

Issue Brief

2018

The objective of this paper is to present an introduction to dialogue, facilitation and mediation, give examples of Sida's experiences and possible opportunities for engagement. The overview provides guidance based on Swedish and international policy commitments and priorities, successful practical experiences as well as lessons learned in providing conflict-sensitive support to conflict prevention.

INTRODUCTION

The number of violent conflicts and crises has been on the rise in the last decade with devastating impact on populations and negative effects on economic, social and political development. Current trends also show an increased complexity in conflict patterns. The average number of armed groups in a civil war is on the rise and violent conflicts are increasingly internationalized with external actors involved. This complexity indicates the need to design support to dialogue and peace processes carefully and seek innovative ways of engagement and inclusiveness.

Sweden's commitment to human security, peacebuilding and conflict prevention is articulated in the Policy Framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, where Peaceful and Inclusive Societies is one of eight prioritized areas. This focus has also been articulated in the Swedish foreign policy's increased focus on dialogue, mediation and peace processes. Three concrete examples of this is the establishment of the female mediation network, the appointment of Special Envoys to conflict countries and regions, and the recently adopted strategy for Sustainable Peace 2017-2022. Support to inclusive peace processes has also since long been a priority within Swedish development cooperation and undertaken in bilateral and regional strategies under various headings.

Window of opportunity

The 2017-2022 Strategy for Sustainable Peace opens up for a fast, flexible and context adapted national and local support during critical stages of conflict prevention, including in forgotten and protracted conflicts where opportunities within the framework of bilateral or regional strategies are lacking or, upon consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in countries where Sweden is currently not involved in bilateral development cooperation.

DIALOGUE, FACILITATION AND MEDIATION

Dialogue, facilitation and mediation are three core concepts used to describe different approaches to supporting peace processes or conflict management. Often, these are associated with short-term initiatives put into place in a critical moment with the aim of having a direct de-escalating effect on tensions or violence. However, in many cases, the methods and approaches are connected and linked to long term structural conflict prevention. It is therefore crucial that dialogue, facilitation and mediation is adapted to fit the context where it is applied and the actors involved. Imperative to this process is a thorough analysis of the conflict and of relevant actors.

What is dialogue?

Dialogue is an instrument which is utilized to foster relationships and build an inclusive consensus among a wide group of actors. It is also used to extend the reach and impact of a formal process through wider participation. Dialogues are structured as conversations and are often public, although specific parts can be conducted in private or confidentiality. The format can range from one conversation to initiatives that are conducted over a longer period of time. A third party has

a public and active role in the process, advising on models for dialogue and facilitating the approach.

What is facilitation?

The objective of facilitation is similar to dialogue: the aim is to build trust and to find like-mindedness on contested issues among a group of actors. The role of a third party is precisely to facilitate the conversation, i.e. to create the enabling environment necessary to conduct a more formal process. It entails structuring and organizing the dialogue (process design), and to monitor and sometimes guide the conversation. Meetings are often conducted outside of the public eye, which provides a platform for informal discussions, and often before a more formal peace process takes shape. Facilitation is often discreet and behind the scenes.

What is mediation?

A mediation process has the aim of resolving a specific conflict among a limited number of parties and generate an acceptable agreement between them. Often, mediation is at the core of formal peace-making processes. Mediation initiatives are public, but actual proceedings are normally conducted in privacy. A third party is in charge of the format and design of the process, and can suggest options or even enforce agreements, depending on the third party's position and interests.

TRACKS

Conflict prevention measures should preferably focus on strengthening the capacity of the society for prevention – not just the state or elite parties. Supporting local actors' efforts in prevention is a critical part of better understanding and addressing local grievances and avoid that local conflicts escalate to the national level. However, for this decentralized approach to mediation and peacebuilding to work, it is important to create synergies among various efforts at local, national, and regional levels and with diplomatic efforts. These various levels of actors involved in dialogue, mediation and peace processes have traditionally been described as "tracks".

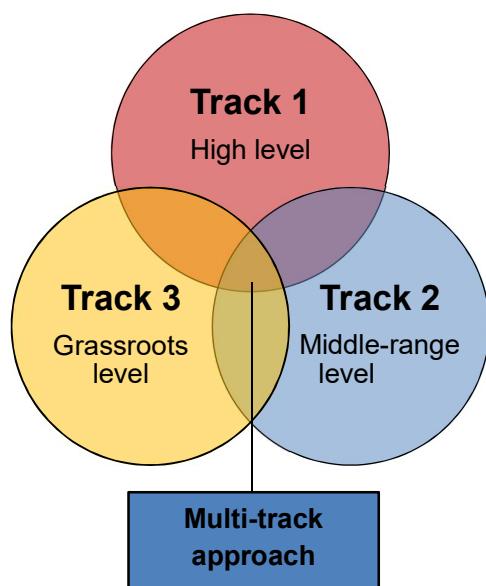
Track 1 is normally understood as high-level negotiations. These dialogues involve top leaders from governments or belligerent parties, and is often mediated by the UN, regional organisations or governmental leaders. Included here is also *track 1.5* formats which are similar to track 1, but in an informal setting.

Track 2 initiatives are conducted by unofficial actors, such as academics or NGOs. These efforts are often organized as workshops and actors involved are either the belligerent parties or individuals close to them that are seen as legitimate or having a real influence on primary actors. Track 2 discussions are sometimes held secretly as a way of testing ideas through trusted intermediaries.

Track 3 is conducted by or together with for example local peace committees or local mediation programmes and is aimed towards local leaders and grassroot NGOs. Instead of an outside third party, there is usually an inside, or local, third party, sometimes supported by international civil society organizations, and the focus is on building capacity for peaceful resolutions to conflicts within a society.

These different tracks are not exclusive. Rather, efficiency is most likely to be reached when applying a *multi-track approach* that coordinate various processes towards the same result.ⁱ

Structural marginalisation and exclusion have often left certain groups (women, youth, ethnic or religious minorities, people with disabilities, etc) under-represented, particularly in Track 1 and 2, but also in Track 3 processes. This is the background to why UN



Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and on Youth, Peace and Security have been adopted. Sweden is deeply committed to their full implementation.

SIDA'S SUPPORT IN THE AREA OF DIALOGUE, FACILITATION AND MEDIATION

Sida's analyses and strategy reports show that opportunities for development cooperation to contribute to conflict prevention, inclusive peacebuilding and particularly mediation initiatives are limited in many contexts. Swedish support has contributed to national level peace processes (Track 1) in a few cooperation countries, although development cooperation is most commonly used to support Track 2 and 3 initiatives through strengthening of local peacebuilding and dialogue capacity in directly targeted geographical areas.

Swedish development cooperation in **Colombia** has supported national and local civil society organisations dialogue initiatives in the peace negotiations with FARC as well as the ongoing negotiations between the Colombian government and ELN. This include support to civil society organisations mobilisation for an agenda for peace at local level and national level, but also support in the actual negotiations. This has been complemented with technical and political support to the respective negotiations tables. As a result, the Swedish priorities of gender equality in line with UNSCR 1325, participation and victims' rights are reflected in both processes. In the FARC peace agreement Sweden is assigned three roles overseeing the implementation in the areas of gender equality, victim's rights and missing people. In the ongoing peace negotiations with the ELN, Sweden has become a reliable and trusted actor in the areas of gender equality and participation, not only among the two parts of the negotiation table, but also among Colombian women's rights organisations and civil society organisations from the most conflict affected regions.

In **Moldova**, Sweden was the first country to substantially support the first functional formal dialogue between the People's Assembly of autonomous region Gagauzia and the Parliament in Moldova. Through the regional **Syria crisis** strategy, Sweden has supported local partners' and other civil society actors'

participation in the preparations of formal peace negotiations led by De Mistura and also contributed to the formal Geneva peace talks.

Building capacity through the establishment of dialogue forums, training, development of guidance, and institutional strengthening for national and local actors to mediate between social groups as well as between various elite interests is the most commonly used approach for supporting inclusive peace processes. In **Rwanda**, Swedish support through local civil society organizations has contributed to strengthened justice mechanisms and local mediation processes. The project includes capacity building of mediation committees for resolving local disputes, for example regarding the new land law.

In **DRC**, Sida's partner International Alert uses dialogue to increase inter-ethnic trust and reinforce women's empowerment and political participation. Members of the community dialogue groups who admit to having experienced situations of inter-ethnic mistrust confirm that the dialogue reinforces social cohesion and prevents the generalizations or demonization across borders in **Rwanda, Burundi** and DRC.

Through the **regional strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa**, Sida supports West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in providing capacity building to women from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria and Niger in dialog and mediation. Support is also provided to strengthen the mediation capacity of the African Union Commission (AUC) and Regional Economic Communities (REC), who often plays important roles in mediation processes, most recently in Burundi, DRC, South Sudan and Gambia.

Through the Syrian organisation Etana, Sida has strengthened the capacity of strategic actors including civil society and local leaders in southern **Syria**. Etana also facilitates the establishment of local peace networks to raise preparedness and handle an escalation of conflict and mitigate it through local dialogue promoting peace. Within the same strategy, the Syrian peace network Mobaderoon works cross-border inside Syria through a large network of young women and men advocating for peaceful co-existence and democratic change through dialogue on a local level. The network is active among refugee communities in Lebanon and Turkey as well. In the **MENA** region local partners focusing on women's

participation and implementation of UNSCR is provided support through the Kvinna till Kvinna foundation.

Through the **Strategy for Sustainable Peace**, Sida provides core support to strategic partners specialised in inclusive dialogue and mediation such as Conciliation Resources (CR) and International Alert (IA). Through Sida support, these organisations are able to work also in countries where Sweden does not have a bilateral engagement. CR, for example, participates in the international contact group for the peace process in Mindanao, Philippines. CR has promoted women's rights throughout the peace process and preparations for implementation of the Peace Agreement. In the same country, IA helped shape the ceasefire and peace agreements between the Government and the National Democratic Front, which led both parties to sign an interim joint ceasefire agreement in early 2017. IA participated in several rounds of formal negotiations and as subject matter expert on ceasefires and conflict monitoring.

Through Sida's long-term support for the United Nations Development Programme/Department of Political Affairs Joint Programme on building national capacities for conflict prevention, 37 peace and development advisors at country level and several national level dialogue processes have been supported over the years. This contributed, for example, to stabilisation, early recovery and co-existence in north-east Nigeria.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Inclusive processes for selecting representatives are critical to build trust and legitimacy. Underrepresented voices, such as women and youth, should be promoted. Specific attention should be put on enabling meaningful participation of these groups.
- ❖ Capacity for peace should be supported by engaging local non-state actors in platforms for peacebuilding, joining representatives from the private sector, civil society, community-based organizations and religious groups.
- ❖ Programme planning in geographical areas at risk of violence can include participatory and consultative elements to ensure that efforts are focused on locally defined problems and that solutions are accepted as legitimate by all relevant stakeholders.
- ❖ Support to governance and economic planning programmes can integrate support to national and local mediation capacities of institutions, political leaders and middle-range leadership for them to convene actors and build consensus around contested issues.
- ❖ It is not unusual for societies to have their own mechanisms for reconciliation. When developing programmes for dialogue, facilitation or mediation, it is important to have an understanding of local structures. Existing mechanisms for reconciliation can provide good entry points for external support.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [Research Brief – What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues. Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative.](#)
[Community dialogue in Somalia: Lessons learned from implementing peacebuilding dialogues in Mogadishu International Alert](#)
[Dialogue for Peace: Reflections and lessons from community peace platforms in the Mano River Region Conciliation Resource](#)

ⁱ Basics of mediation: Concepts and Definitions. Fact Sheet Series: Peace Mediation and Mediation Support. *Federal Foreign Office & Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland*. 2007.

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