in nature and aimed at addressing threats in a society which can cause a lapse or relapse into violent conflict. The objective of political dialogue is to achieve practical and peaceful solutions to problems. At a deeper level, the aim is to address conflict drivers and foster reconciliation, build a greater national consensus and social cohesion, and define a shared vision of the future. In many cases regular state institutions are not functioning properly because they have been compromised by political bias, corruption, and inefficiency. The role of political dialogue in such contexts is to strengthen the legitimacy of institutions by building consensus on and trust in their proper functioning. As a result, political dialogue in all its forms plays an indispensible role in efforts by national actors and the international community to respond to violent conflict and to build national vision in fragile contexts. It takes place among national actors at all levels of society; among international actors; and between the international community and national actors. The focus of the report is political dialogue within conflict-affected countries, but in the context of international support.

The report reviews experiences with political dialogue in a broad range of countries and based on this identifies four main types of dialogues; presents preconditions for successful dialogue; and proposes key strategic elements of interventions to support effective political dialogue.

Types of political dialogue

Political dialogue takes place in many forms; is initiated and facilitated by a variety of actors; and takes place at various levels of society. Four main types of dialogue have been identified: (i) High-level or summit dialogues involving the top leadership of contending sections of the population. These dialogues are often initiated or mediated by the international community. These are high-risk events, with much at stake. (ii) Track Two interventions by civil society organizations that provide discreet and relatively low-risk opportunities to explore options, and build trust and skill in the process of dialogue. (iii) Political dialogue that takes place as an indispensable aspect of planning for peacebuilding, statebuilding and development. It is increasingly, but not yet sufficiently, understood that such planning has to be driven by political dialogue. (iv) Multi-level dialogue, where dialogue takes place at various levels of society in an effort to engage citizens in building sufficient national consensus on critical challenges. These four approaches are not mutually exclusive, rather complementary. Each type has its advantages and limitations. It is often advisable to pursue different types of dialogue in parallel, on the condition that they pursue the same overall objectives and are not contradictory.

Preconditions for successful dialogue

Political dialogue is a complex political and psychological process. For success it relies on specific preconditions and professional attention. An under-estimation of its complexity contributes to failure. Moreover, pursuing dialogue in inappropriate manners and at inappropriate times may do harm

because of the way it reduces confidence, increases cynicism and contributes to what has become known as 'dialogue fatigue'. The preconditions for successful dialogue are:

Adequate preparation:

- Conducting an objective, reliable analysis of the conflict and parties' interests and fears.
- Learning lessons from past experiences, particularly the reasons for past failures.
- Designing an appropriate process; clarifying and allocating roles of different support actors.
- Setting up a support structure to deal with funding, logistical arrangements and financial management.
- Pre-mediation consultation to ensure sufficient buy-in of all parties into the process.
- Planning an appropriate communication strategy with the press.

Credible facilitation. It is crucial to have a skilled facilitator that all parties accept and feel comfortable with in order to make the process as fair and even-handed as possible.

Sufficient political commitment. Political will is important for the dialogue to reach inclusive agreements; and for effective implementation. Political commitment is influenced by internal and external political pressure; but is strongest when participating parties enjoy a sense of ownership of the dialogue process.

Collective leadership capability. A critical factor determining the success of dialogue is the capability of leaders to form coalitions across political and social divides in order to implement decisions that have been made through the dialogue process. Where the capability to form such coalitions does not exist, little can be expected from dialogue in terms of lasting results.

Adequate inclusion. The aspect of inclusion is of critical importance because exclusion is often a major cause of conflict. It is in most cases a contentious issue; and in reality difficult to satisfy all. It is, however, necessary to be "inclusive enough" to safeguard the legitimacy of decisions. The inclusion of women is crucial as the political dialogue process can be a window of opportunity for addressing structural inequalities. The inclusion of youth is also highly important given the demographic realities of many societies.

Strategies for dialogue

It is possible to improve the effectiveness of political dialogue through well-designed interventions. The five strategies that hold most promise are:

1. *Strengthening leadership capability to form productive coalitions.* The improvement of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the collective leadership of a society with regards to participative leadership and dialogue holds much promise.

2. *Infrastructures for peace.* Establishing or supporting existing councils or committees at every level of society that are made responsible for implementing dialogue as a first response to escalating tensions - supported by expert facilitation capacity. The approach relies on existing institutions (government, civil society and traditional), providing effective linkage and coordination between

them. The approach has also shown promising results when used in the context of potentially violent elections.

3. *Conducting planning processes as political dialogue.* In a context where planning for development has immediate consequences for either a return to violence or constructive peacebuilding, planning cannot be conducted as purely bureaucratic procedures. There is increasing use of PRSP, UNDAF or similar planning processes as opportunities to achieve consensus at various levels of society on developmental priorities. These processes also provide opportunities for dialogue with donors. The understanding is that planning should not outpace political consensus, but should be aligned to political reality and conducted as political dialogue. All the preconditions for successful dialogue therefore apply to these processes.

4. *Attention to the implementation of agreements.* It is normal that the implementation of agreements resulting from dialogue will be troubled by recurring doubts, ongoing intra-party and inter-party tensions, and new challenges. It is therefore necessary to pay specific and serious attention to measures to support the implementation process. Measures to be considered in this regard include the validation of dialogue results through as broad a public process as is possible. Civil society institutions have a critical role to play in monitoring agreements and holding parties to account. Conducting planning as ongoing political dialogue, as discussed above, will also contribute to constructive implementation. On the whole it means that the dialogue process does not end with the signing of agreements, but has to continue with a focus on implementation. Agreements should therefore include provision for procedures or institutions to monitor implementation and facilitate ongoing dialogue.

5. *Institutionalization of dialogue support.* Given the need for expert support to mediation and facilitation processes, it is in the interest of individual societies and the international community to invest in and support institutions that focus on deepening knowledge through research, that improves facilitation skills though training, and that have the capacity to provide technical support to dialogue processes. Such institutions exist at international level (e.g. the UN's Mediation Support Unit), and at regional, sub-regional and national levels - including CSOs that specialize in this area.

Political dialogue and the international community

Complex socio-political conflicts are not solved through once-off dialogue events, but through ongoing, multi-faceted and multi-level dialogue processes. Building sufficient social cohesion and functional democratic institutions in societies that have been ravaged by violent conflict is a process that takes decades rather than years. Political dialogue, in other words, has to be sustained across all the levels of society for a prolonged period of time. It is therefore necessary, for the countries involved and donors alike, to invest long-term in the capacity of a society to conduct political dialogue. The short-term perspective that still holds in some circles of the international community and that sees the first post-crisis democratic elections as the end of the crisis, has to change.

The international community has played a substantive role in initiating, facilitating and supporting political dialogue in conflict-affected societies. Yet, its role is not without its controversies and dilemmas. A substantive dialogue between g7+ countries and the international community has to be initiated on how to find 'best fit' solution, i.e. institutions and procedures, addressing context-specific conditions. This report offers a number of building blocks for such a dialogue.

Introduction

The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (ID) is an initiative that connects countries experiencing conflict and fragility and international partners in a dialogue to "…jointly shape and guide international assistance to support peacebuilding and statebuilding."[1] The ID aims to create a set of critical peacebuilding and statebuilding objectives as framework for (inter)national engagement, as well as an action plan containing key commitments on what countries experiencing conflict and fragility and international partners need to change in their focus, interventions and ways of working together to realize better results. At its Dili conference in 2010, political dialogue was identified as one of four areas that need urgent attention. The aim of this report is to inform the discussions and recommendations of the working group on political dialogue of the ID.

Political dialogue in all its forms is an indispensable instrument in the quest for peace and stability in the world of today. The importance of political dialogue has grown as the world went through a dramatic period of change in the nature of armed conflict and political crisis over the last two decades. Since the ending of the Cold War intra-state conflict has surpassed inter-state war as by far the dominant form of violent conflict. The dynamics of the intra-state conflicts of today differ sharply from that of inter-state wars. They are seemingly intractable, where 'violent conflict exacerbates the conditions that gave rise to it in the first place'[2], and affect entire populations, with civilians bearing the bulk of casualties and humanitarian crises. They do substantial damage to the social fabric of a society by deepening levels of distrust and resentment among its constituent sections. In addition, intra-state conflict often results in a serious reduction in governance capability with harm done not only to the efficiency of public institutions, but also to their political legitimacy.

As a consequence the response to violent intra-state conflict has to entail much more than keeping the peace and forging a national peace agreement[3]. It requires processes of reconciliation at all levels of society, the re-building of confidence in democratic institutions, and facilitating a sufficiently coherent national vision to drive development. For all these tasks political dialogue is an indispensible tool.

While the main objectives with political dialogue are pursued through intra-country processes, they often take place in a context shaped by the engagement and support of the international community. The role of the international community in responding to intra-state violent conflict is, in fact, substantial. It provides a normative framework for the settlement of disputes through the various protocols and human rights regimes of the United Nations and regional organizations. Moreover, it provides practical and logistic support to a wide spectrum of interventions aimed at restoring peace and returning order to a society. The United Nations, in partnership with regional and sub-regional actors, are increasingly called upon to mandate, manage and finance multi-dimensional peacekeeping

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[1] Dili Declaration 2010. For more information: www.pbsbdialogue.org
[2] Human Security Report: War and Peace in the 21st Century, 2005
[3] More civil wars today are ended through a negotiated agreement than through military victory (Toft 2006; Jarstad and Sisk 2008), which indicates the increasing reliance on dialogue as a peacemaking mechanism. However, these agreements are often fragile, with approximately 50% of cases relapsing into violence within 5 years (Fortna 2008:50). It underscores the need to build peace in an ongoing manner through multiple and multifaceted interventions.

operations, political missions and mediation efforts, while at the same time dealing with the various humanitarian crises. It amounts to a considerable engagement that, by its sheer weight, impacts on and shapes the environment in which political dialogue has to take place. This fact points to the need for and importance of political dialogue not only between international actors; but more importantly between international and national actors. They have to address issues of mutual trust, reach consensus on the objectives to be achieved jointly, and the best strategies to follow.

The focus of this report is therefore on in-country political dialogue, as it is the primary context where political dialogue has to take place, but in the context of international support. This focus is based on the assumption that the ultimate aim of internal and external responses to violent conflict is the promotion of an internal political culture where political and social tensions and contradictions are managed constructively through processes of inclusive political dialogue. Consequently the objective with the report is twofold: first, to survey and interpret experience with in-country political dialogue as a mechanism for conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding in order to recommend strategies for its improvement. Political dialogue is not a panacea that is appropriate for all conditions and effective under all circumstances. It is important to identify the preconditions for successful dialogue. Second, the report will begin to show that political dialogue is increasingly, but not sufficiently, driving national and international decision-making on the allocation of international assistance and aid.

Defining what is meant by political dialogue is problematic[4]. Concepts like mediation, facilitation, preventive diplomacy and political dialogue are used fairly interchangeably in the field. Consequently political dialogue may refer to a wide range of activities, from high-level negotiations to mediation to community attempts at reconciliation. In this report political dialogue will be used in a similarly flexible manner, but the parameters are that the dialogue must be political in nature and aimed at addressing threats in a society which can cause a lapse or relapse into violent conflict. The objective of political dialogue is to achieve practical and peaceful solutions to problems, and, at a deeper level, to address conflict drivers and reconciliation, build a greater national consensus or cohesion, and a shared vision of the future[5]. The discussion is also underpinned by the assumption that political dialogue is an essential mechanism for promoting a peaceful democracy. Inclusive political dialogue is, by its nature, a democratic activity. Peaceful political dialogue therefore is an expression of democracy. When properly implemented it also contributes to the promotion of democratic practices by allowing the voices of all sections of society to be heard. Political dialogue is not in opposition to institution-building. However, in many cases state institutions are not functioning properly because they have been compromised by political bias, corruption, and inefficiency. The role of political dialogue in such contexts is to strengthen the legitimacy of institutions by building consensus on and trust in their proper functioning. Extraordinary processes of dialogue are at times necessary to achieve this purpose.

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[4] For a discussion of the theory of dialogue and a distinction between, mediation, facilitation, debate, and dialogue, see Ramsbotham, O., T. Woodhouse, et al. (2005); Pruitt, B. and P. Thomas (2007); Ramsbotham, O. (2010) and Van Brabant (2011) .

[5] The report won't address transitional justice measures such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, which may also seek to address issues of truth, reparations and post-conflict reconciliation. See Report of the Secretary-General, *The rule of law and transitional justice in conflict and post-conflict societies*, S/2004/616

The report firstly provides an overview of the various strategies to stimulate and support intra-state political dialogue. It classifies these efforts into four categories: summit dialogues that involve the top leadership of a country; Track Two dialogues initiated by civil society; dialogues that are implicit in planning and governance activities; and multi-level dialogues that seek to involve all levels of the society. Following the typology, the report discusses the preconditions for successful dialogue in light of recent collective experience, namely adequate preparation, credible facilitation, sufficient political commitment, collective leadership capability, and adequate levels of inclusion. It then proceeds to discuss strategies to promote and support political dialogue on the basis of best practices that have been identified. It pays specific attention to strategies to promote a culture of political dialogue, with reference to the stimulation of and support to leadership coalition formation; the establishment of infrastructures for peace; grounding development and other planning in political dialogue; attention to the implementation of agreements; and support for institutions that specialize in dialogue support. The report also discusses the role of the international community and donors, and suggests areas that call for improvement. It ends with a set of conclusions.

Types of political dialogue

In what follows four types of (or approaches to) political dialogue will be distinguished, namely (i) summit dialogues, (ii) Track Two dialogues, (iii) dialogue that is part of planning processes, and (iv) multi-level dialogue. The purpose with the distinction is not to provide an exhaustive typology, but rather to demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of political dialogue; and to highlight the specific advantages and limitations of each approach. These approaches are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is often advisable to pursue parallel processes, on the condition that they pursue the same overall objectives and are not contradictory.

Summit dialogue

Summit dialogue refers to high-level political negotiations that are mostly aimed at defusing a national political crisis, facilitate a transition from authoritarian rule, or end a civil war. They are attended by the leadership of contending parties and, in some cases, representatives of secondary stakeholders, civil society and observers. They often take place in a context where international actors (the UN, regional organizations, and bilateral partners) have a preventive diplomacy or mediation role, and often substantial interests in the process. Some international actors may exert some form of pressure, provide assistance, and either facilitate or observe proceedings.

Summit dialogues may either be initiated and driven by external or internal actors. International mediation plays an increasingly important role in this respect. In Africa alone the following countries have in the recent past used mediation by the UN, AU or other regional bodies to deal with internal conflict: Burundi, Chad, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mauritania, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe[6]. A forthcoming study of five cases of international mediation and dialogue concludes that in almost every case the process was able to move actors towards compromise, with successful conclusion in some. The

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[6]See Nathan 2009. For descriptions of mediation processes, see Wolpe 2011 (regarding Burundi), and Call 2011 – Draft (Kenya, Mauritania, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan and Madagascar).

study also highlighted the complex task of achieving collaboration between international structures (the UN, regional and sub-regional organizations), and pointed out the benefits of successful collaboration as well as the detrimental impact when it fails[7].

There are examples of summit dialogues initiated by incumbent presidents or governments as tentative efforts to move towards increased political representation and liberalization, or to manage transitional periods[8]. The success of such dialogues depends critically on the role played by the incumbent government, its willingness to act evenhandedly and transparently, and its commitment to change. Examples are summits that took place in Togo, Benin, Niger, the Central African Republic, and Iraq.

When successful, summit dialogues result in formal agreements that capture the commitment of the various actors to implement those measures that will ensure peace or a successful transition. They are often, however, high-risk events, where success is elusive, especially when an immediate and overwhelming goal of the dialogue may be to stop fighting, address emergency humanitarian needs, to prevent further large-scale population displacement, and disarm fighters. Attention to the conditions that influence success (that will be discussed in the next section) should alleviate the risk to some extent.

The importance of summit dialogues cannot be underestimated. The agreements forged in this way provide the mandate and set parameters for all subsequent peacebuilding processes. They can contribute substantially to ending wars, and kick-start conditions conducive to internal stability and peace. Their failure, however, can have as dramatic an impact. Failure further deteriorates political legitimacy, diminishes trust, and heightens levels of cynicism about the motivations and agendas of opponents.

Track Two dialogue

Track Two dialogue refers to initiatives that do not have official status and are mostly initiated by civil society organizations or individuals. They often take place in a discreet manner. The major advantage of Track Two initiatives is that they present low-risk opportunities to parties in conflict to jointly explore the possibilities of collaboration, before or after a peace process. They can be used to build confidence to get to and frame the parameters of an agreement, or to develop a common understanding of a process of

> **Box 1: Examples of Track Two initiatives**
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> In Timor Leste dialogue between President Ramos-Horta and the army chief Major Reinado in August 2007 was facilitated by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. In Togo the first meeting between President Gnassingbé and the main opposition leader was facilitated by the Sant' Egidio Community in Rome in 2005; while in South Africa in 1991 church and business leaders jointly facilitated talks that resulted in the National Peace Accord. An example of a Track Two attempt dealing with a bi-national conflict was the intervention by the Carter Center, in collaboration with UNDP's Democratic Dialogue Regional Project, in the conflict between Ecuador and Colombia (2007-2009). In Mozambique (1993-1994) the Sant' Egidio Community initiated contact between the Frelimo government and the rebel movement Renamo, and ended up being the official mediators. They were also instrumental in facilitating the first contact between Burundi's belligerents.

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[7] Call 2011 – Draft.
[8] See Papagianni 2006.

implementation. They often facilitate the first contact between belligerents; enable the establishment of more reliable channels of communication between the groups; the development of some trust; and greater clarity on preparatory steps that have to be taken to initiate a peace process. They also enable the exploration of options in a context where no decisions have to be made. In addition, Track Two facilitators are able to engage actors that may have been excluded from the main process; and those with an interest in subverting the process – something that is not always possible through official processes. The very advantage of Track Two dialogues, its informality, may however become its disadvantage when the discussions take place in a manner that is too disconnected from political reality. When, for example, the participants are too distant from the centers of power, the dialogue may end up in being a futile 'talk shop'.

The range of Track Two initiatives runs from community-level interventions to interventions in multi-national conflict. The dialogues may take many forms: think tanks, workshops, discussion groups, seminars, or conferences where participants are representative of the conflict spectrum. Facilitators may act on the basis of their personal stature in a society and on own initiative, but more commonly they represent religious, academic or business institutions, or specialist organizations.

Box 2: Planning and dialogue in Cyprus

The use of technical committees in Cyprus is a somewhat different example of the infusion of practical planning processes with political dialogue. These committees were assembled during the preparatory phase that led to the beginning of full-fledged negotiations between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot sides in 2008. Their objective was to explore possible areas of technical cooperation between the two polarized communities - in the absence of an official peace agreement – and to enhance confidence in the ability of the two communities to cooperate and improve the conditions of their citizens. They therefore discussed practical issues at a semi-official level and in the process demonstrated the potential, but also the complexity, of cooperation. Between them they produced 23 confidence-building measures. The general view of those who observed or were involved in the committees is that they contributed to a more positive, constructive environment that allowed the launch of official negotiations between the two leaders in July 2008.

Dialogue that is implicit in planning processes

This type of political dialogue informs developmental planning processes. Its importance, however, is not yet sufficiently recognized. Examples of developmental planning processes that should be informed by political dialogue are the United Nation's Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes of the IMF and the World Bank. These processes are used to set development priorities, for instance in the short or medium term aftermath of violent conflict or political crisis. Development is not an apolitical matter, especially not in the context of polarized communities where levels of trust and collaboration are low. Development planning has a direct impact on peacebuilding and should therefore be informed by political dialogue. Furthermore, planning processes provide opportunities for dialogue taking place at different levels of society that may contribute to a shared vision of the future. The dialogue takes place not only between stakeholders, but also with donors. Such processes have much potential value as dialogue opportunities[9]. It is important that these processes are sufficiently inclusive of the political spectrum,

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[9] Following violence in a Sierra Leone by-election that produced a political compact between the two main political parties in the form of the 2 April 2009 *Joint Communiqué*, the second PRSP "An Agenda for Change" was used as a

and of civil society and women's organizations. They also rely for success on a well-structured design and skilled facilitation. Because the relevance of political dialogue for planning is undervalued at the moment, it is often dealt with in a bureaucratic manner.

In Liberia the Poverty Reduction Strategy conducted in 2008 followed a multi-level design underpinned by the use of dialogue. One hundred and thirty-four district consultations took place, 15 county consultations, and 3 regional consultations. These fed into a national stakeholders' validation conference, attended by 300 participants and chaired by the president. The manner in which national development objectives have thus been identified contributed to greater social cohesion and the emergence of a shared national vision[10].

Multi-level dialogue

There are examples of dialogue processes that have the objective to address a specific national challenge, but that are structured to take place at various levels of society. Typically dialogues would take place at the local level, which would then feed into higher level processes that may culminate in a summit meeting. An alternative approach is to bring people from various levels of society or from different sectors into a dialogue process to stimulate better communication across the levels or sectors[11]. The objective, therefore, is to involve broader society in a dialogue -- as opposed to exclusive elite-driven processes. It often relies on civil society capacity to facilitate such processes. The advantage of this approach is that it has the potential to address issues of horizontal polarization (between different identity and political groups) and vertical polarization (between citizens and the political elite)[12]. It risks raising expectations among the population that are subsequently disappointed. A multi-level process also assumes that sufficient capacity exists to facilitate and support the broad array of processes.

In Timor Leste, following the crisis of 2006, the president and prime minister promoted the need for dialogue. The participation of all sections of society was deliberately pursued and it resulted in numerous dialogue initiatives by both government and civil society. Dialogue processes took place at national and local levels, and within specific sectors (such as the security sector and the youth sector). The opinion on the success of the process is divided. An assessment done in 2008 was pessimistic,

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vehicle for broader consultation on gaining consensus on the measures necessary to build durable peace and development a decade after the end of their civil war. Both the Burundian government and the government of the Central African Republic voiced their intention to make better use of the PRSP process as an opportunity for dialogue and building a nationally owned vision. See www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/59/45122645.pdf.

[10] The PAPEP strategy developed by the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean is another example. It utilizes scenario development, followed by the discussion of findings in 'dialogue spaces' attended by national political and civil society actors. It also makes use of opinion polls. This approach was, for example, followed in Bolivia in 2008 – 2009. It contributed in Bolivia to the successful negotiation of a new constitution. In Kyrgyzstan UNDP implemented a Peace and Development Analysis process in 2010 based on the understanding that planning should be informed by political dialogue.

[11] See Van Brabant 2011:12 for an example of inter-sectoral policy-dialogue on 'democratic security' in Guatemala that has been taking place since 2000.

[12] See Van Brabant (2011:10-11) for the various complementary dialogue processes implemented by civil society in Burundi, pointing to the need for "…a multiplicity of potentially complementary efforts that – over significant amounts of time – hopefully will begin to show cumulative effect".

stating that the political leadership as an elite group failed to effectively engage with society[13]. A recent assessment by UNDP, however, concluded that the dialogues have successfully shed light on many of the divisions within Timorese society; and that the maintenance of the dialogues has played a large role in laying the foundations for developing the society's capacity to address them. The government made it clear that, after three years into the process, they valued the dialogues, in particular those that fed directly into the work plan of a specific institution and delivered a clear plan of action[14].

While multi-level dialogue processes therefore address both horizontal and vertical legitimacy, its strongest contribution is in the area of vertical legitimacy – the confidence of citizens in state institutions. The greatest challenge, though, is to ensure that there is linkage and coherence between the processes, that they feed into and build on each other, and that they succeed in addressing the political reality.

Box 3: Multi-level dialogue in Somaliland

One of the most remarkable multi-level dialogue processes took place in Somaliland, the self-declared independent state that broke away from Somalia. In the absence of effective functioning state institutions in Somalia following the fall of the Barre regime in 1991, the process of statebuilding in the region of Somaliland is noteworthy for the extent of dialogue that preceded and informed it. The process consisted, firstly, of peace conferences at the local level sub-clans. The peace conferences brought contiguous and interdependent sub-clans together under the leadership of the elders of each sub-clan. These local conferences, which depended heavily on the customary authority of the elders and involved lengthy discussions that took months in some cases, resulted in agreements that clarified issues of responsibility and leadership and that dealt effectively with the high levels of violence. Following the local conferences, peace conferences were conducted at increasingly higher levels until, eventually, it culminated in the Grand Borama Peace Conference in 1991 that was attended by more than five hundred elders and lasted for more than six months. One of its outcomes was the decision to secede from Somalia and seek international recognition as an independent state – an objective not yet achieved. See Lederach 1997:52-53; Paffenholz 2003; Bruton 2009, Van Brabant 2011:28.

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[13] Von Kaltenborn-Stachau 2008

[14] In Guyana, in a joint DPA/UNDP initiative, a program was launched in 2003 that stimulated local and national dialogues -- called 'conversations to explore' because dialogue, by that time, had acquired a negative connotation. The primary objective was to ensure violence-free elections in 2006. A range of inclusive local level dialogues were conducted, capturing the aspirations of the communities for their society, which fed into a two-day national conversation. An independent assessment concluded that these conversations contributed to the fact that the 2006 elections were the first to be peaceful (Lund and Myers 2007). There are indications that ethnic tensions have subsequently subsided to some degree.

The preconditions for successful dialogue

The idea that dialogue is some miraculous medicine that will easily remove the deep structural causes of conflict and decades of strife and trauma purely by the fact that belligerents are brought into the same room and invited to talk, is clearly false. Dialogue is a deeply complex political and psychological process. It has to deal with those issues that have caused violence and the breakdown of order. Moreover, it has to deal with strong emotions (like deep distrust, anger, hatred, fear and guilt) that participants bring to the dialogue and that might have built up over generations. These emotions have to be managed properly in order to make progress. It is not surprising that there are many examples of failed dialogues. Moreover, dialogue may do harm. If it is pursued with ulterior motives such as to buy time or to impress external actors, its inevitable failure contributes to deepening levels of distrust and cynicism, and the growth of 'dialogue fatigue' – the condition of distrust in dialogue itself.

The frequent failure of dialogues means that much care should be taken to ensure that the conditions for dialogue are favorable. The review of experiences done for this report points to the following preconditions for successful dialogue: adequate preparation, credible facilitation, sufficient political commitment, collective leadership capability, and adequate levels of inclusion[15].

What follows is a brief overview of the preconditions. It will be followed by a discussion on strategies to enhance the impact of political dialogue.

Adequate preparation

Sloppy preparation does harm. In his description of the protracted mediation in Burundi, Wolpe[16] mentioned how the lack of adequate preparation hindered the process. Little thought had been given in advance to how negotiations would be structured; little preparation was done for individual meetings; with little follow-up between meetings. Every negotiation session effectively began from scratch, and it was often difficult to pick up the threads.

The responsibility for preparation rests with the facilitation team, but they have to negotiate every step of the process with all the prospective partners. Reigning conditions will determine what is possible, but ideally the facilitation team should work with a group of people representative of the main participants to ensure that the concerns of all parties regarding the process are addressed. The preparation process is therefore a dialogue about the dialogue. The participation and transparency achieved in this way are important for building confidence in the process.

Conditions may, of course, not always be favorable for proper preparations, especially in crisis situations where time pressures or physical conditions prevent proper planning. Unfortunately, where this is the case, the dialogue process will suffer proportionally.

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[15] These findings largely agree with the general consensus in the community of facilitation practitioners. See, for example, Pruitt and Thomas 2007.
[16] Wolpe 2011:46, 50.

Adequate preparation depends on the following:

- An objective, reliable analysis that includes a study of the causes of the conflict; the identification of actors or parties that have to be included in order to find a sustainable outcome; and the needs, interests, fears and options of the different parties.
- Learning lessons from past experiences. In many cases there have been previous attempts to facilitate dialogue. It is important to learn lessons from these experiences: what worked in the past and what not, and why? It is particularly important to understand what the reasons were for failure and how the new process will address those matters.
- The design of an appropriate process. The collective wisdom of the facilitation field is that the nature of the process determines, to a large extent, the outcome. Included in the process design is the clarification and allocation of roles; and the coordination of collaboration. This is particularly important in a context where a range of actors, external and internal, seek to support the facilitation process.
- Setting up a support structure to deal with funding, logistical arrangements and financial management.
- Sufficient pre-mediation consultation with the different parties to clarify the process; manage expectations; ensure that concerns about the process are addressed; and establish a relationship of trust with the party.
- Deciding on and planning for an appropriate communication strategy with the press.

Credible facilitation

The decision who to appoint as facilitator or mediator is critical. Some observers of the Burundi mediation felt that the deep distrust between the Burundian President Buyoya and the mediator, Tanzania's President Nyerere, had a very negative impact on the process (Nathan 1999; Wolpe 2011). A summit that was organized by Nigeria's government to address the Niger-Delta conflict in 2008 failed to materialize because of a dispute over the facilitator who was unilaterally appointed by the government. In Togo opposition parties threatened to boycott the second round of summit talks in 2006 because the president did not honor an undertaking to appoint a neutral, international mediator. In Afghanistan President Karzai's appointments on the High Peace Council that has to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation, similarly threatens to undo his initiative because of perceptions of bias.

In any dialogue between deeply distrustful parties, the facilitator is the guarantor of trust and of fair, equal treatment. Without a shared trust in the facilitator, constructive dialogue becomes extremely difficult. It is therefore critically important that all parties agree to the appointment of the facilitator.

A second aspect of the credibility of the facilitator is the level of professionalism and expertise displayed. The facilitation of an encounter between people that come to the table with deep levels of distrust, anger, fear and even hatred, is a highly skillful undertaking. In addition, there is inevitably a power asymmetry between participating parties that has to be skillfully facilitated. The facilitator has to ensure a 'level playing field'. There is a growing body of knowledge and techniques regarding mediation or facilitation. There is similarly a growth in the establishment of professional institutions such as the UN's Mediation Support Unit or regional support units, and independent institutions specializing in the

field. Ignorance of or disregard for the accumulated wisdom and expertise of the field is therefore not only harmful to the process, but also irresponsible[17].

Sufficient political commitment

In 2003 the Swazi king called a national dialogue to discuss political reform. However, he clearly had no intention of liberalizing his autocratic rule. In July 1991, when the Togolese national conference stripped president Eyadema of most of his powers and established an interim government and legislature, Eyadema surrounded it with troops. He subsequently allowed the conference to proceed to a ceremonial ending, but used the army to harass his political opponents and maintain his grip on power[18]. In Iraq the National Conference of August 2004, organized by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, was a failure because the organizers exercised such one-sided control over the process that it pre-empted meaningful, inclusive dialogue[19].

The list of summit dialogues that failed because one of the parties, often the ruling party, lacked the political will to agree to and implement measures that would go against their perceived interests, is quite long. There are three main factors that have an impact on the political commitment to embrace change. The first has to do with pressure that comes both from the state of internal conditions in the country, and from the international community[20]. The second has to do with the level of ownership, i.e. the extent to which a dialogue process is embraced by participants, or imposed on them without their consent. It makes a dramatic difference whether participants join a dialogue out of their own free will, or whether at the figurative point of a gun. The third factor is the ability of the process of facilitation to instill confidence[21]. Expert facilitation is no magic wand that removes intransigence and obstinacy in a second, but the process that is pursued is not without consequence. The main task of the facilitator is to enhance the confidence of participants in dialogue as a credible and productive way to deal with the impasse; and to ensure that the interests and fears of the different parties are taken serious. Good facilitation cannot ensure success and cannot create sufficient political will out of nothing; but it can create a climate of trust that enables participants to explore what was previously unthinkable. Bad facilitation, on the other hand, certainly contributes to the hardening of attitudes and positions.

Some of the facilitative steps that can be taken to enhance political commitment are to ensure that the details of the dialogue process (including agenda, venue, participants and the procedural rules that will apply) are negotiated beforehand with all the parties; and that a reasonable consensus exists regarding the objective with the dialogue. If the expectations are too divergent in nature, it is perhaps better to narrow them down through Track Two processes or bi-lateral consultations, rather than to risk the failure of a summit event.

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[17] See Nathan (2009).
[18] Papagianni 2006:318.
[19] See Papagianni 2006.
[20] See Zartman (2001) for his theory on hurting stalemates and ripe moments for mediation.
[21] See Nathan (2009) for his distinction between power-based and confidence-based mediation.

Collective leadership capability

Leadership is undoubtedly a critical factor determining the success of political dialogue[22]. From the case studies a range of leadership styles can be observed regarding the conduct of dialogue. What is clear is that the characteristics and approach of individual leaders have an important bearing on the outcome of political dialogue processes. However, they have never been able to achieve much *on their own*. Their capacity to mobilize inclusive and wider coalitions of other leaders and organizations is what ensures that their vision is pursued and achieved. These networks include not only political leaders, but importantly also leaders representing other spheres of society.

Research that was done on countries that have been successful in dealing with the challenges of deeply polarized communities and severe poverty illustrate this fact[23]. The ability of leaders to be effective in forming coalitions has been a decisive factor in their success[24]. By coalitions is meant formal or informal groups which come together to achieve goals which they could not achieve on their own. Leadership coalitions may not therefore only refer to formal coalitions between political parties, but rather to the fact that leaders with different initial interests and representing different sectors and levels of society agree to work collectively and cooperatively; whether in formal structures or informally, for longer or shorter periods of time. The successful formation of coalitions, however, requires that enough effective and able leaders from a variety of fields will be able to see and reach beyond their immediate interests to a wider encompassing interest. They require leaders that are capable of negotiating, taking, abiding by, and implementing key decisions. It means that leaders should have the education, skills and experience that will enable them to devise and agree the rules of the game (i.e. create institutions) that will organize and mediate political and economic relationships[25].

Adequate inclusion

The last precondition to effective political dialogue discussed here, is the issue of inclusion. It presents a serious dilemma. The absence of Jean Bosco Ndayikengurukiye's CNDD-FDD from the Burundi mediation in Arusha was detrimental to the process; while the inclusion of Foday Sanko's RUF in a peace arrangement for Sierra Leone was very controversial. There are further questions that complicate the

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[22] Much scholarly debate has been devoted to the question whether animosities are the product of vast impersonal forces in human history, or a more instrumentalist understanding of the role of elites in exploiting differences for political purposes. Increasingly, however, the importance of human agency is recognized. Brown (quoted in Ramsbotham et al, 2005:104), for example, has calculated that almost 70% of major active conflicts at the time were triggered by "bad leadership". Current developments regarding the indictment by international tribunals and the International Criminal Court of national leaders confirm that leaders are increasingly being held accountable for the manner in which violence has been used to pursue domestic agendas (see Lutz and Reiger, 2009). However, the most effective prophylaxis for bad leadership is strong democratic institutions. The emphasis on leadership should therefore be read with the need for institution-building and not as an alternative to it, and with the understanding that especially during transition periods quality leadership networks are needed to build and sustain effective local institutions.

[23] See the website of the Developmental Leadership Program (DPL) (http://www.dlprog.org/); Leftwich and Hogg (2007); Leftwich (2009).

[24] The World Development Report of the World Bank (2011) stated: "…the state cannot address complex stresses and violent challenges on its own but must build momentum through coalitions that are sufficiently inclusive, at both national and local levels, to generate broad support".

[25] Leftwich and Hogg (2007); Leftwich 2009.

issue: is inclusion not a reward for the undemocratic, violent behavior of violent parties? Does their inclusion not undermine the long-term objective of establishing a peaceful, democratic state? How do you exclude those pursuing politics with a criminal intent? And who should make the decisions on inclusion and exclusion? Should the international community or other interested states, for example, be allowed to determine who legitimate participants are, and who are 'terrorists'?

The World Bank has formulated the concept 'inclusive enough' on the basis of research that indicated that transitions from violence have in most cases been achieved by talks that have been sufficiently, but not fully inclusive. They formulated three key lessons on inclusiveness: (i) groups may legitimately be excluded where there is an evolving belief among the population that they have sacrificed their right to participate due to past abuses; (ii) there can be trade-offs between wide inclusiveness and efficiency of subsequent state decision-making; and (iii) inclusion strategies can change over time as it becomes possible to marginalize consistently abusive groups or include a larger set of stakeholders[26].

The ideal, though, is that participants in a dialogue should be a representative microcosm of the complete conflict system[27]. It means that all those who participate in the conflict and who suffer its consequences have to be included. Indications are that excluded groups to a greater extent return to violent tactics[28]. Moreover, if exclusion, particularly on the basis of identity, is a main cause of violent conflict, it follows logically that the success of a dialogue process will be determined by the extent of the inclusion it achieves. Inclusion of civil society has the advantage that it may moderate the hard-line positions of politicians and, in particular, armed groups. They also introduce views that highlight different societal concerns than those pursued by political or armed groups.

Therefore, the decision who to include or exclude is key to the success of the process, but is in itself often controversial and a source of tension, not only between participants, but also between the international community and local actors. In principle the decision who should participate in dialogue belongs to the participants, those who should own the process. It is not a decision that should be imposed by external actors or the facilitator. However, given the fact that the success of a dialogue is determined by its level of inclusiveness, facilitators should ensure that decisions regarding inclusion have been informed by relevant and valid concerns and principles. It is an area that may be in need of substantial dialogue on its own. What is, however, not acceptable is that issues of inclusion and exclusion in internal dialogues are determined by the political agendas of external actors.

The **inclusion of women** is a topic of particular importance. Conflict and war are not gender-neutral. Because men, women, boys and girls engage in and experience conflict and war in different ways, they require different security, peacebuilding, humanitarian and development responses. Women often find themselves in situations where, on the one hand, their responsibilities to support children and families increase as their access to opportunities and resources decrease. On the other hand they are extremely vulnerable to conflict-related sexual violence with its physical and psycho-emotional damage, including the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies.

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[26] World Bank 2010.
[27] Pruitt and Thomas (2007).
[28] Gurr (2000), quoted by Jarstad and Sisk (2008:23).

Addressing the impact of conflict on women, therefore, requires concerted efforts to ensure women and girls' access to health services, justice and reparations, DDR packages, land, resources, income generation and employment. Specific attention to women's needs and priorities in conflict and post-conflict contexts also requires addressing a range of historic and systemic gender gaps, and unequal policies and structures of discrimination that have disadvantaged women and distorted overall development.[29]

While armed conflict and crisis situations can radically affect social and cultural relations, they can also provide a window of opportunity for addressing structural inequalities. It is imperative that this window of opportunity be seized early on, and that women and women's needs and concerns are included at the outset of peace negotiations and accords, donor conferences and other post-conflict planning processes. Yet, in conflict and in post-conflict situations, women and women's needs, priorities and perspectives are largely absent from peace processes, donor conferences and in early recovery and peacebuilding [30].

Since 1992 women have constituted less than 8 per cent of negotiating delegations in United Nations mediated peace processes, and less than 3 per cent of peace agreement signatories. There are ample grounds for concluding that women's underrepresentation in peace talks has contributed to the relative neglect of women's priorities in the texts of peace agreements and, subsequently in post-conflict planning and financing frameworks. A study of 585 peace agreements concluded between 1990 and 2010 found that just 16 per cent contained references to women. Many mention women — along with children, the disabled and refugees — merely as a group requiring special assistance. They are, therefore, simply victims. Another study found that, globally, in only eight cases was sexual violence included among the "prohibited acts" that would constitute a ceasefire violation[31].

The inclusion of women in peace processes may present challenges in cultural settings and religious contexts where the role of women is impacted by age-old traditions. It is a dilemma that must be recognized. However, the principle of women's inclusion should be pursued as constructively as possible.

The **inclusion of youth** is similarly important for two reasons. Firstly, in many conflict-affected countries the so-called youth bulge is very real, meaning that the youth constitute the majority of the population. They are often unemployed and destitute and therefore easily manipulated into violent activities[32]. Secondly, since many young men and women have been socialized into violent behavior during the war, it is important to engage them in processes of reconciliation as well as opportunities to acquire dialogue skills and attitudes. This is particularly true of youth leadership.

It may not be feasible to include youth formations in high-level dialogue, but it is certainly necessary to involve them in other dialogue processes and in training opportunities.

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[29] See Torry, Rana & Bhadra (2010).

[30] Torry, Rana & Bhadra (2010).

[31] See the Report of the Secretary-General, S/2010/466.

[32] See WDR (2011:9).

Promoting a culture of dialogue

The overarching objective with political dialogue is to promote a political culture where inclusive dialogue is an integral part of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and, for that matter, democratic governance processes. One of the key lessons that stand out from the analysis of current experiences is that the use of political dialogue is too sporadic and once-off in nature. Political dialogue is often just used as a tool during peacemaking processes or periods of dramatic instability. Its contribution to conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding and statebuilding is undervalued. In fact, one of the reasons for the frequent failure of peace agreements may well be that post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding is not sufficiently rooted in long-term, ongoing political dialogue.

It has to be clarified, though, that political dialogue is not in opposition to institution-building. There is a concern that dialogue processes may undermine the task of strengthening state institutions if dialogue is facilitated by non-state actors or the international community in a manner that discredits or by-passes existing institutions. Well-functioning state institutions are increasingly seen as a necessary precondition for peace and stability. In fact, the central conclusion of the World Development Report 2011 is the need for strengthening legitimate institutions and governance (in particular to provide citizen security, justice, and jobs)[33]. Dialogue processes that replace the role of these institutions potentially do harm in the long term[34]. Those institutions that have been mandated by the constitution to peacefully manage conflict and political contests (such as parliament, registered political parties, electoral commissions, and other ad hoc commissions such as those responsible for human rights and anti-corruption measures) should benefit from political dialogue. Ideally political dialogue should take place under their auspices.

However, in many cases state institutions are not functioning properly because they have been compromised by political bias, corruption, and inefficiency. They therefore lack broad-based legitimacy[35]. The role of political dialogue in such contexts is precisely to strengthen the legitimacy of institutions by building consensus on and trust in their proper functioning. In other words, extraordinary processes of dialogue are at times necessary in order to build or strengthen the legitimacy of institutions. In addition, such processes of building credible and efficient institutions are long-term in nature – between 15 to 30 years[36]. During this time societies should have ongoing access to the option to conduct extraordinary dialogue processes, but with the objective to strengthen the legitimacy of institutions.

In addition, in a context where state institutions are not yet fully functional and where society is experiencing extraordinary levels of tension and stress, it is a matter of urgent necessity to strengthen the capacity of that society to deal with tensions through facilitated dialogue processes, whether (preferably) under the auspices of state institutions, or as extraordinary measures.

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[33] WDR 2011. See also the Security Council, S/PRST/2011/2, and OECD (2011).

[34] See Chopra (2009) for a discussion of the role of local peace committees in Kenya's pastoral communities. They are effective in managing conflict associated with cattle rustling through their reliance on dialogue, but are in danger of replacing the role of the police and judiciary, thereby compromising the constitution of the country.

[35] See Van Brabant 2022:19-21 for the views of citizens of their political institutions.

[36] See WDR 2011.

What is clear is that it is necessary to develop a long-term perspective on the need for support to political dialogue. The emergence since 1999 of UN political missions configured as integrated peacebuilding offices with broader mandates[37] and subsequently the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, have, *inter alia,* signaled that such a long-term view is necessary[38]. There is an assumption, though, which still holds in some quarters that, once a peace agreement has been signed and the first elections concluded to legitimize a new executive and legislature, the task of peacebuilding is complete. But in societies that are often highly diverse, deeply polarized through war, where much trauma has taken place, where distrust runs deep, and where the struggle for survival is often stark and harsh, political dialogue cannot be seen as a once-off activity limited to times of national crisis or transition. The use of inclusive dialogue to deal with potentially divisive problems has to become normal -- the default option, whether at the local or national level.

This section considers five strategies that may contribute to achieving this ideal: support to enhancing the dialogue capabilities of the collective leadership; the establishment of 'infrastructures for peace'; strengthening the interdependence between planning processes and political dialogue; attention to the problem of implementing results of political dialogue processes; and support to specialist institutions.

Leadership and coalition formation.

In light of what has been said above of the importance of leadership coalition formations as a precondition for successful dialogue[39], the question that remains to be answered is whether this is an area that will benefit from focused interventions.

There is no quick-fix solution to the development of the leadership qualities of individuals. Leadership is nurtured by upbringing and quality education[40]. However, dialogue and coalition forming is the process by which leaders learn to work together. This process can be stimulated through dedicated interventions to strengthen the dialogue skills of leaders, as well as their capability to form productive coalitions.

There are examples of projects that have the above objective. The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars has developed an innovative approach, first in Burundi (between 2002

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[37] In Guinea-Bissau, the first political mission UNOGBIS was created *sui generis* in 1999 without a prior peacekeeping operation (S/RES/1233 (1999), although it was briefly accompanied by ECOMOG forces). In its first years it had only two mandate tasks: to facilitate the political process, and to coordinate UN activities in the country. But since 2004 the Security Council has regularly expanded its mandate, eventually to seventeen areas with the establishment of the integrated office, UNIOGBIS (S/RES/1580 (2004). Other current examples include the UN political missions in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), Burundi (BNUB) and Central African Republic (BINUCA). See http://www.un.org/en/sc/repertoire/subsidiary_organs/peace_offices.shtml

[38] In his justification for the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the UN Secretary-General has stated: "The end of conflict does not necessarily mean the arrival of peace: a lack of political consensus and trust often remains and the root causes of the conflict may persist." Secretary-General (2009). S/2009/304.

[39] The Security Council repeatedly stresses 'the primary responsibility for the peaceful settlement of disputes rests with the parties to the conflict', needing their 'full participation and genuine commitment'. S/PRST/2009/8.

[40] De Ver and Kennedy 2011.

and 2008) and subsequently in other countries such as Liberia[41] The motivation for the project was informed by an analysis of the post-civil war context in Burundi. It concluded that reconstruction and peacebuilding was hampered by the weak capacity of its collective leadership to overcome zero-sum, aggressive negotiation styles. There was no recognition of interdependence and common interests among the different groups, nor recognition that their objectives could be more effectively advanced through collaboration and inclusive political processes. The Burundi Leadership Program was developed as a response (See Box 4).

Box 4: The Burundi Leadership Program

After months of consultations with a cross-section of Burundian leaders from across all political and social sectors, representing ethnic, regional, functional, and gender diversity, 95 Burundian leaders who reflected that diversity were strategically selected to take part in an 18-month-long capacity-building initiative, with follow-up workshops every 2-3 months until 2008. The objective was to build a cohesive, sustainable network of leaders who could work together across all ethnic and political divides in order to advance Burundi's reconstruction. The principal instrument that was used in the process was experiential learning. A variety of simulations and other interactive exercises were used to open up discussions on the nature of interdependence and the value of finding inclusive solutions to problems.

The impact of the project surprised many (see Sommers 2006). It led to levels of social cohesion and collaboration among the political class that was unprecedented. This does not mean that final reconciliation has been achieved, or that all instability has been dealt with. The 2010 elections provided sufficient reasons for ongoing concern, but of interest is that fact that the tensions of 2010 were not inter-ethnic in nature, but rather intra-ethnic. A further indicator of its impact was that requests kept coming in for its implementation in specific sectors, such as the military. A similar process was followed for the top command of the army and the armed rebellions that made a substantial contribution to the fact that the integrated Burundian army has emerged as a professional and cohesive organization, contributing not only to Burundi's immediate security, but also to the challenging Somalia peacekeeping effort (Wolpe 2011:61).

There are more examples. The World Bank initiated a fairly similar approach in Timor Leste in 2007, called the Leadership and Communication Capacity for National Renewal (LCCNR) Programme. Of interest is the analysis that informed the project, namely that the leadership and communication style of political leaders reflected the long years of clandestine existence that necessitated secretive behaviour. These leadership styles did not suit the post-conflict peacebuilding context where open communication, confidence-building and productive leadership coalitions were necessary. The Ramos-Horta government, however, took the step to address these issues by agreeing to the World Bank programme. The programme targeted formal and non-formal national leaders (political leaders, as well as civil society, business leaders, senior media people, the church, senior judiciary, senior military and police)[42]. Also in Nepal a project is currently being implemented by UNDP that seeks to develop the dialogue and networking capacity of an inclusive group of leaders. It is, however, too early to assess the impact of these projects, but their design accurately reflects the objective to facilitate the formation of leadership

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[41] Wolpe H et al, 2004; Wolpe and McDonald 2006.
[42] World Bank 2007

coalitions through enhancing dialogue skills and attitudes[43]. What also stands out about all these projects is the longer-term perspective of their planning. The projects are not short-term and once-off events; but rather a fairly sustained intervention.

In conclusion:

- Interventions such as the above that are aimed at strengthening the appreciation for and skill in the formation of productive leadership coalitions, show much potential. It is an area where ongoing experimentation should be considered positively.
- It is important to base such projects on solid analysis, substantive consultation, and sufficient evidence of political ownership.

Infrastructures for peace

'Infrastructures for peace' is a strategy that relies on existing capacity in society. It depends on a political mandate for the use of inclusive dialogue to address problems; effective linkage between existing structures (government institutions, civil society organizations, traditional institutions and political parties) at all levels of society, and the availability of facilitation expertise.

Ghana provides an interesting example in this respect. The process to establish such an infrastructure came out of a realization that there were shortcomings to the normal 'law and order' approach to deal with violent community conflicts. Some of these conflicts were sufficiently serious to constitute a threat to national stability. In 2004, for example, a State of Emergency was declared in the Northern Region because of the Dagbon conflict – a conflict on succession issues in one of the most important kingdoms of the region. The conflict erupted some months before national elections were to be conducted, leading to fears that it could be politicized for electoral purposes. Previous law and order approaches to similar disruptions had not fully resolved such conflicts. Following an initiative by civil society that later received substantial UNDP/DPA collaboration and support (at the request of government), an alternative approach was followed. The approach relied on the use of widely inclusive dialogue and consensus building that was professionally facilitated by independent professionals and, in some cases, UN staff, and that enjoyed the support and engagement of government and an inclusive range of traditional and civil societies structures.

As a consequence of the proven appropriateness of this approach, the decision was made to move forward with the institutionalization of an infrastructure for peace[44]. The infrastructure consists of councils of representatives of relevant stakeholders as well as individual Ghanaians that enjoy high levels of trust and respect within society. These councils exist at national, regional and district level with the mandate to facilitate dialogue, problem-solving and reconciliation processes at their levels of jurisdiction. They are served by a body of full-time, professional Peace Promotion Officers connected to

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[43] However, in order to be truly effective, the building of leadership skills have to be matched by a corresponding demand from society for participatory leadership approaches. It is a demand that can be stimulated, to some extent, through civic education. See Von Kaltenborn-Stachau (2008), Van Brabant (2011:21-23).

[44] The decision was also informed by a resolution of African leaders at the Standing Conference on Stability, Security and Development in Africa in Durban, South Africa, in 2002. The resolution called for African countries to establish a national framework for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict by December 2004.

the 10 Regional Peace Advisory Councils. Furthermore, a Peace Building Support Unit was established within the Ministry of the Interior to coordinate support and collaboration from government agencies.

The National Peace Council was established in 2006 even though enabling legislation had not been in place at the time. In fact, legislation was only approved in 2011. The Council, however, was able to defuse a number of potentially violent conflicts, most importantly the escalation of tension during presidential and parliamentary elections in 2008. When tensions threatened to explode into open violence during the period when the election results were anticipated, the National Peace Council stepped in and facilitated discussions between the leaders. It contributed to the joint and public commitment by the leaders of the two contending parties to respect the official outcome.

Infrastructures for peace is an approach that is finding increasing application[45]. It has been used, in one or another format, in, for example, Nicaragua (1987), South Africa (1991-1994), and Northern Ireland (1996 – with a specific focus on policing)[46]. In FYR Macedonia and Serbia the Committees for Inter-Community Relations institutionalize ethnic dialogue at district level. Of particular relevance may be its application in the contexts of elections, as in Sierra Leone (see box 5).

The key elements of a potentially successful infrastructure for peace are: (i) the infrastructure *legitimizes* the use of dialogue and consensus seeking approaches to conflict at all levels of society; (ii) it allocates *responsibility* for violence prevention and peacebuilding to a specific collection of persons at various levels and locations; (iii) it ensures that sufficient *linkage* takes place between relevant stakeholders (government, political parties and civil society) and resources at the different levels; (iv) it ensures that a measure of *expert support* in facilitating dialogue is available to support dialogue processes.

A particular attraction of an infrastructure for peace is that it is relatively inexpensive because, apart from the full-time technical and administrative staff, it relies on existing capability in society. Furthermore, the reliance on existing government, civil society and traditional structures means that there is no need for elaborate institution-building; the focus is rather on allocating responsibility, establishing effective linkages, and utilizing dialogue in skillful manners.

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[45] See Odendaal (forthcoming).
[46] See also Van Brabant (2011:25-26) for examples from Rwanda and Guinea-Bissau.

Box 5: Election Monitoring in Sierra Leone

In 2007 the Sierra Leone National Electoral Commission conducted their third post-conflict elections since the end of the 10 year civil war and the 1999 Lome Peace agreement. These were completed with limited support from the international community as the peacekeeping operation UNAMSIL had handed over to a smaller integrated political office, UNIOSIL. A key change was the formation of the independent Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), a body provided for in the 1991 Constitution and 2002 Political Parties Act, with a Judge, the Chief of the Electoral Commission, a legal practitioner, and a member nominated by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress. Not only does the Commission register and regulate the functioning of political parties, it was also given a conflict mediation role. In this context it facilitated negotiations between political parties on a voluntary code of conduct, in itself a major achievement.

Moreover, in order to facilitate the monitoring of the code of conduct, committees were established at national, regional and local levels that consisted of representatives of all political parties participating in the elections, civil society organizations, the police, and the electoral commission. These committees, coordinating with the Sierra Leone Police Force, effectively dealt with the tensions and conflict associated with the elections process, and thereby contributing substantially to its successful and largely peaceful conclusion. Following the 2007 elections, the next political mission UNIPSIL, in collaboration with the PPRC, also facilitated a series of inter-party dialogues involving Sierra Leone's major political parties to promote confidence and mutual trust among them and to prevent violence. This dialogue created a platform for resolving tensions around 2009 election-related violence that resulted in the Joint Communiqué referred to above (see footnote 9 above). As the country now prepares for the 2012 national elections, inter-party dialogue remains an important mechanism for conflict prevention and promoting peaceful elections.

In conclusion:

- An infrastructure for peace is a cost-effective mechanism that relies exclusively on dialogue and that is relevant for conflict prevention and for the post-agreement management of ongoing tensions and conflict.
- It functions at all levels of society and has the capacity to address problems at the level where they arise.
- The reliance on dialogue as the instrument to deal with ongoing post-agreement social and political tensions has strong benefits for reconciliation and peacebuilding.
- The reliance on existing capacity, coupled with the strengthening of that capacity through access to facilitation expertise and training, is important for local ownership and development.
- However, the process to establish an infrastructure in Ghana took 8 years (2003-2011) and is not yet complete. The establishment of such infrastructures should not take place on the basis of hasty, superficial considerations. Its specific design should follow the contours of the country and not that of a template developed elsewhere. Joint political ownership is critical. It is, in other words, a process that must be home-grown, but that will benefit from learning from experiences elsewhere.

Political dialogue and planning

Reference has been made above to the potential of using planning and technical processes (such as PRSPs) as opportunities for inclusive political dialogue; and, conversely, that political dialogue *informs* policy and planning. It is an area in need of much further thought and experimentation. It is also the subject of a parallel report by the working group of the International Dialogue on planning and is treated there in much more detail.

Planning, in a context of distrust and lingering polarization, may contribute either to more conflict or to peacebuilding. Planning regards the distribution and utilization of resources, and determines priorities in this respect. It is a deeply political matter. In any development strategy there are relative winners and losers, and shifts in the power balance of a society. In the context of divided communities, the conflict potential of planning and development processes is therefore high. Much institution-building and development work has been undone because of a basic lack of sufficient social cohesion and consensus. Conversely, when informed by dialogue and consensus, the peacebuilding potential improves considerably.

It also means that planning cycles or frameworks should not extend beyond the political cycle or the lifetime of the political agreement in place, but should be realistically aligned to the political reality. Planning should not try to pre-empt political developments and should rather focus on what is do-able within the reality of the current situation.

From a facilitation perspective, all the preconditions for successful dialogue apply equally to these processes. It is therefore important to ensure that the facilitation of such processes is done professionally. It cannot be done in a bureaucratic manner.

The implementation of political dialogue results

Most of the case studies report on the problem that the results of political dialogue are not implemented as expected. It is a serious matter because of the very negative impact it has on confidence, not only in government or those responsible for implementation, but in the agreement and the value of dialogue itself. Failure in implementation also indicates that the dialogue process did not deliver sustainable results.

Non-implementation may point to a lack of political will and the cynical misuse of dialogue. However, complex social systems are rarely transformed through once-off events, but are subject to the ongoing push and pull of counteracting or reinforcing loops[47]. In other words, once an agreement has been made, the agreement remains subject to forces that will resist its implementation, and forces that want its implementation. The failure in implementation is therefore not necessarily a matter of political mischief, but may be an indication of a fairly normal post-agreement struggle that takes place intra-party and between parties. The point is not to condone failure of implementation, though, rather to emphasize that there should be no complacency once agreements have been signed, and to sustain attention on implementation. It is a reasonable expectation that renewed conflict may emerge during the implementation process. As reflected in the Secretary-General's 2009 mediation report, it is as

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[47] See Ropers 2008.

important to achieve agreements that facilitate implementation as to ensure that professional capacities for mediation are sustained throughout implementation.[48]

There are a number of pointers in the direction of a better approach to implementation. Firstly, accept and plan for the inevitability of implementation challenges. All actors in the peace process – belligerent parties, facilitators, the international community, donors, and the general public – have to appreciate this reality. It implies, *i.a.,* continued reliance on political dialogue to find collaborative solutions to the new challenges. The emphasis in dialogue may well shift towards the 'how' of building peace, but the process will be as subject to the preconditions for successful dialogue as the initial negotiations.

Secondly, when external actors apply pressure on political leaders to sign agreements without allowing them sufficient time to get the buy-in of their constituencies, they contribute to implementation failures. This is particularly the case when leadership of the party is weak and the party divided. Negotiators then fall victim to hard-liners in their own party for making unpopular concessions. The resulting tensions between negotiators and hardliners within parties paralyze decision-making. When intra-party consensus on the details of the agreement is therefore weak, implementation will suffer.

Thirdly, potentially the most potent force to support implementation is the citizenry. It is important, therefore, to provide adequate information to citizens regarding the contents of the agreement, and to engage them as much as possible in ongoing dialogue regarding implementation. It is also important to ensure, where appropriate, that the results of political dialogue are validated as

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Box 6: Implementation of the results of political dialogue "Kenyan style"

In Kenya, following the signing of the agreement in 2008 as mediated by the AU Panel led by Kofi Annan, the Kenyan parties, the AU, the UN and their national and international partners agreed on the need to ensure the effective implementation of the National Dialogue agreements in order to consolidate the peace process and address the country's long-standing challenges and the underlying causes of the violence. An AU Coordination and Liaison Office (CLO) was consequently established to support and facilitate the timely and effective implementation of the agreements. It was financed through a basket fund supported by fourteen donors. The CLO also had personnel seconded from the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA). One of the objectives was to maintain political dialogue between political actors. The CLO worked with a dialogue team, comprising representatives of the two parties in conflict, which had together formed a Coalition Government in accordance with the negotiated power-sharing settlement. However, the CLO at times found it difficult to engage the dialogue team, partly due to tensions between the parties. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that much progress has been made in Kenya as, for example, demonstrated by the successful conclusion of negotiations on a new constitution, ratified in 2010.

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broadly as feasible (e.g. by parliaments, referendums or opinion polls). An active civil society that is monitoring implementation and staying engaged in the ongoing dialogue can make an important contribution.

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[48] Report of the Secretary-General on *Enhancing mediation and its support activities*, S/2009/189, and subsequent Statement by the President of the Security Council, S/PRST/2009/8

Fourthly, as discussed above, it is important to see post-agreement planning processes as an extension of the core process of political dialogue. When planning is driven by political dialogue, it has the potential to contribute to more successful implementation.

Lastly, it is important to design specific processes and, in some cases, establish institutions to monitor and guide implementation. In Zimbabwe, for example, SADC has an ongoing mandate to monitor and guide the deeply troubled implementation of the Global Political Agreement. In Kenya a specific institution was created to assist implementation (see Box 6) [49].

Institutionalization of dialogue support

The last strategy considered here for promoting in-country political dialogue is that of the institutionalization of dialogue support. There is a need for organizations that specialize in research, training, and providing specialist support to complex mediation or facilitation processes. It is important that these institutions are located close to the locus of contemporary conflict with a specific focus on the experiences and challenges of their context. Moreover, these institutions should not be mere carbon copies of western institutions, but should be appropriate for the cultural contexts and the specific needs of societies. When establishing institutions to support dialogue, careful attention should therefore be given to indigenous conflict management capacities in societies, and ways to achieve the 'best fit' between these indigenous capacities and the body of knowledge and skills that has been developed across the world.

The rationale for such institutions is the fact, as discussed above, that mediation and the facilitation of dialogue are complex matters that require high levels of knowledge and skill. The quality of facilitation has an impact on the process. Given the importance of political dialogue, it is in the interest of specific countries and the international community as a whole to invest in the promotion of higher levels of knowledge and skill; and in the capacity to provide expert facilitation support.

There are three general categories of institutions. The first is institutions that serve international organizations such as the UN, regional, or sub-regional institutions, in their efforts to maintain international peace and security. The UN Mediation Support Unit, and other UN Secretariat and political mission support to the development of regional and national mediation capacities are good examples.[50] Another is the Democratic Dialogue Regional Project of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (RBLAC). It has, since 2003, provided active support to dialogue initiatives promoted by UN country offices of Latin America and the Caribbean[51].

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[49] In the Central African Republic, following the Inclusive National Dialogue of 2008, a recommendations monitoring body was established that combined representatives of the national participating bodies, as well as the international community. The mandate of this body included the specific task to ensure that funding commitments to the peacebuilding process were honored.

[50] S/2009/189, p15 and Report of the Secretary-General, *Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations*, A/65/382-S/2010/490

[51] The Regional Bureau provides service in three areas. Firstly, it aims at building the capacity of political and social leaders, dialogue facilitators, and UN staff to use dialogue effectively as an instrument to respond to complex and multi-layered challenges. Secondly, it provides technical assistance to dialogue processes, which includes conflict analysis, process design, logistics, and assessment. Thirdly, it develops knowledge products for use by facilitators and UN staff.

A particularly relevant development in this respect is the establishment of panels of eminent persons with the mandate to mediate or facilitate dialogue. This practice is growing particularly in Africa where the AU, most of the sub-regional bodies, and individual countries[52] have established or are considering the establishment of such panels. The mediation effort in Kenya in 2008 was, in fact, the first major intervention by the AU's Panel of the Wise. Connected to this development is the intention to establish specialist support units to provide expert assistance to the eminent persons' interventions. It is work in progress, and certainly a development worth supporting.

Box 7: The Common Space Initiative in Lebanon

The CSI is, on the one hand, a physical space. It is an office complex with meeting rooms, conference facilities, and a library. Its core responsibility, however, is to support the National Dialogue, a meeting of the leadership of all political parties under the chairmanship of the president. The National Dialogue provides an alternative and discreet opportunity to the collective leadership to discuss serious issues in a context where public institutions often struggle to address the main reasons behind the crisis in the country.

The CSI further seeks to support dialogue in the country by stimulating impartial research. It produces research papers, mapping documents, reports and policy briefs. The policy briefs aim to collectively define existing political discourses, support constructive debates, and develop new collective thinking on future options. In addition the CSI supports dialogue processes at various levels of society on a range of important issues.

The second category is country-specific. It is intended and designed to serve the specific needs of a country and has a national mandate to perform this service. The "Common Space Initiative for Shared Knowledge and Consensus Building" (CSI) in Lebanon is an example (see Box 7). It is the product of a collaborative effort between the UN and leading national institutions: the presidency, ministries, universities, civil society organizations, and political parties across the political spectrum. Because of the formal nature of its mandate, it enjoys open access to formal institutions and political parties.

The third category of institutions is independent institutions or CSOs that specialize in political dialogue, but that do not operate with a formal national mandate. The disadvantage is that, at times, they find it difficult to have access to or work with formal institutions. Their informality, as noted above, may however also be an advantage, because it enables them to operate discreetly and provide low-risk opportunities. As with CSOs in general, the quality of their inputs may vary considerably from institution to institution, but a professional, well-organized institution of this nature adds considerable value to internal dialogue and the empowerment of local leaders in dialogue capacity[53]. CSOs are also instrumental in providing training in dialogue skills to various audiences.

In-country dialogue and the international community

The role of the international community in internal dialogue processes has been substantive. Most of the mediation processes took place under the auspices of the international community, often as joint efforts between the UN and regional or sub-regional institutions. The international community, and

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[52] Examples of countries where panels of eminent persons have been established or are in the process of formation are Malawi and Uganda.

[53] See Van Brabant 2011 for a detailed discussion of the role of CSOs in facilitating political dialogue.

donors in particular, have also provided substantive support to all the other types of dialogue in the form of funding, capacity building and expert assistance.

However, international assistance is not without its controversies and dilemmas. From the case studies the following issues have emerged as areas where the role of the international community in supporting internal dialogue may need further attention.

Coordination: Much progress has been made in enhancing collaboration within the international community. A recent study commented positively on the ability of the UN and the AU, the EU, the OSCE and ECOWAS to work collaboratively and effectively in mediation efforts[54]. The intervention in Kenya in 2008 to support the AU-led mediation is a fine example of AU, UN and donor collaboration[55]. While this is a cause for celebration, there is still evidence of the negative impact of a lack of coordination[56].

The problem of short-termism. Too many dialogue initiatives are conducted as once-off initiatives. Such initiatives are not without value. They may break an impasse and infuse new energy into efforts to deal with a crisis. However, as discussed, peacebuilding requires a long-term view, while the attention span of the donor community is too short. Too much of the attention of the donor community may be on dealing with a humanitarian crisis, achieving a political agreement and, thereafter, the conduct of the first elections. Once the elections have been completed, the assumption is that political legitimacy and stability has been restored, which, in most cases, is not really true. While attention to short-term tasks is necessary, the thrust of financial and technical support to the promotion of political dialogue should have a long-term focus. It should enter much earlier than at the point of the outbreak of violence, with a strong focus on violence prevention; and stay beyond the first elections to assist the process of consolidating and implementing peace agreements.

Better analysis. There is a disconcerting refrain that comes from the case studies and the literature: the assumption that western concepts, institutions and solutions are automatically appropriate for countries that have completely different histories, cultures and challenges, is false. The persistence of this assumption points, among other things, to insufficient analysis. International organizations and donors should do better to understand not only the surface conditions of conflict, polarization and poverty, but the deeper trends and root causes[57], and develop a better appreciation of the applicability or not of their own models. In fact, the real challenge, which is a joint challenge to both the international community and fragile states, is to determine the 'best fit'. In other words, the challenge is to find solutions and build institutions that will best fit the specific conditions and challenges that exist. The debate whether institutions should have a western or indigenous orientation is largely academic; what is important is whether the best practical response to the existing reality has been found. Moreover, the analysis should not only understand the causes of polarization, but also the resources that exist in a

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[54] Call 2011 – Draft.
[55] See Kofi Annan Foundation (2009).
[56] See Michailof 2010 for a critical discussion of the impact that the lack of a joint strategic focus and coordination among donors had on peace and stability in Afghanistan. See also Call (2011) – Draft for the case study on Madagascar.
[57] See Leftwich 2009.

society that may support dialogue processes and peacebuilding[58]. Failure to identify and enhance such resources is an opportunity lost.

Prevention is better than cure. Coupled with the problem of a short-term focus on recovery and early elections, is the neglect of a conflict prevention focus. It has two aspects. The cost effectiveness of mediation, preventive diplomacy and other forms of dialogue over recovery efforts has been well established[59]. Yet it still does not attract the investment in research, capacity building and institutionalization within conflict-prone countries that it deserves. The second aspect is that situations that have experienced violence attract massive concentrations of funding to deal with the crisis, while states that do not experience violent conflict but that face similar complex challenges are neglected. A strategy of conflict prevention would require that states where conflict prevention is still a feasible option receive sufficient attention[60].

Legitimate institution-building. The building or strengthening of efficient and credible public institutions is a key strategy in the quest for successful, prosperous states. Yet, too much institution-building is unbalanced because of a focus on technical capacity rather than political legitimacy and contextual relevance[61]. The WDR (2011) has remarked on the slow progress in changing donor behavior, particularly regarding the focus on the form rather than the function of change; and the reluctance to move away from headquarter prescriptions to 'best fit' solutions. At heart is the risk involved in moving from 'safe' investments (such as funding ballot boxes, model procurement laws, and anti-corruption and human rights commissions) to more risky investments in 'best fit' practices.

These matters are urgent topics for dialogue between the international community and the g7+.

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[58] See *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict: Independent report of the Senior Advisory Group*, A/65/747-S/2011/85, pp 10-11

[59] See Report of the Secretary-General on enhancing mediation, S/2009/189, par. 8. See also forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on Preventive Diplomacy, requested by the Security Council, to make recommendations on how best to optimize the use of preventive diplomacy tools within the United Nations system and in co-operation with regional and sub-regional organizations and other actors (S/PRST/2010/14)

[60] The WDR 2011 concluded that the policy debate has been fairly narrowly focused on post-conflict transition, rather than considering the broader question of how societies struggling to prevent situations of rising conflict risk can be assisted. They conclude: "post-conflict trumps prevention" (WDR 2011:27).

[61] See INCAF (2010); OECD (2007); Leftwich and Hogg 2007:7.

Conclusions

1. The contribution of political dialogue to post-violence reconstruction and reducing fragility is its role in facilitating consensus, strengthening legitimacy, building trust, promoting reconciliation, and enabling productive coalitions between important actors. Dialogue plays a necessary role in violence prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding. It is also indispensable in institution building because of its contribution to strengthening the legitimacy of institutions and in ensuring 'best fit' solutions.

2. Political dialogue takes place in many forms, with each approach having specific advantages and disadvantages. It means that care has to be taken in designing a dialogue process. Success is not guaranteed, and failure may do harm because of reduced confidence and dialogue fatigue. However, there is sufficient evidence that the impact of political dialogue can be strengthened and improved through well-designed interventions.

3. It is evident that a specific dialogue process is not able to address all the variables that cause conflict. There is need for multiple interventions that complement each other and that operate at different levels of society.

4. Political dialogue is a complex undertaking that relies on specific preconditions and that benefits from professional attention. The preconditions are adequate preparation, credible facilitation, sufficient political commitment, the collective leadership capability to form productive coalitions, and sufficient inclusion.

5. Complex political problems and deeply embedded patterns of distrust and hostility cannot be solved through a once-off dialogue event. The process of building sufficient social cohesion and functional institutions in a society that has been ravaged by violent conflict is a long-term process of two to three decades. The focus therefore has to be on strengthening procedures or institutions that have the capacity to sustain dialogue processes. Ultimately the objective has to be a political culture that resorts to dialogue as the first response to rising tensions.

6. It is in the interest of affected societies and the international community to invest in procedures or institutions that assume responsibility for ongoing dialogue and that enhance the potential for success with dialogue. These include institutions that specialize in dialogue support; 'infrastructures for peace'; and projects that provide opportunities for the strengthening of leadership capabilities.

7. Planning for peacebuilding and development has to be driven by political dialogue. These are political matters with the potential to either contribute to further violence or to peace, and should not be pursued in a purely technical or bureaucratic manner. It is important to ensure that the political dialogue that should underpin these processes is conducted with full awareness of the preconditions for success.

8. The implementation of dialogue results is an area that needs particular attention, particularly in terms of strengthening procedures or institutions to assist the implementation process. What is clear is that the need for dialogue does not end when an agreement is signed. Political dialogue remains necessary throughout the implementation process.

9. Political dialogue between g7+ countries and the international community has to focus on 'best fit' solutions; and the constraints and risks that inhibit such a quest.

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