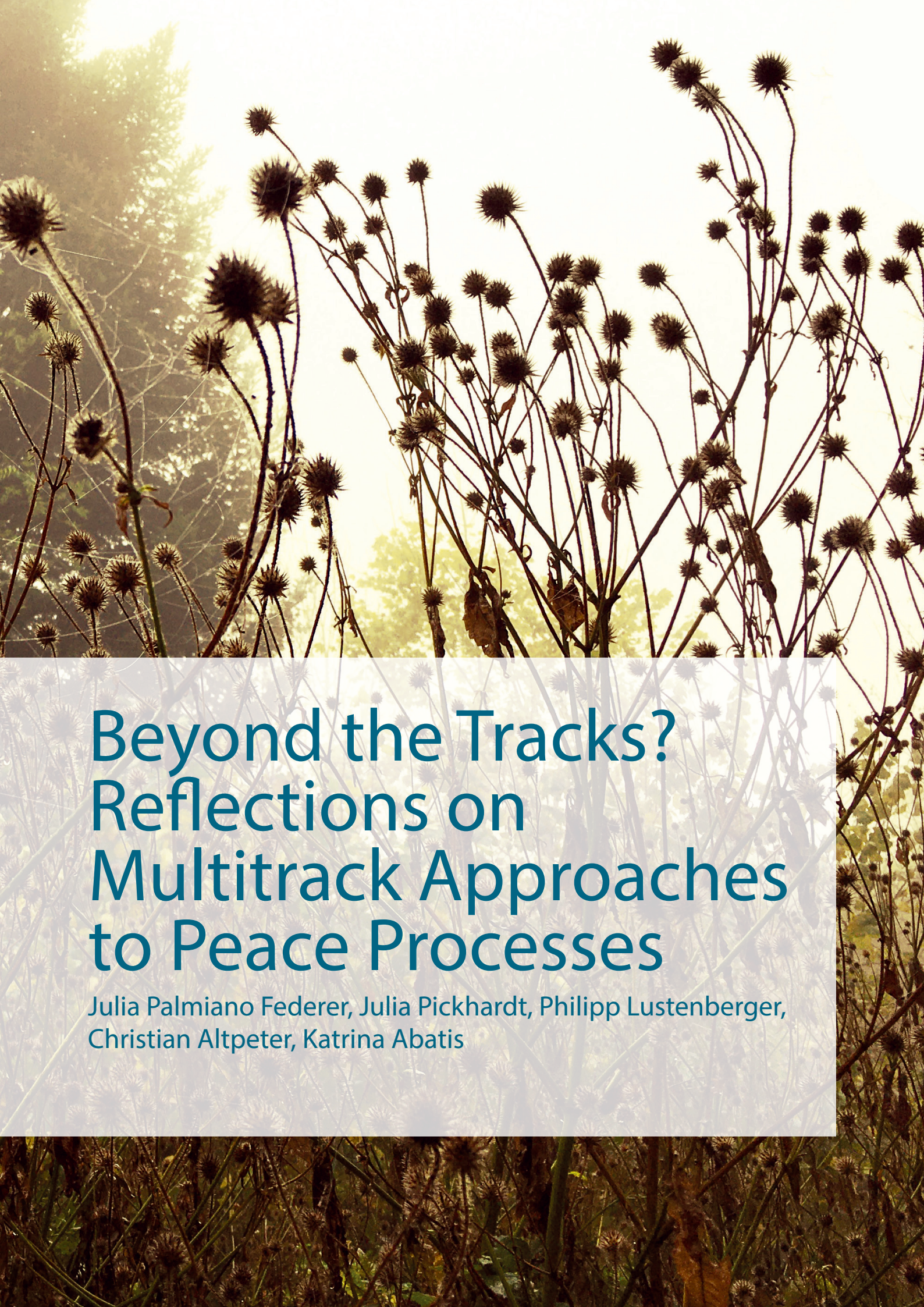

Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes

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This report is the result of a collaboration
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About this Report

This report was completed in the framework of a collaborative project on multitrack approaches to peace processes. The insights in the report were principally drawn from a three-day retreat that took place in Sandö, Sweden from 16 – 18 September 2019, organised with the generous support of the Folke Bernadotte Academy. Practitioners involved in dialogue, negotiation or mediation initiatives in Colombia, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine and Zimbabwe, as well as representatives from the Folke Bernadotte Academy, swisspeace, the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue shared conceptual insights and practical experiences about the challenges and opportunities of working across different levels of society and linking different initiatives as part of a larger peace process. The retreat was part of a project aiming to contribute to the following objectives: (1) Working with partners that engage in dialogue, negotiation and mediation initiatives supporting the prevention, management and resolution of intrastate and internationalised conflicts; (2) Exploring whether and how initiatives at multiple levels of society interact with each other in relation to the broader goal of achieving sustainable peace; and (3) Fostering conceptual understanding of, and developing practical guidance on, multitrack approaches to contemporary peace processes. This initial report aims to frame existing debates around multitrack approaches to peace processes, present insights from practice and provide ideas for future research and informed practice. The project invites the peacebuilding community to reflect and comment on this report.

Executive Summary

In order to address the multi-level nature of contemporary conflicts, peace practitioners have sought to conceive – and deal with – peace processes that encompass initiatives on different societal levels (or "tracks"), ranging from community-based peacebuilding to high-level negotiations. Multitrack approaches can be understood as a way of considering different peacebuilding initiatives taking place at different levels of society, with the intention of leveraging the positive impact of linkages between initiatives, while preventing or mitigating negative impact. Since the 1990s, the logic of multitrack approaches has become salient in theory and practice. After an overview of existing theoretical concepts and policy developments around multitrack approaches to peace processes, this report presents insights and analyses from peace practitioners, and assesses how multitrack approaches reflect the complexities of today's peace processes. In doing so, the report draws from a retreat with practitioners involved in dialogue, negotiation and mediation initiatives in Colombia, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

Initially, the notion of 'tracks' comes from the field of diplomacy. "Track Two diplomacy" was used to describe an alternative to official "Track One" interactions between official representatives. During the 1990s, Diamond and McDonald presented a "multitrack diplomacy" framework with nine tracks and Lederach developed his transformative model, featuring a pyramid with three system levels: top leadership (Track I), middle-range leadership (Track II) and grassroots leadership (Track III). The Lederach model has inspired many peace practitioners, resulting in the growing salience of multitrack approaches as a way to promote peace in a "holistic and inclusive fashion" (Dudouet, Eshaq et al. 2018, p. 183). The logic and language of multitrack approaches have also influenced the policies of international organisations and governments.

The impact and effectiveness of multitrack approaches have not been systematically examined. Despite the common assumption that linking initiatives within and across levels of society creates beneficial outcomes, little attention has been paid to how to create linkages in practice and what kind of impact these linkages generate. While linkages often create positive impact – such as information-sharing, consensus-building or increased ownership – sometimes linking initiatives, especially across levels of society, generates negative impact. Trying to link initiatives upwards towards high-level, political negotiations may not always be the best fit.

The report presents five main points for reflection:

- **Questioning what is behind the terms and concepts:** Despite constant references to the mainstream terms and conceptual models, there is little common understanding about these terms and models. Peace practitioners need to be aware of the different ways in which these terms are understood and clarify the way they are used in relation to multitrack approaches to peace processes.

- **Building sustainable peace requires working at various levels of society:** A variety of initiatives at different levels of society, with different objectives and timeframes, are needed to build sustainable peace. Therefore, national and international peace practitioners need to acknowledge the existence of a multitude of initiatives, and aim to ensure complementarity among them.

- **Considering effective contributions to sustainable peace:** Dialogue, negotiation and mediation initiatives can make important contributions to building sustainable peace at different levels of society, independently of formal linkages to peace processes, for example, by creating horizontal linkages in a polarised society. Often there is only limited consideration of different theories of change in the design of peace processes.

- **Fostering positive linkages between initiatives within and across different levels of society:** When useful, a multitrack approach to a peace process fosters linkages between initiatives – horizontally within a level of society and vertically across levels of society. It is important to consider clearly what the purpose of fostering a particular linkage is, and how it should be done.

- **Linking initiatives and actors must be done in a conflict-sensitive way:** Different initiatives may have a positive or negative impact on each other. Therefore, it is essential to consider sensitivities around a conflict, based on an in-depth conflict analysis, when promoting linkages between different initiatives.

Considering the multifaceted nature of conflicts, peace processes need to be viewed comprehensively to understand how initiatives at different levels of society, and their linkages, can foster change to support sustainable peace. Taking into consideration these initial reflections on when – and how to – leverage multitrack approaches, peace practitioners and scholars are invited to comment on this report in order to contribute to clarifying concepts and providing practical guidance on multitrack approaches to peace processes.

Contents

Introduction

Today's armed conflicts are often characterised by complexity, the fragmentation of parties and incoherent responses from the international community. Political and armed conflict may have an impact on different levels of society, and peace practitioners may become involved at different stages during a conflict or political transition. In these situations, it is challenging to address multiple interrelated conflict dynamics separately. For instance, conflicts between herders and farmers in South Sudan or *rido* (clan) conflict in Mindanao in the Philippines, are distinct from national level political conflicts, yet may affect, or may be affected by, official peace negotiations tackling those national level political conflicts. At the same time, different levels of society may be affected differently by the same conflict. To address this multi-level nature of conflicts, peace practitioners have sought to conceive – and deal with – peace processes that encompass initiatives on different societal levels, ranging from informal community-based peacebuilding to formal high-level negotiations featuring official representatives from warring parties.

The logic of multitrack approaches to peace processes[1] has become salient in theory and practice since the 1990s (Montville 1991, Diamond and McDonald 1996, Lederach 1997). Multitrack approaches to peace processes consider and leverage peacebuilding initiatives that take place on different 'tracks', understood as different levels of society.[2] These initiatives may or may not be linked intentionally.

Despite the possible benefits of multitrack approaches which can render peace processes more inclusive and sustainable by looking beyond formal Track I initiatives, peace practitioners face conceptual and practical challenges with this approach. Firstly, while many peace practitioners commonly use 'track' language[3] to talk about 'Track I actors' or working at a 'Track II level' or promoting 'Track III processes', they do not always agree on exactly what is meant in each case: the terms 'tracks' and 'linkages' are contested concepts.[4] Secondly, despite the potential salience of multitrack approaches as a way to design peace processes, there is a lack of empirical evidence on whether, and how, multitrack approaches lead to better outcomes in terms of sustainable peace. Thirdly, despite this lack of evidence, the assumption that initiatives should be linked across tracks often results in a particular focus on attempting to connect local peace initiatives to official peace negotiations.

To address these issues, this report begins with an overview of existing theoretical concepts and policy developments around multitrack approaches to peace processes. Through insights and analyses from peace practitioners engaged in dialogue, negotiation or mediation initiatives[5] at different levels of society, it then assesses how multitrack approaches reflect the complexities of today's peace processes. This report consequently provides insights on the following questions:

- Is track language used in different peace processes? If yes, how? If not, what other terms and concepts are used?
- How do actors and initiatives interact within and across different levels of society? How do different initiatives affect each other in relation to the broader goal of achieving sustainable peace?
- What role do national and international peacebuilding actors play in multitrack approaches to peace processes?

The report also provides some reflections on how researchers and practitioners can leverage multitrack approaches to contribute more effectively to sustainable peace. It concludes with a few suggestions on practical and conceptual ways forward.

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1 For the purpose of this paper, a peace process is understood to encompass initiatives at different levels of society. A peace process requires a certain formality of engagement at the official, governmental level. This may include peace negotiations between a government and an armed non-state actor or, in broader terms, other governmental initiatives to resolve an armed conflict through political means. A peace process may start with a pre-negotiation phase, gain more visibility during the negotiation phase, and extend in time during the implementation of peace agreements or a political transition.

2 Most commonly, Track I refers to top leadership (military, religious and political actors), Track II to middle-range leadership (academics, NGOs, civil society) and Track III to grassroots leadership (local leaders, health officials, community-based NGOs). This is taken from John Paul Lederach's theoretical framework which is explained in more detail on pages 7–9.

3 'Track' language and 'track' concepts refer to peace practitioners using this term and related phrases to discuss these different societal levels. Hereafter these terms will be used without quotation marks.

4 These terms are used in many different ways. This publication does not seek to put forth precise definitions for these terms, but instead offers some working definitions to guide reflection and thinking. For a list of working definitions that were used at the retreat, see Annex 1.

5 While peace processes encompass many different types of peacebuilding initiatives at different levels of society, this report focuses on dialogue, negotiations and mediation initiatives.

1. Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes: State of the Art

Multitrack approaches to peace processes can be understood as a way of considering different peacebuilding initiatives (or, for the purpose of this report, dialogue, negotiation and mediation initiatives) taking place on different levels of society, with the intention of leveraging the positive impact of linkages between initiatives, while preventing or mitigating the negative impact. Initiatives may or may not be linked intentionally, and may impact on each other positively or negatively. Often, multitrack approaches include an understanding of the different types of actors involved in initiatives at different societal levels. While many peace practitioners reference the need for multitrack approaches to encourage linking initiatives within and across different levels of society, exactly *why* and *how* they do so is not always clear. Despite this knowledge gap, the 'mantra' that multitrack approaches lead to more effective and legitimate peace processes has become mainstream in the research community as well as in policy circles since the concept emerged in the 1990s.

1.1 Literature and Theories on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes

The notion of tracks comes from the field of diplomacy. The term "Track Two diplomacy" was first used by US Foreign Service Officers Joseph Montville and William Davidson in 1981 in a 'Foreign Policy' article describing an alternative to power-based, official "Track One" interactions between official representations. "Track Two diplomacy" was understood as "unstructured, unofficial interaction" (Davidson and Montville 1981, p. 156), such as scientific or cultural exchange between unofficial actors like academics (Kelman 2012). In 1996, then US Ambassador John W. McDonald and scholar Louise Diamond further developed the track concept in theory by viewing the process of international peacemaking as a living system (Diamond and McDonald 1996). Their "multitrack diplomacy" framework identifies nine tracks that reflect a set of interconnected activities, individuals, institutions and communities operating together for the common goal of peace. In addition to Track I (official government diplomacy) and Track II (non-official conflict resolution), they identify seven additional tracks (business; private citizens; research, training and education; activism; religion; philanthropy; and media) in an interconnected circle. No one track is more important than the other or independent from the other, and each track operates more powerfully when they are co-ordinated.

The track concept was developed further in the work of conflict resolution scholars in the late 1990s. The end of the Cold War facilitated a shift in peacebuilding approaches: emerging theories described moving from the resolution to the transformation of conflict, in which peace processes were no longer only seen as being conducted between political leaders from a strategic bargaining perspective (Fearon 1995, Svensson 2016), but as encompassing deeper societal transformations in conflict-affected countries (Chetail 2009). The accompanying advent of the international peacebuilding agenda as a dominant way to address conflicts also included an increasing focus on local actors and the need to support locally-led peace initiatives (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). This transformative approach was influenced by scholarly contributions, like John Paul Lederach's analysis of peacebuilding[6] as part of a long-term transformation from war to peace. Lederach built further on systems thinking and catapulted the theory into the mainstream by analysing conflict-affected societies in terms of system levels and the types of peacebuilding activities. Lederach's conflict transformation theory depicts peacebuilding taking place through changes in the personal, relational, cultural and structural dimensions of conflict, brought about over different time periods (short-, mid- and long-term) and affecting different system levels (often referred to as tracks). His peacebuilding pyramid divides society into three levels: Track I – the top leadership; Track II – the middle-range leadership; and Track III – the grassroots leadership. In his "middle-out approach", Lederach argued that the middle-range leadership (Track II) has the "greatest potential for establishing an infrastructure that can sustain peacebuilding over the long term" (Lederach 1997, p. 60) and serve as "a source of practical, immediate action" (Lederach 1997, p. 61), because it can influence both the top (Track I) and grassroots (Track III) levels. Responding to scholarly critiques of an overemphasis on Track II actors, often understood as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Lederach later replaces the middle-out approach with a web approach that focuses on the centrality of relationships between different actors (Lederach 2000, Paffenholz 2013). In his later work, with relationships being considered at the heart of social change, Lederach emphasises the relational space that links vertical and horizontal capacities. Therefore, peacebuilding essentially requires thinking strategically about social spaces, as the places where relationships build and sustain themselves over time and across divides (Lederach 2000). This later work never reached the level of popularity of the initial pyramid, which continues to be used widely by peace practitioners.

Lederach's three-level, pyramid-based model has had considerable influence on peacebuilding practice in the last 20 years, affecting a whole generation of peace practitioners through the "mantra status of the middle–out approach as an almost unquestioned theory of change

6 The term peacebuilding is used here in this context as Lederach specifically refers to "peacebuilding" in his original multitrack conception (1997).

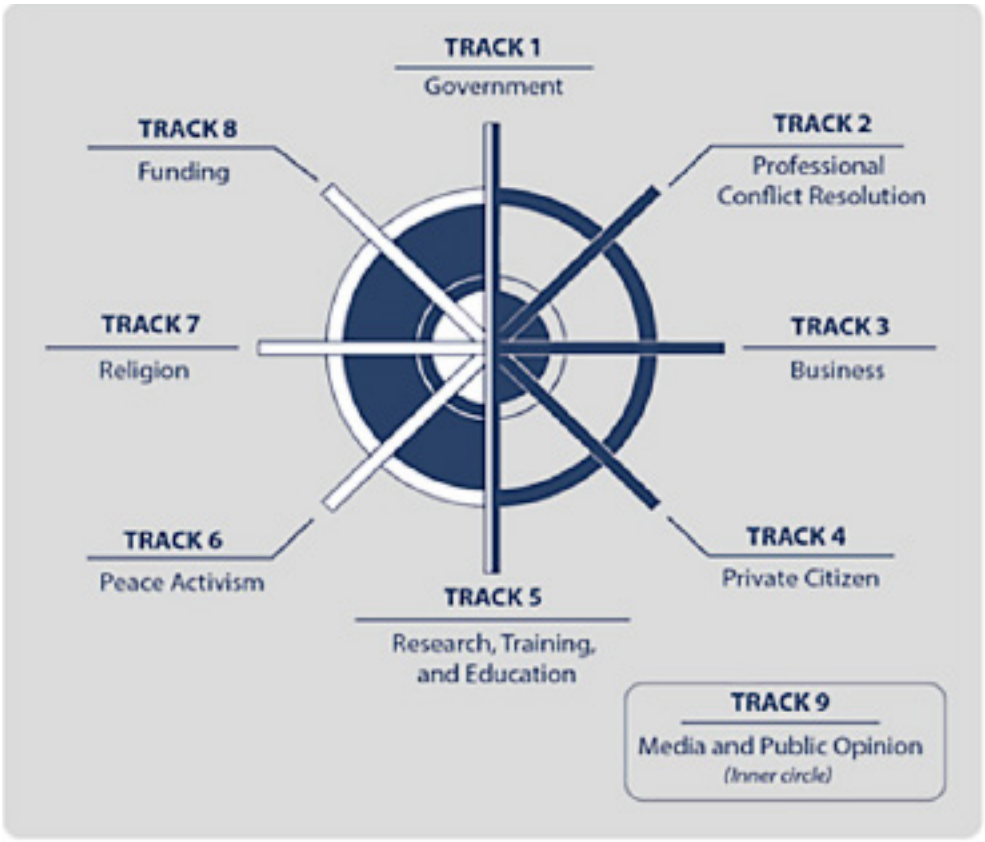

Figure 1. Diamond and McDonald's Multitrack Diplomacy Model (Diamond and McDonald 1996)

in civil society peacebuilding" (Paffenholz 2013, p. 11). This focus on Track II was illustrated when the United States Institute of Peace created a practical guide to conducting Track II peacemaking, which it defines as a broad range of activities aimed at supporting Track I directly or indirectly (Burgess and Burgess 2010). This is also a good example of how the 'track' language can be used to mean different things. Tracks are defined in this practical guide as a certain set of activities, not actors. For example, Track I is understood as a negotiation process aiming at a peace agreement. In this regard, Track II activities can prepare the ground for Track I negotiations and then support them in different ways, for example by feeding in ideas or enlarging the peace constituency (Burgess and Burgess 2010). However, according to Paffenholz, the focus on civil society actors as a force for positive and effective change in conflict settings has led peace practitioners to focus largely on apolitical, non-representative peacebuilding NGOs, at the expense of more comprehensive civil society support and peacebuilding strategies. In her research, she established that Track III actors have "substantial impact on local peacebuilding, independent of Track II developments" (Paffenholz 2013, p. 26). As a related approach to assess the effectiveness of peace initiatives, the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Project was established in the early 2000s. Based on a three-year study of practical experiences, The Collaborative for Development Action developed the RPP tool with concrete guidance on how peace initiatives add up to the broader goal of building sustainable peace. RPP identifies two levels of society – the 'Key People', as people who have major influence on the situation, and 'More People', as the broader population – and argues that peace initiatives must strategically link the engagement with both levels in order to be effective. Moreover, RPP proposes that effective peace initiatives need to focus on changes beyond the personal sphere to affect the socio-cultural sphere. It clearly states that assuming linkages between these two spheres does not mean they actually occur, emphasising the need for clear programmatic steps to build linkages (The Collaborative for Development Action 2016).

As the track concept gained further traction in peace research, some scholars have also looked at third parties in peace processes through a multitrack lens. For instance, the multi-mediator approach (Mason and Sguaitamatti 2011) argues that different types of third parties can work in complementary ways on different levels of society. These can be internal actors from the conflict setting, international NGOs, other states, or intergovernmental organisations. In this sense, peace processes may include various third parties on different levels of society. Information-sharing, co-ordination and co-operation between the various third parties is essential to avoid wasting resources or even doing harm. Studies have also explored the effects of multi-party mediation on peace processes (Crocker, Hampson et al. 1999, Crocker, Hampson et al.

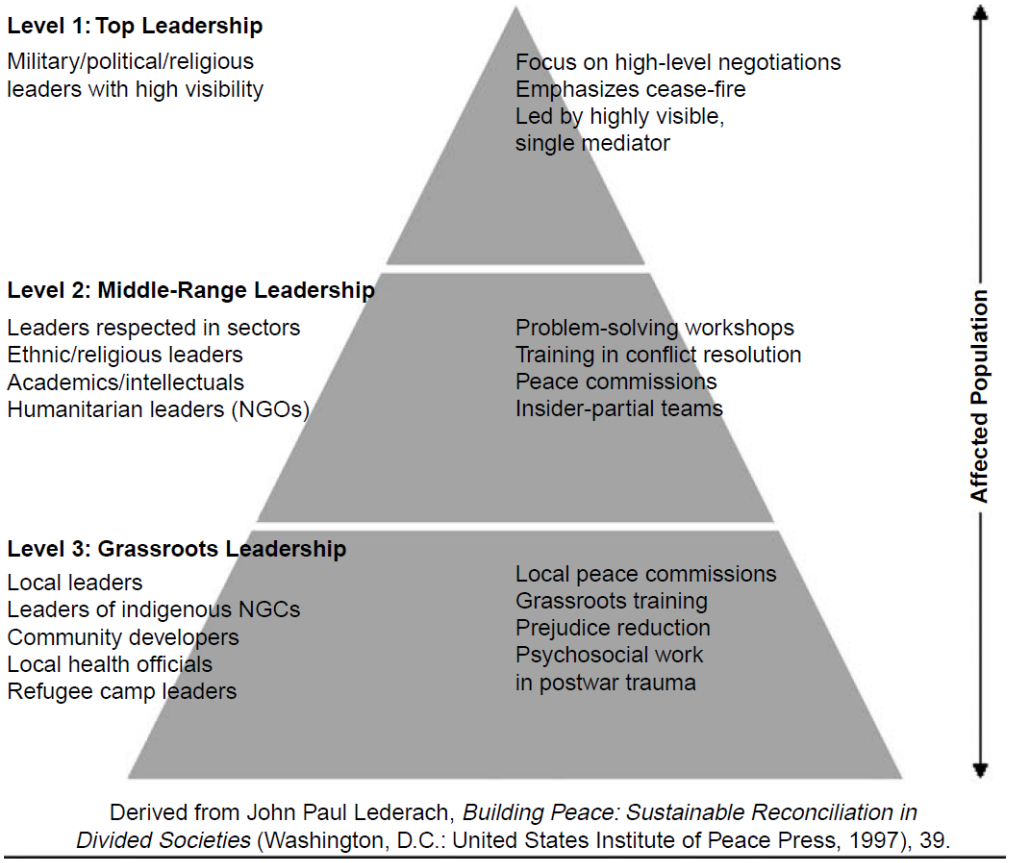

Figure 2. Lederach's 'Pyramid' Model (Lederach 1997)

2015). Multi-party mediation involves two or more third parties supporting negotiating parties in reaching a settlement. This is accompanied by co-operation or competition between third parties, having positive or negative effects on a given peace process. With the increasing involvement of NGOs and other informal actors in high-level peacemaking, studies began to propose new elements of the track concept. For instance, Track 1.5 diplomacy describes "public or private interaction between official representatives of conflicting government or political entities such as popular armed movements, which is facilitated or mediated by a third party not representing a political organisation or institution" (Mapendere 2005, p. 69). This encompasses mediation efforts by professionalised conflict resolution organisations such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the Carter Center and the Crisis Management Initiative (Nan 2005).

The Lederach-inspired view and language of peacebuilding has become mainstream among peace practitioners, resulting in the growing salience of a "multitrack approach" as a way to promote peace in a "holistic and inclusive fashion" (Dudouet, Eshaq et al. 2018, p. 183). This is reflected, for example, in the discourse around the architecture of peace processes, or "infrastructures for peace", described as a "dynamic network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a society" (Lidén 2006, Kumar and De la Haye 2011, p. 14, Richmond 2012). The mainstreaming of multitrack approaches has been enhanced further by emerging normative imperatives around inclusivity, national ownership and the emphasis on "local" peace actors. While a multitrack approach encourages interconnectivity between levels of society, the inclusivity logic has concentrated mainly on fostering the participation of broader segments of society – beyond armed actors and political elites – in formal peace negotiations. The inclusion of actors such as civil society representatives, women, young people, religious leaders or business actors aims to connect these actors to official representatives in negotiations, and has emphasised supporting Track II and III initiatives or linking them to the Track I level (Paffenholz 2013).

The Lederach-inspired view and language of peacebuilding has become mainstream among peace practitioners…

1.2 Policy Frameworks Around Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes

The logic and language of multitrack approaches have also influenced the policies of international organisations and governments. In recent years, large-scale reviews of the international peacemaking architecture have resulted in strategic frameworks, such as the UN's *Sustaining Peace* policy[7], and comprehensive reports such as the UN and the World Bank's *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*[8]. To foster the *Sustaining Peace* policy, the Security Council and the General Assembly passed two identical resolutions emphasising "the importance of national ownership and leadership in peacebuilding, whereby the responsibility for sustaining peace is broadly shared by the Government and all other national stakeholders" (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282). Referring to the complexity of contemporary conflicts, the *Pathways for Peace* report, in the first of eight key messages on prevention, calls on "policy makers at all levels, from local to global, to make a more concerted effort to bring their tools and instruments to bear in an effective and complementary way" (United Nations and World Bank 2018, xviii). According to the report, inclusive policies, decision-making and processes, including peace processes, are "fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels" (United Nations and World Bank, xix). The UN Secretary-General's 2017 report on *United Nations Activities in Support of Mediation* places emphasis on the fact that "local-level dialogues and peace initiatives can provide a basis for and act as complements to a formal peace process" (United Nations 2017, p 10).

These policy imperatives have particularly influenced the peacebuilding field, guiding both national and international peace practitioners to focus on designing processes that pursue "both a top-down and bottom-up approach in parallel tracks, which reinforce and inform each other" (Dudouet, Eshaq et al. 2018, p. 183). Some high-level mediators also increasingly see themselves as "orchestra conductors" (Feltman 2019) who work with regional organisations and NGOs to support many peace initiatives operating on different levels of society. Mediation experts have explicitly recommended European Union (EU) mediators and dialogue supporters to "operationalise a 'multi-track' approach" (Herrberg, Gündüz et al. 2009, p. 7) and, in its 2016 Global Strategy, the EU commits to pursuing "a multi-level approach to conflicts acting at the local, national, regional and global levels" (EEAS 2016, p. 29). The African Union Mediation Support Handbook underlines the efforts of the mediator to co-ordinate different tracks, while ECOWAS highlights the need to "forge alliances and coordination among the tracks." (ECOWAS 2017, p. 12).

States have also adopted track language and concepts in their foreign policies. For instance, the German Federal Foreign Office in its Peace Mediation Framework expresses its preference for "multi-track approaches or national dialogues [whenever they] can increase the likelihood of reaching a lasting and comprehensive solution" (Federal Foreign Office 2019). A 2018 report commissioned by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs presenting a vision of foreign policy outlines the importance of a bottom-up approach to peace policy, on which it believes Switzerland is well-positioned to offer expertise (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs 2019). Sweden's peace policy emphasises the importance of inclusive processes and the participation of civil society and local actors in peacebuilding and state-building. In its Strategy for Sustainable Peace, the Swedish Government underlines that Sweden's "support at national and local level in critical stages of peacebuilding […] shall include […] increased local participation in peace processes" (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017).

States have also adopted track language and concepts in their foreign policies.

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7 The UN developed the Sustaining Peace approach in response to the three major reviews of the UN's peace operations, the UN peacebuilding architecture and the UN's work on the women, peace and security agenda that were carried out in 2015. Sustaining Peace emphasises the need to focus on prevention based on a more nuanced understanding of conflicts and conflict management and aims to narrow the gap between development and peacebuilding efforts. For a discussion of the Sustaining Peace approach, see for example: https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/04/sustaining-peace-can-new-approach-change-un.

8 To access the *Pathways for Peace* report, please visit: https://www.pathwaysforpeace.org.

2. Multitrack Realities: Insights from Ongoing Peace Processes

More than two decades after the multitrack language became mainstream among international peace practitioners, the complexity of conflicts, the fragmentation of conflict parties and the lack of co-ordination among international actors (Preston McGhie 2019) calls for further reflection on the use of track language and new ways of thinking about multitrack approaches. Peace processes can no longer be understood as centring on a single mediator working with just two negotiating parties in a single series of high-level negotiations. The need to critically analyse the understanding and practice of multitrack approaches to peace processes is ever more pressing given the fast-changing landscape of conflict and peacebuilding. While there is a wealth of existing and emerging peace research literature calling for a more critical approach to peacebuilding (Paris 2002, Mac Ginty 2008, Lidén, Mac Ginty et al. 2009, Hellmüller 2018, Hellmüller 2019), the application, impact and effectiveness of multitrack approaches which are built on theories of conflict transformation have not been systematically examined.

With the aim of furthering our understanding of the application of multitrack approaches in contemporary peace process, the following sections provide insights and reflections generated through a retreat with peace practitioners[9] from Colombia, Myanmar, Syria, Ukraine and Zimbabwe in September 2019.

2.1 The Use of Track Language in Different Contexts

Peace practitioners use the language of 'tracks' as if there was a common understanding of what this means. In discussions, many participants at the retreat used track language as an analytical tool to describe and map different peace initiatives – including the actors, structures and linkages involved – albeit with different understandings and expectations. For instance, while many participants clearly defined Track I actors and initiatives as official talks with the highest political leadership, including government and the top leadership of non-state armed groups, and Track III as grassroots initiatives and actors, an understanding of *who* and *what* actually constituted Track II actors and initiatives was lacking. However, discussions among participants reflected the idea that the static depiction of society in three levels of leadership, as proposed by Lederach's pyramid, rarely holds up to reality. In many contexts, the same individuals are often represented in different initiatives at different levels.

Discussions on the characteristics, criteria and objectives of the different tracks, although mostly understood as levels of society, revealed conceptual confusion among participants. For example, Syrian participants outlined the diverse range of initiatives and actors involved in the peace processes according to Lederach's pyramid model and argued that tracks and actors could be identified through respective decision-making and influencing power, in addition to the type of communication and information channel, professional and social background of the participants and outcomes of the process. Some Syrian participants added an additional 'international' track. Participants from Ukraine identified three tracks as "international", "national Ukrainian" and "civil society level". Meanwhile, participants from Myanmar explained that track language is deliberately used as a means for designing the peace architecture, but does not necessarily reflect multitrack realities on the ground. Within the rather formal peace architecture, often the same actors are involved in different initiatives on different levels. Hence, participants prefer to refer directly to the different initiatives instead of tracks or levels. In the Colombian context, track language is not commonly used, as other concepts are applied to refer to different actors and initiatives such as local, regional or national.

Furthermore, in many cases, track language was described as being imported by international peace practitioners and donors rather than reflecting contextual realities. In order to attract funding for their initiatives, national peace practitioners (particularly NGOs) use track language and design their programme activities accordingly. For instance, participants from Colombia explained that mainly academic scholars, who have studied abroad, and NGOs interacting with international peace practitioners use track language, while other national peace practitioners refer to different, more context-specific terms and concepts. Participants from Syria also confirmed that they use track language mostly in exchanges with international peace practitioners and in international platforms, despite directly calling actors and initiatives by their names when speaking with Syrian stakeholders. Participants from Myanmar clarified that owing to their education and training received abroad, they apply track language regularly. However, most participants viewed track language as limiting and often subject to misunderstanding. They put greater emphasis on the objectives and intentions of the different initiatives and the influence of the actors involved. For instance, in the case of Ukraine, participants explained that the track concept and language is currently not applicable, because their society is undergoing a transition that is reshaping institutions and relationships.

9 Hereafter referred to as participants. For confidentiality reasons, insights from participants will not be attributed in this report.

2.2 Impact and Linkages Between Different Initiatives

A large part of the discussions focused on how different initiatives interact and have impact upon each other (or not). Despite the common assumption that linking initiatives within and across levels of society creates beneficial outcomes, many participants believed that little attention is paid to how to create linkages and what kind of impact these linkages have in practice. Instead, it is generally assumed that setting up formal linkages between initiatives is always necessary and favourable. This is particularly visible in contexts which have a sophisticated peace architecture. Indeed, participants agreed that such linkages do often create positive impact, such as information-sharing, the strengthening of capacities, trust and consensus-building, as well as increased legitimacy and ownership of the overall peace process. In the case of Syria, the establishment of the Women's Advisory Board not only enabled the Office of the UN Special Envoy to listen to a broader and more diverse range of voices, but it also changed the mindset of different national actors about the role of women in the peace process. The international support for Colombian civil society actors at the national and local level contributed positively to the most recent peace process by opening up political space, promoting an exchange of views and enhancing alliances.

Despite the positive impact, linking initiatives, especially across levels of society, may also generate negative effects. For example, some participants felt that formal linkages of local initiatives to high-level negotiations might lead to polarisation, with a possible negative impact on trust-building or even security risks for participants. In the case of Colombia, grassroots peace practitioners faced increasing threats and harassment after they supported the implementation of the high-level peace agreement. These security risks also affect the dynamics of trust-building at the local level. Syrian participants in dialogue processes that aim to influence the political process face security threats against family members still living inside Syria. In Ukraine, many civil society actors do not desire to create any linkages to political negotiations as they consider the reputational risks to be too high. Participants also mentioned that some dialogue forums, often promoted by governments or international donors, only seek to gather information about the different initiatives instead of creating real opportunities to engage across levels of society. Some participants argued that, while expectations have to be managed, the exchange of information between initiatives is important. For example in Zimbabwe, peace practitioners from civil society may facilitate co-ordination and information-sharing between different initiatives and actors, without creating official linkages between initiatives. Through informal exchanges, various actors may realise that their initiatives are working towards the same goal, with potential synergies or overlaps. Certain linkages between initiatives may also create more space for actors with a spoiling potential. Sometimes different initiatives can also be in competition with each other and incentivise 'forum shopping'.

Participants also discussed that further harm may be done when linkages between initiatives lack proper design or real commitment – often resulting in 'fake' interactions within and across levels of society. These types of linkages may waste resources and have the potential of increasing frustration and mistrust among participants. In the case of Myanmar, practitioners mentioned that many co-ordination meetings are held without any effective outcome or progress. This shows that even sophisticated peace architectures with formal linkages do not automatically translate into positive and efficient linkages. Creating linkages between initiatives without proper reflection may be counterproductive. Hence, it is essential to apply a conflict-sensitive approach to linking initiatives, by reflecting clearly on the *why* and *how* of linkages and assessing possible negative consequences.

Throughout the discussions at the retreat, it became apparent that the connection to Track I negotiations was used as the main reference point for multitrack approaches. Many participants had a strong focus on linking initiatives upwards towards high-level political negotiations. Track I was seen by many participants as the centre of power and the place where real change happens. Often, national or local level peace practitioners feel the need to prove the value and worth of their initiatives through formal linkages with high-level negotiations. This may lead to competition for legitimacy and representation among different Track II initiatives, because international donors also emphasise the importance of getting access to 'the table'. In contexts with ongoing high-level political negotiations or sophisticated peace architectures in place, the creation of formal linkages between certain Track II and Track III initiatives and actors and the Track I negotiations has resulted in the marginalisation of other initiatives and the weakening of other approaches affecting positive change. Participants from Colombia observed that once the political negotiations started in Havana, many actors and initiatives from different levels of society were trying to get access to these high-level negotiations, while overlooking the need to strengthen linkages between different sectors of society at the local and national level. Participants from Myanmar realised that initiatives outside the formal peace architecture contribute to social cohesion and consensus-building from which the overall process benefits and that this has a value on its own. In Syria, where the political process at Track I level has shown little progress, initiatives at other levels of society have continued to prove their importance, independent of any linkage to the formal political process. For example, civil society peace initiatives that brought to-

…it is essential to apply a conflict-sensitive approach to linking initiatives, by reflecting clearly on the *why* and *how* of linkages and assessing possible negative consequences.

gether different communities across societal and religious divides countered efforts to frame the conflict in sectarian terms. Some practitioners also argued that a strong focus on Track I negotiations, with top-down linkages, bears the risk of negative trickle-down effects on the other initiatives if the peace negotiations collapse or stall. In the case of Zimbabwe, participants stressed that there are no formal linkages between some of the key dialogue initiatives, working in parallel to protect the different spaces. In Colombia, the outcome of successful peace negotiations has been limited so far, as national and local level peacebuilding challenges have inhibited a clear transition from the negotiating table to positive changes on the ground.

… in many conflict contexts, key personalities that are involved in the different initiatives create the crucial linkages between them.

Moreover, the discussions shed light on the personalised dimension of a multitrack approach to peace processes: in many conflict contexts, key personalities that are involved in the different initiatives create the crucial linkages between them. In the context of Colombia, participants stressed that initiatives within and across different levels of society may be connected through specific personalities or institutions who can mobilise efforts around a common idea. For example, some religious leaders have in-depth understanding and benefit from trust at the local level, while also being able to engage with broad sectors of society and access political decision-makers. In the case of Myanmar, leading civil society actors have served as crucial linkages between levels of society by implementing peace initiatives on local and regional levels as well as participating as mediators in high-level national talks with ethnic groups.

2.3 The Role of International Peace Practitioners

The initial Lederach pyramid assumed that actors at a given level of society engage in a specific type of initiative (e.g. Track I actors act only in high-level negotiations). However, discussions among participants reflected that often the same individuals or entities are represented in different initiatives at different levels. The complexity of initiatives and linkages as part of a peace process has a bearing on the understanding of the role of national and international peace practitioners, especially those who play formal third party roles. The discussions among participants clearly showed the extent to which the concept of multitrack approaches has affected the way peace practitioners conceive of their roles and how they engage with partners in the context of peace processes.

Participants underlined how multitrack approaches may inform the strategies of international donors and support actors. On the one hand, there are many examples where international support, based on a multitrack approach, has been instrumental for engaging with civil society actors or initiatives at different levels of society. International partners can enable these actors and initiatives through funding, capacity-building and political support, as for example in the case of Myanmar. Participants highlighted that, in certain cases, international peace practitioners can act as messengers between different initiatives. In contexts such as Colombia and Syria, the support of international peace practitioners to local dialogue initiatives helped to open up space for broader civic engagements. In the context of Zimbabwe, platforms for exchanging experiences organised by international donors were considered useful spaces for dialogue and capacity-building.

On the other hand, international peace practitioners need to leverage their influential role, through a conflict-sensitive approach, without imposing their own agenda. The fact that national peace practitioners use track language mostly, or sometimes exclusively, in exchanges with international donors may raise questions about national ownership. Funding patterns can create dependencies where international donors push for a specific understanding of a multitrack approach, without necessarily considering the realities of the conflict context. Conditions and expectations of international actors concerning the process, content and outcome of initiatives tends to increase their level of complexity, possibly overburdening certain initiatives. Furthermore, in certain contexts, international support can affect some actors and initiatives negatively, for example by creating perceptions that they are representing foreign agendas.

The discussion among participants confirmed the inadequacy of the idea of a 'lone mediator' managing a single, relatively linear process. One participant provided the image of a 'conductor' orchestrating a jazz concert, as a more adequate depiction of the realities in certain peace processes, considering the 'improvisation' by different actors within the process. In the case of Syria, for example, the UN Special Envoy for Syria and his office are not able to solely focus on the UN-led peace process in Geneva; they need to interact with other initiatives at different levels, both Syrian and international. In many cases, there is no 'conductor' at all, with only informal co-ordination among national and international actors taking roles at different level of society. Therefore, participants highlighted the need for co-ordination among national and international peace practitioners to develop organically, with a multitrack approach in mind and based on the realities of the context. Engagements by international peace practitioners and donors have to be demand-driven and conflict-sensitive.

3. Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes

Insights from the retreat provide some initial guidance for peace practitioners intending to integrate or leverage multitrack approaches in their efforts to foster sustainable peace. The report presents five main points for reflection:

- **Questioning what is behind the terms and concepts:** Peace processes take place within a specific context with its historical, socio-cultural and political implications. Despite the usage of mainstream terms and conceptual models within the international peacebuilding community, peace practitioners do not necessarily share the same understanding of these terms and models. This can lead to misunderstandings or oversimplification of peacebuilding approaches. Therefore, peace practitioners need to be aware of the different ways these terms are understood and clarify their particular use of terms and concepts in relation to multitrack approaches to peace processes. In practice, it is important to describe theories of change in detail, rather than to refer to buzzwords and broad concepts.

- **Building sustainable peace requires working at various levels of society with different objectives and timeframes:** Responding to complex, multifaceted conflicts often calls for multitrack approaches. These approaches require an awareness of the multifaceted nature of conflicts, as well as of the existence of multiple dialogue, negotiation and mediation initiatives, with different actors, objectives and timeframes, at different levels of society. A variety of initiatives at different levels of society are needed to build sustainable peace. Formal peace negotiations may operate in a short-term timeframe with a specific objective, while initiatives on other levels of society usually aim for middle- and long-term contributions to the broader process of building sustainable peace. Therefore, national and international peace practitioners need to acknowledge the value of the multitude of initiatives, and aim to ensure complementarity among them.

- **Considering effective contributions to sustainable peace, independently of formal linkages to peace negotiations:** Track I processes, such as peace negotiations, are important for ending armed conflicts and paving the way towards building sustainable peace. In this sense, it is important for broader segments of society, beyond the parties to an armed conflict, to be able to make their views, needs and proposals adequately heard in such negotiations. However, a multitrack approach goes beyond linking different levels of society to formal peace negotiations. Initiatives at different levels of society are not only valuable when they are linked directly or indirectly to Track I processes. Dialogue, negotiations and mediation initiatives can make important contributions to building sustainable peace at different levels of society, independently of formal linkages to peace processes, for example by creating horizontal linkages in a polarised society. In order to recognise this, peace practitioners and donors should not exclusively prioritise initiatives that claim some form of linkage to peace negotiations.

- **Fostering positive linkages between initiatives within and across different levels of society:** When useful, a multitrack approach to a peace process fosters linkages between initiatives – horizontally within a level of society and vertically across levels of society. Such linkages can take many forms, and be formal or informal. It is important to consider clearly what the purpose of fostering a particular linkage is, and how it should be done.

- **Linking initiatives and actors must be done in a conflict-sensitive way:** Different initiatives may have a positive or negative impact on each other. Therefore, it is essential to consider sensitivities around the conflict, based on an in-depth conflict analysis, when promoting linkages between different initiatives. A more explicit understanding of the linkages within and across the different levels of society may allow for a more conscious leveraging of the positive linkages, while preventing, or mitigating the effects of, negative linkages. This is important for peace practitioners supporting different initiatives and advising on the design of peace processes, as well as donors engaging in funding initiatives at different levels of society.

Conclusion

By taking stock of existing theoretical concepts and policies around multitrack approaches, and assessing how they relate to current peace processes, this report has presented nuanced observations on multitrack approaches to peace processes. While the brief foray into academia and peace policy has illustrated the salience of multitrack approaches to peace processes, the report has highlighted that existing terminology and concepts around these multitrack approaches are often confusing, imprecise and perceived as limiting. There is no common understanding of what constitutes 'tracks' among peace practitioners. However, language matters, as peace practitioners must understand the meaning of the precise terms they commonly use to explain their theories of change. Equally, there is little conceptual clarity about multitrack approaches to peace processes. References to multitrack approaches often allude to Lederach's pyramid model, but there is no commonly shared understanding of how 'multitrack approaches' should be applied in practice.

Among peace practitioners and across different contexts, there is often a general assumption that linking initiatives within and across different levels of society is positive. The potentially negative effects of linking initiatives are rarely considered. Furthermore, there is a strong focus on ways to connect different levels of society 'upwards' towards high-level peace negotiations. So-called 'Track II processes' are mostly evaluated according to their ability to have an impact on high-level peace negotiations. As many national and international peace practitioners focus almost exclusively on peace negotiations, as high-level decision-making processes, other initiatives that are not related to these negotiations may suffer from a lack of attention, pointing to a narrow understanding of how to build sustainable peace. Often there is only limited consideration of other theories of change – involving initiatives at different levels of society, and different horizontal and vertical linkages – as an essential complement to Track I processes.

In view of the multifaceted nature of conflicts, peace processes need to be viewed comprehensively in order to gain a greater understanding of how initiatives at different levels of society, and their linkages, can foster sustainable peace. Based on analytical insights from different conflict contexts, this report provides some initial reflections on when, and how, peace practitioners can leverage multitrack approaches. This report is exploratory. It does not provide any new concepts and definite answers. Therefore, the project – and the four organisations promoting it – invite peace practitioners and scholars to comment on this report, in order to help clarify concepts and provide practical guidance on multitrack approaches to peace processes. Meanwhile, the project will look for further ways to pursue practice-based research for this purpose.

Annex 1: Working Definitions of Key Words or Concepts

Initiative: An act, strategy or effort to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation. In the context of peace processes, an initiative can refer to mediation, dialogue or negotiation processes.

Process: A series of actions or steps to resolve a conflict.

Peace Process: Activities or initiatives taking place in a society with the broad goal of conflict resolution and/or transformation. Peace processes can include, but are distinct from, initiatives such as peace negotiations.

Track: Different levels of society, as per Lederach's (1997) conceptualisation. References to tracks as different types of processes (e.g. formal track, back-channel), as used by certain peace practitioners, are avoided in this report to prevent confusion.

Interaction: An intentional or unintentional connection between two or more initiatives.

Impact: The possible effect of one initiative on another, whether intentional or unintentional.

Linkage: The conscious establishment of a connection between different initiatives. A linkage denotes agency on the part of actors that 'create' the linkage.

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About the Organisations

Folke Bernadotte Academy

The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development. FBA supports international peace operations and international development cooperation. The agency conducts training, research and method development in order to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict and post-conflict countries. We also recruit civilian personnel and expertise for peace operations and election observation missions led by the EU, UN and OSCE. The agency is named after Count Folke Bernadotte, the first UN mediator.

swisspeace

swisspeace is a practice-oriented peace research institute. It analyses the causes of violent conflicts and develops strategies for their peaceful transformation. swisspeace aims to contribute to the improvement of conflict prevention and conflict transformation by producing innovative research, shaping discourses on international peace policy, developing and applying new peacebuilding tools and methodologies, supporting and advising other peace actors, as well as by providing and facilitating spaces for analysis, discussion, critical reflection and learning. swisspeace is an associated Institute of the University of Basel and member of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is a centre of competence for Swiss and international security policy. It offers security policy expertise in research, teaching, and consulting activities. The CSS promotes understanding of security policy challenges as a contribution to a more peaceful world. Its work is independent, practice-relevant, and based on a sound academic footing. It combines research and policy consultancy and, as such, functions as a bridge between academia and practice. It trains highly qualified junior researchers and serves as a point of contact and information for the interested public.

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) is a Swiss-based private diplomacy organisation founded on the principles of humanity, impartiality and independence. Its mission is to help prevent, mitigate and resolve armed conflict through dialogue and mediation. HD opens channels of communication with, and mediates directly between, conflict parties, providing a confidential space for them to explore options for a negotiated settlement or for humanitarian access. HD may also support or facilitate dialogue with a wider range of representatives, including civil society as well as national and community leaders. In addition, HD promotes discussion around emerging challenges and conducts research on mediation issues, sharing insights drawn from its own operational experiences. The organisation is currently involved in more than 40 dialogue and mediation initiatives in over 25 countries.

Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Mediation for peace

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