



NONFORMAL DIALOGUES IN NATIONAL PEACEMAKING COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Nonformal, inquiry-based dialogues have played an important role in advancing peacemaking and other political change processes in countries such as Nepal, Lebanon, and Myanmar. This report draws extensively on the experiences of national stakeholders in both nonformal and formal national dialogue processes who participated in the two international conferences on national dialogues in April 2014 and November 2015 hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Through subsequent research supported by the United States Institute of Peace under the Jennings Randolph Fellowship program, the report involved extensive consultations, meetings, and interviews with national stakeholders, including participants, staff, advisers, donors, and observers of both formal and nonformal dialogue processes in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

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[Both nonformal and formal national dialogues have arisen in part as a response to the growing emphasis on indigenous national responses to the challenge of conflict transformation and the ongoing effort to ensure that peacemaking processes are more inclusive.]

Summary

- Nonformal national dialogues are a type of national architecture for peacemaking and peacebuilding. This report examines several nonformal dialogues initiated in Nepal, Lebanon, and Burma since 2003.
- Both nonformal and formal national dialogues have arisen in part as a response to the growing emphasis on indigenous national responses to the challenge of conflict transformation and the ongoing effort to ensure that peacemaking processes are more inclusive.
- Nonformal dialogues are distinguished from their formal counterparts (which they often complement) in the type and origin of their mandates, their less public character, types of participants (which may include those sidelined from, or who refuse to participate in, formal dialogues), their extended duration, and a generally smaller size.
- In peace and political change processes, nonformal national dialogues can help stabilize a peace process, particularly when formal processes have broken down.
- Nonformal national dialogue processes and their stakeholders need significant support from local, national, and international sources but, as multistakeholder entities, must be independent of, and perceived to be independent of, the influence of any one constituency or donor.
- As seen in Nepal, Lebanon, and Burma, nonformal dialogues can provide valuable input into official negotiations and policy recommendations for governments and other entities over many years. During their lifetime, nonformal dialogues may well need to evolve to reflect and address changing circumstances in the wider society.
- Though not without risks, nonformal dialogues offer a flexible mechanism for engaging national stakeholders in structured and sequenced peacemaking efforts even when political and security conditions may not favor a formal, public national dialogue.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, a new architecture for international peacebuilding support has emerged. The most visible element of this architecture has been the expansion of the United Nations' diplomatic efforts, which complement the organization's better-known "blue helmet" peacekeeping duties. Regional organizations, such as the Africa Union (formerly the Organization of African Unity) and the Gulf Cooperation Council, have also taken a greater role in peacebuilding initiatives among their member states. Along with the expanding role of official multilateral actors, there has also been a significant increase both in the number of international civil society organizations engaged in peacebuilding and in the breadth of the peacebuilding activities they undertake.¹

As the international architecture for peacebuilding support has expanded, and especially in the last decade and a half, there has been a parallel interest in the development of a corresponding national architecture. Some practitioners and scholars have dubbed these national support structures "infrastructures for peace."² Formal structures, such as ministries for peace, local peace councils, various types of transitional justice institutions, and national dialogue processes, have received the most attention. In addition, researchers have looked at the less tangible (but no less important) area of national capabilities for undertaking peacebuilding.

This report focuses on an emerging type of national architectures for peacebuilding: long-term political dialogues that are national in scope, both in the issues they address and in the breadth of their membership, but nonformal in their structure. The term "nonformal" aims to draw a distinction between those formal national dialogues that are generally officially mandated by existing governments, often in conjunction with international bodies, and are conducted in public and those dialogues whose mandates derive from the participating parties and are often conducted out of the limelight, which I term "nonformal." (For more on this distinction, see box 1, "Mapping National Dialogues: Differences in Degree and in Kind.") In examining how nonformal political dialogues, and the structures that host and support them, contribute to formal political change processes, the report draws extensively on experiences in three countries, Lebanon, Burma, and Nepal, and to a lesser extent on processes in Tajikistan and Cyprus.

The experiences with nonformal and formal dialogues in four of these five countries were the subject of a session at the Second Conference on Non-formal Dialogue Processes and National Dialogues, held in Helsinki in November 2015. While not a random sample, the cases profiled in this report were selected with several factors in mind, including diversity of types of conflicts, diversity of types of nonformal dialogues and their support structures, the accessibility of stakeholders to the nonformal dialogues under study, and in two cases the author's familiarity with the conflict and intermediaries.

All of the cases profiled have distinct identities and origins, but they also possess several shared characteristics. Most are longer-term endeavors that emerged through collaboration among political parties, nonstate actors, civil society, and governments, often with support from international institutions. Their membership is often closely tied to official structures, whether formal negotiations, national legislatures, or formal dialogues themselves.

The primary focus of nonformal dialogues is to host a political dialogue on national issues at the Track 1.5 level (that is, processes involving official and nonofficial senior leadership from within stakeholder groups). What distinguishes nonformal dialogues from many prior experiences of what is commonly known as Track 2 diplomacy is their membership (including the involvement of official senior leadership), as well as their locale, frequency, and duration. Most nonformal dialogues, such as those profiled here, are convened by national stakeholders

within their own countries, unlike many prior experiences with forms of Track 2 diplomacy, which have been convened in neutral external environments. Most of the nonformal dialogues profiled here have involved frequent (often weekly) meetings of their stakeholders over many years, while many of the previous efforts at Track 2 diplomacy entailed much less frequent meetings over relatively short time periods.

Most dialogues have support structures with staff offering facilitation support, research services, and other forms of assistance, and some also offer dedicated physical spaces within which dialogue can take place. Several stakeholders involved in the processes have adopted the term “common space” both to describe the conceptual and physical structure of the political dialogue and to serve as an aspirational statement of the role of nonformal dialogues—namely, to provide a space or a platform for dialogue that involves and resonates with a society’s diverse and often conflicted communities.

Box 1. Mapping National Dialogues: Differences in Degree and in Kind

The appellation “national dialogue” has increasingly been employed in the past fifty years to describe a broad spectrum of concepts and initiatives. The term has been used to encompass everything from the idea for a “national conversation” on important topics (for example, First Lady Betty Ford’s advocacy in the 1970s, which resulted in a national dialogue on addiction) to a variety of more distinct and institutionalized efforts, such as the 2008–09 political process in Senegal known as the Assises Nationales, a nongovernmental dialogue that brought together the country’s opposition groups and produced the Good Governance Charter, and the political efforts of four civil society groups in Tunisia (collectively known as “the Quartet”) beginning in 2013 that brokered a compromise among the country’s political factions, resulting in the selection of a new prime minister and ratification of a new constitution in January 2015 and presidential elections later that year. (The Quartet was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for its efforts).

In light of the diversity of experiences of national dialogues, particularly in their institutionalized form, this report proposes a typology of national dialogues based on six key dimensions: the source and type of their mandate, their size, their participants, their duration, whether they are explicitly public processes or are conducted out of the public eye, and their relation to official processes (whether national legislatures or formal negotiations). These six key dimensions, plus one less distinctive but nonetheless characteristic dimension, and the scope of the issues they address, are shown in table 1.

The diversity of national experiences means that clear-cut categories with easily marked definitional boundaries are elusive; most boundaries are hazy and porous. This typology does lend itself, however, to the mapping of various institutionalized national dialogues into two broad categories, formal and nonformal.

Nonformal dialogues, such as those examined in this report, tend to emerge in stages, usually drawing on the reputation of their initial organizers to attract a broader membership and eventually deriving their mandate from the extent to which influential leaders from across multiple constituencies agree to participate. The mandates of formal processes, by contrast, are usually derived from agreements between governments and their opposing parties. While nonformal dialogues, like formal dialogues, aim to be inclusive in their membership, they usually have fewer participants than most formal national dialogues. Nonformal dialogues tend to draw their membership from the second-tier leadership of the political parties and groups that participate, and often include those groups that either have been unwilling to join or have been excluded from formal negotiations. They are not established to conclude within a given time frame, and their duration is usually far longer than that of formal dialogues. Nonformal dialogues tend to be conducted out of the glare of media attention, whereas formal processes are more likely to attract significant media interest. Formal national dialogues are also more likely to have a predefined path for the consideration of their recommendations by official decision-making bodies. Nonformal processes are more likely to affect official decision-making bodies indirectly, through the influence exerted by their members on decision makers and through informal relationships established between institutional players.

Table 1. Key Dimensions of Nonformal and Formal Dialogues

Nonformal Dialogues	Formal Dialogues
Issue Scope	
<i>National and regional</i>	<i>National</i>
Membership	
<i>Second-tier leaders and influential figures</i>	<i>Leaders, influential figures, and activists</i>
Inclusivity	
<i>Broadly inclusive, often including proscribed stakeholders</i>	<i>Broadly inclusive</i>
Size	
<i>Small to medium-sized</i>	<i>Usually large-scale conferences</i>
Duration and Frequency	
<i>Open-ended and recurrent</i>	<i>Time-limited, with numerous meetings over short periods of time</i>
Mandate	
<i>Official and unofficial</i>	<i>Official and predetermined</i>
Openness/Transparency	
<i>Out of the limelight</i>	<i>Public</i>

The emergence in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East of both nonformal and formal national dialogues and their support structures parallels two important trends in the development of a more robust approach to national peace and political transformation processes. The first trend is the increasing emphasis on the development of indigenous national responses to the challenge of conflict transformation, responses that reflect the values, traditions, belief systems, and other tangible and intangible peace assets of particular societies. The second trend is the ongoing efforts by national and international actors alike to ensure that peacemaking processes are more inclusive by expanding participation in the arenas and institutions through which peacemaking and peacebuilding processes occur. Both the mixed track record of international mediation of elite negotiations and a growing understanding of the benefits of increased participation in political change processes have helped drive these trends.³

One of the striking aspects of the cases examined in this report is the enduring commitment of their participants. Until a decade or so ago, most nonformal dialogues were convened by international actors and did not last long. In most of the cases profiled here, stakeholders have continued to participate in the dialogues for many years. Although the short-term impact of these dialogues has varied, in several cases the dialogues have greatly influenced decisions taken by negotiators and political leaders in both Track 1 negotiations and formal, constitutionally mandated institutions. As endeavors that have attracted the ongoing, voluntary participation of senior political stakeholders over years and that are perceived by their participants as making concrete contributions, these structures warrant further research and study.

This report first examines the historical record of dialogue processes and other consultative mechanisms, explains their recent evolution in conflict-affected societies, and distinguishes between formal and nonformal dialogues. It then turns to the four main contributions that nonformal dialogues can make in peacebuilding and political reform processes, examines the forms these dialogues take in the broader peacebuilding ecosystem, and discusses how institutional

structures develop to support them. Drawing on the experiences of the multiple dialogues surveyed, this report proposes seven principles for launching and maximizing the potential success of nonformal dialogues and offers a distillation of important factors and questions for would-be organizers of nonformal dialogues to consider. The report concludes with summary observations of the key features of nonformal dialogues, their evolving roles in societies emerging from violent political conflict, and the implications for their international supporters.

National Political Dialogues: Historical Antecedents and Current Forms

As used in this report, “dialogue” refers both to a structure and to a particular way of engaging in communication with others. Contemporary definitions of dialogue describe it as a type of communication among individuals characterized by “exploration of a particular subject” intended to “resolve a problem.”⁴ National efforts at political dialogue, characterized as both a separate structure and a distinct type of problem-solving communication, have existed for millennia. In many historical examples, common features include an emphasis on consultation and issue exploration (with or without explicit decision-making authority) and expanded participation.

For instance, from the eighth through the eleventh centuries, the Anglo-Saxon moots convened a broad array of participants, incorporating diverse sections of society in a consultative capacity. Among the various types of moots were the “witenagemot,” an assembly of “wise men with whom the king took counsel in legislation and government of the state,”⁵ and the “witans,” councils of nobles that did not make law but were consulted by the king.⁶ In North America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Iroquois Confederacy utilized a consensus-based, intertribal decision-making body with fifty members known as the Council.⁷

In contemporary politics and political systems, communications and decision-making structures are characterized by negotiation or debate. In countries experiencing violent political conflict (and even in long-standing democracies), however, political communication can break down and negotiation through established structures can become impossible, thereby creating the need for parallel structures promoting dialogue and more exploratory problem-solving conversations. National-level political dialogues are one example of such a structure. They can occur during most phases of a national peace and political change process. Dialogue processes are most often recognizable in the deliberative processes of constituent assemblies, leading to fundamental constitutional reforms. Less well recognized are the roles they play as a mechanism to generate proposals for negotiated ceasefires and comprehensive peace accords and as a means of addressing ongoing political divides in postconflict peacebuilding when existing constitutional branches of government have failed to resolve existential conflicts.

The term “national dialogue” has been applied to a disparate universe of examples, most with uneven reputations and few that have been closely studied. The diversity of these processes creates a challenge to the study of their role in conflict resolution. The most prominent recent examples of national-level political dialogue have been the raft of national processes launched throughout the Middle East and North Africa in conjunction with the Arab Uprisings (sometimes known as the Arab Spring). The differences among these dialogues were at least as great as their similarities. Two of the better-known formal processes—both convened in 2013—were Yemen’s National Dialogue and Tunisia’s National Dialogue, the latter of which emerged in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution events of 2011. Yemen’s was an official assembly, attended by 565 participants, who met daily over a period of nine months. Tunisia’s process more closely resembled a series of intensely mediated negotiations and dialogues

among diverse stakeholders in society, led by the country's largest labor union, the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail.

Less public examples of national-level political dialogues held during the past several decades have been endeavors involving groups of stakeholders in national conflicts, such as the initially confidential problem-solving workshops on the Israel-Palestine conflict convened by Herbert Kelman and Nadim Rouhana beginning in the 1990s, and the series of meetings convened under the auspices of the Harvard Study Group on Cyprus, first launched in 1999. In addition to their smaller size and less public profiles, what distinguishes these dialogues is the direct and formal role of third-party conveners.

Other examples of national-level processes include the profusion of national conferences, or "national debates," as they were occasionally called, in postcolonial French West Africa in the early 1990s. These dialogues largely arose out of pressure for political liberalization, and they shared with the more recent Middle East examples the practice of bringing new stakeholders to the table to address issues of national concern.⁸

The increasing incidence of both formal and nonformal national-level political dialogues reflects the changing character and complexity of intrastate conflicts in the post-Cold War period. These conflicts have involved a multiplicity of issues (for example, ethnopolitical identity, natural resources, state structure, religion) and actors (for example, nonstate armed groups), challenging the ability of any third-party mediator, no matter how skilled, to nurture political accommodation.⁹ As early as 1992, the American diplomat Robert Neuman remarked (as many practitioners and scholars have noted since) that the "traditional skills of peacekeeping, mediation and negotiation" are not sufficient to the challenge posed by increasingly complex intrastate conflicts today.¹⁰

The complex issues addressed in national political dialogues, as well as the diverse circumstances in which they develop, give rise to a diversity of forms. National political dialogues may be large or small in scale, short or long in duration, and focused on single issues or a broad agenda. Some aim to yield political agreements in broad outline, while others seek greater specificity. In addition, the degree of their formality varies. Many are formal, explicitly mandated by governmental bodies and their adversaries (whether political parties or nonstate actors), operating in the public eye and with a defined agenda, while others may be nonformal, possessing mandates that may be either conferred or earned, with agendas that evolve to meet changing circumstances and operating with varying degrees of openness.¹¹ A nonformal dialogue often precedes a formal dialogue, but each may also arise independently. Where both are present, they may be conducted entirely independently of each other, or they may be not only contemporaneous but also mutually supportive.

The factors driving the development of national political dialogues are also wide-ranging. Common to most cases is the perception that existing government institutions, particularly legislative bodies, are illegitimate or insufficiently representative to broker comprehensive solutions to national conflicts fairly. Minority groups that have historically been in conflict with state institutions may not be willing to cede authority to a body ruled by majoritarian principles in which their interests have not been adequately protected. Conversely, minority groups may dominate existing state institutions through control of the military or security forces, undermining the broader population's confidence in those institutions. Even when existing legislative bodies are perceived as representative of a nation's diverse constituencies, they may not be perceived as adequate to the task of addressing the crises of the day. As has happened in many long-standing democracies that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), political cultures may become polarized, even ossified, and incapable of producing the compromises necessary to move a society forward (see box 2).

National political dialogues may be large or small in scale, short or long in duration, and focused on single issues.

Box 2. Political Dialogue in the OECD

Political polarization and deadlocks are not restricted to countries emerging from violent conflict. Within the presidential and parliamentary democracies of the OECD, formal dialogue processes supporting a more exploratory and inquiry-based investigation of issues and policy proposals are regularly employed. In several OECD countries, the expectation that some issues are both politically challenging and urgently in need of consideration has resulted in alternative mechanisms to ensure that difficult issues are both deliberated and addressed.

In the United States, the closest analogue to the use of national dialogue processes to generate new policy options is the practice of convening presidential and congressional commissions, usually developed with discrete investigatory objectives on challenging issues over finite terms. The most successful of these commissions result in policy proposals, which are then considered by Congress. Negotiated rule making, an administrative procedure that emerged in the 1980s in federal agencies, also involves a consensus-based, mediated dialogue, usually taking place over many months.

In Germany, a similar mechanism exists in the form of the Enquete-Kommissionen (enquete commissions, commissions of inquiry), which, like their US commission equivalent, usually include elected government officials and external parties whose goal is to study and prepare decisions on wide-ranging and significant issues. These processes, and others in other OECD countries, aim for consensus-based solutions to a country's most difficult challenges.

A recent illustration of how broadly representative democratically elected legislatures can be perceived as inadequate to the task of reform comes from Burma. Even though national elections were scheduled in November 2015, the country's ethnic armed groups—which had been at war with military-dominated governments for decades—still negotiated the convening of a national political dialogue to be held outside parliament in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signed in October of the same year.

In January 2016, the first session of a new national political dialogue—what came to be known as the Union Peace Conference—was convened. The second session of the dialogue, which has been called the “Panglong Conference for the 21st Century” (a reference to the formative conference of the same name giving rise to the modern Union of Burma in 1947), was held in August and September 2016, after the National League of Democracy had assumed leadership of the government. This effort has been designed as a vehicle for the peace process to develop an agreement on the creation of a federal union with greater autonomy for the country's many states and peoples, which has not been achievable within the current constitutional mechanisms.

Despite the growing use of formal national political dialogues as mechanisms to support political change in countries in conflict, their record is mixed. Neither the formality of their structure nor the depth of their support has been sufficient to guarantee their substantive impact. For example, Yemen's National Dialogue floundered on the key question of the structure of the future state (abetted by internal factional conflicts and an unfavorable regional political context), even with massive international support and national resources devoted to it. In other cases, ranging from Togo's 1991 National Conference to Bahrain's 2011 National Dialogue, processes have effectively been manipulated by political elites to give the appearance of broader popular consultation, thereby deflecting public calls for change.¹²

In light of the mixed record of national dialogue processes, continued interest in them has been accompanied by caution regarding their design. Where existing legislative and other constitutionally mandated structures are broken and few, if any, mechanisms exist to bring all parties (including nonstate and other marginalized groups) together, national dialogues

stand as a promising alternative to political stasis. Distinguishing among different forms of national dialogues and comparing their diverse experiences is then paramount to understanding (and not overestimating) their potential. Drawing extensively on examples of initiatives from Lebanon, Burma, and Nepal, this report explores how nonformal dialogue processes have contributed to broader national political change processes (including official negotiations in peace processes and formal national dialogues) and how they can contribute to future political reforms. (Profiles of the conflicts and peace processes in Burma, Lebanon, and Nepal are provided in boxes 3, 4, and 5.)

How Nonformal National Political Dialogues Contribute to National Political Change Processes

In an increasing number of today's intrastate conflicts, nonformal national political dialogues have been embraced as a promising strategy to support political accommodation outside formal legislative bodies, often helping parties break long-standing deadlocks in countries emerging from conflict. These processes create the space for stakeholders in entrenched conflicts to engage with their political adversaries through facilitated dialogue, allowing them to openly explore issues and ideas to foster consensual (or consensus-based) policy options. However, in almost all conflicts, they require a new structure to host and support a dialogue, a structure that exists mainly outside formal governmental bodies but has links to formal legislative or decision-making processes.

The potential contributions of nonformal dialogue processes vary according to many factors. In conflicts in which governments are reluctant to accept a mediator because doing so may legitimize an opponent in others' eyes, nonformal and often confidential dialogue processes are better suited than more formal processes, as the latter may be perceived as lending the same legitimacy to adversaries as externally mediated negotiations do.¹³ Nonformal dialogue processes are not without risks, however. Less formality may be an advantage for some initiatives, but more formality—in terms of the number, type, and selection of participants, their mandate, or the participants' relationships with official bodies—may confer a greater capacity to achieve the implicit objectives.

In peace and political change processes, nonformal national political dialogues can offer distinct advantages that complement formal negotiation processes, legislative efforts, and the endeavors of other officially mandated constitutional arms of government. Among these advantages, four abilities stand out: the ability to build relationships of trust, to introduce new policy proposals, to stabilize a process, and to open a pathway to expanded engagement. Figure 1 depicts the inputs and outputs into nonformal dialogues and the process by which they can exert influence.

Building Working Relationships of Trust

Building working relationships with at least some degree of trust is the foundation of effective collaboration among stakeholders in dialogue processes. Although contexts vary across national conflicts, participants in many of these initiatives have had little prior contact with their counterparts, many of whom will be direct adversaries. Participants' understanding of the other side's political views and positions, history, and culture, not to mention the individuals themselves, is often slim (though there are notable exceptions where adversarial political elites are well known to one another). Distrust among stakeholders who are longtime adversaries can stymie the

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Figure 1. Nonformal Dialogues: A Pathway to Influence

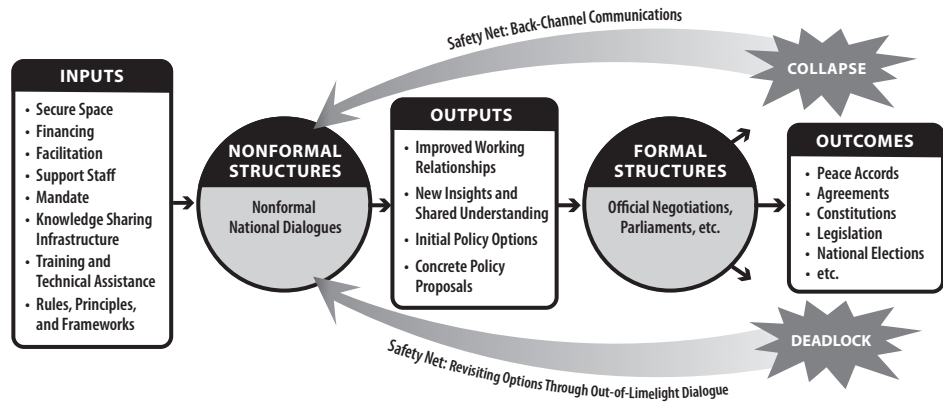


Figure conceptualized by Derek Brown and illustrated by Donna Schaefer.

The trust fostered in nonformal dialogue processes can have impact beyond the dialogue itself, carrying over into the evolving relationships among political leaders who may assume senior positions in future governments.

willingness to meet or come to consensus on divisive issues. A key step to surmounting this challenge is structuring a process to bring people to the table and establish working relationships that, over time, involve increasing amounts of trust. The trust fostered in nonformal dialogue processes can have impact beyond the dialogue itself, carrying over into the evolving relationships among political leaders who may assume senior positions in future governments.¹⁴

In nonformal political dialogues, establishing trust among participants occurs gradually and in multiple venues. In interviews with stakeholders, facilitators, and advisers from dialogue processes in Nepal, Burma, and Lebanon, subjects cited both the importance of informal interactions among participants (for example the after-hours socializing during retreats and workshops) and the ongoing working relationships developed through regular interaction in the structured dialogue.

Trust building is important not just among opposing parties in national conflicts but also within and among those ostensibly representing the same political faction. When the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) was established in November 2012 by the government of Thein Sein (a former general who became Burma’s head of state), its leadership and staff included prominent businessmen, academics, and even former student activists who had left the country after Burma’s 1988 student uprising. (To some, the recruitment of a diverse cadre of professional staff, many of whom had been associated with the opposition, signaled the seriousness of the military-dominated government’s intention to pursue political reform and peace.) The diverse backgrounds and opinions of the new leadership and staff posed challenges even before the MPC began reaching out to the armed opposition.

In order to represent the government—and by extension the military—in the peace process with Burma’s ethnic minorities (who had been battling the state for decades), the former activists had to develop not only confidence and trust in the largely civilian leadership of MPC but also mutual trust with senior leaders of the army, an institution many of them had opposed for nearly two decades. Those relationships did develop, aided by shared experiences over time. In at least one instance, extensive knowledge of the security sector on the part of a former activist helped cement personal relationships that translated into effective collaboration.¹⁵

The belief that bringing diverse and conflicting parties into the same room can have beneficial effects has been explored since the end of World War II, and was articulated in Gordon Allport’s seminal 1954 study, *The Nature of Prejudice*.¹⁶ In this book, Allport laid out the hypothesis that

intergroup contact could lead to diminished prejudice, and by extension build effective working relations under the right conditions. The conditions he cited as being essential included “equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals,” contact that is “sanctioned by institutional supports,” and contact that “is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups.”¹⁷

Techniques employed by the facilitators, advisers, and stakeholders in the nonformal dialogues and their support structures in Burma, Nepal, and Lebanon attest to the wisdom of Allport’s core insights. In more recent research, scholars such as Thomas Pettigrew, Jared B. Kenworthy, Miles Hewstone and others have focused on how the relationship-building process can be enhanced by cognitive and affective factors—by a *rational knowledge-acquiring* component and an *emotional* component—that allow stakeholders to reduce prejudice and develop sufficient trust to explore and advance policy proposal objectives.¹⁸ Common-sense examples of the cognitive, or rational knowledge-acquiring, component include the self-disclosure of facts, such as family anecdotes, professional histories, or other information that might elicit a sense of common or shared experience, while the affective, or emotional, component relates to both the reduction of anxiety prompted by contact and concerns over the impact of

Box 3. New Structures to Undergird Burma’s National Peace Process

The unfolding political transition in Burma is the story of multiple conflicts: the democratization movement, whose most visible leader has been Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) and their struggle with the country’s long-standing military-dominated government; the conflicts between Burma’s many ethnic armed groups and the former military government; and ethno-religious conflict, including in Rakhine State between the Rohingya and Buddhist nationalists. Historically, these conflicts have run in parallel, occasionally overlapping, but today they are increasingly intertwined.

Progress in the last several years has been substantial. After fifty-plus years of military rule, a civilian government led by the NLD has been elected. Though Aung San Suu Kyi has been prohibited from serving as head of state, she is *de facto* leading the government as state counsellor. Negotiations to end the long-running civil war with the country’s ethnic minorities (some of whom have been battling the government since the country’s independence) began under the previous military government, which resulted in a partial nationwide ceasefire, and are now a top priority for Suu Kyi and her NLD-led government.

The complexity of Burma’s current politics—with multiple political parties and issues and histories driving its many conflicts—continues to present an enormous challenge to all parties as they seek to engage in a national peace and reconciliation process. The government, long dominated and cloistered by a military wary of the external world, knew that to effectively engage the ethnic armed groups, additional capacity and assistance from non-military actors were needed to enhance the government’s legitimacy. In 2012 the government established the Myanmar Peace Center, drawing on advisers and staff from Burma’s business community, former exiles, and others to build an institution that would support outreach to the country’s ethnic armed groups, host negotiations and dialogues, and pave the way toward a new future.

In parallel with the central government’s efforts, the ethnic armed groups embarked on multiple endeavors to enhance their capacity to engage with the central government to advance their interests. Efforts to create a collective voice for Burma’s ethnic nationalities date back to the country’s founding, but have accelerated in the past decade. New representative bodies, such as the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (formed in 2013), the United Nationalities Federal Council (formed in 2010), and various nonformal dialogue structures, such as the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (founded in 2011), arose with the support of local and international civil society organizations. All of these entities played significant roles leading up to the national elections and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of 2015 and the launch of the Union Peace Conference in January 2016.

engagement with adversaries (what Allport and others refer to as “outgroup” members) and the ability to empathize with those same outgroup members.¹⁹

Stakeholders believed that the unstructured time in these nonformal processes was no less crucial to their success than the structured portions. These unstructured interactions usually occurred after a full day’s meeting, during evening hours, when stakeholders in the process were meeting at remote locations away from the commitments of their lives in major cities. In interviews with participants, organizers, and facilitators of nonformal dialogues in Burma and Nepal, stakeholders relayed that self-disclosure in these unstructured interactions was spurred to some degree by alcohol consumption. Several individuals suggested that sharing a drink played a part in helping to create trust among participants, aiding in the developing of working relationships among groups of stakeholders.

The use of alcohol in these informal interactions has been little studied in the peacebuilding field, and its use is limited by cultural contexts. However, studies of alcohol consumption from other domains, such as intercultural business contexts, suggest that “alcohol may help negotiators bond, build trust, and share information.”²⁰ According to Maurice Schweitzer and Jeffrey L. Kerry, “alcohol lowers inhibitions, encourages disclosure, and causes individuals to feel closer to each other than they might otherwise.... It can help legitimize different points of view and reduce mistrust. It therefore can be appropriate when a primary objective is to develop long-term relationships.”²¹ A cautionary note comes from this same literature as well, as studies have shown that actual negotiation performance can be hindered by even small amounts of alcohol consumption.²²

Introducing New Policy Proposals

The objectives of nonformal national political dialogues are twofold: first, to generate and develop new ideas, policy proposals, and agreements on difficult political challenges dividing societies, and second, to convey these ideas and proposals to formal decision-making bodies, such as national legislatures or constituent assemblies. Generating and developing new ideas and policy proposals both builds on and contributes to the formation of working relationships of trust. It reflects dialogue as a process of communication, emphasizing issue exploration, open inquiry, research, and discussion. The transfer of ideas and proposals usually entails the exercise of influence by a nonformal dialogue’s stakeholders on their counterparts in official decision-making bodies. Occasionally the transfer process may be predefined; for example, recommendations may be submitted to official decision-making bodies for final approval. Despite their potential importance, agreements made by nonformal political dialogues are not universally binding; rather, they must be ratified and endorsed by other official decision-making bodies. In practice, however, they often result in changes to participating parties’ behaviors. In processes mandated by formal agreements, decisions arising from formal national dialogues can be considered binding, though they may also require ratification by official decision-making bodies.

Lebanon provides an example of how a nonformal dialogue pursued the generation of new ideas and policy options. The Beirut-based Common Space Initiative for Shared Knowledge and Consensus Building (in shorthand, the Common Space Initiative), launched in 2009, came into being in the wake of the Doha Agreement (see box 4). Among its various provisions designed to quell a long-simmering political conflict the agreement included a commitment to resume the national dialogue begun in Doha as a means to resolve the country’s long-standing security, as well as additional political disagreements, which the Lebanese political system had been unable to address.

Box 4. Lebanon: Creating a Common Space for Dialogue and Consensus Building

In the decades since the Taif Accord brought an end to Lebanon's civil war in 1989, political stability in the country has been an elusive goal. Beset by periodic flare-ups of violence among the country's diverse confessions, assassinations of political leaders, three full-fledged invasions and multiple incursions by Israel, and the presence of Syrian troops until 2005, many in Lebanon have described their country's unenviable position as being neither at war nor at peace.

In one of most acute post-Taif political crises, violent clashes between Shiite Hezbollah and Sunni, government-aligned militia forces, coupled with the inability to agree on a consensus candidate for the vacant office of president, left the country on the brink of collapse in 2008. Fearing the resumption of a full-blown sectarian conflict, Lebanon's regional Arab neighbors intervened. The country's political leadership was flown to Doha, Qatar, to attend a mediated dialogue with the aim of forging an accord to return the country to a modicum of stability.

The resulting Doha Agreement helped quell sectarian tensions; provided for the election of a compromise candidate as president, the Maronite Christian General Michel Suleiman (ending a dangerous vacuum); and paved the way for a new cabinet and government of national unity and initiated several electoral reforms. It also committed the political stakeholders to participating in a future national dialogue to address the long-standing fissures in Lebanese political life.

As the newly elected President Suleiman moved to convene the country's National Dialogue, he was faced with a challenge: whether or not to extend the agenda beyond the immediate flashpoint in Lebanese politics. Some parties and advisers wanted to expand the agenda to include issues on which greater consensus might be achieved, while others preferred that the dialogue focus solely on the immediate flashpoint (this was referred to as the "defense strategy"). As advisers to the stakeholders worked to forge an agreement on the agenda, the idea for a parallel series of national dialogues with an expanded agenda was floated, paving the way for the launch of Lebanon's Common Space Initiative in 2009.

Located in central Beirut's Nejme Square, the Common Space Initiative sits across from Lebanon's parliament building and is just a short walk from mosques and churches representing most of the country's diverse confessions. The initiative was established to be inclusive, enabling representatives of Lebanon's diverse communities to engage in dialogue on issues of national concern. It also had a parallel function of drawing on its facilitation and research capacities to provide technical support to advisers to the official National Dialogue process and other governmental initiatives. Supported by a broad spectrum of national and international partners, the initiative conducts a range of activities that have evolved over time, and responds to new opportunities and needs.

The Common Space Initiative played a supporting role as a confidential technical assistance resource for the newly resumed official National Dialogue under the president's office as mandated by the Doha Agreement. It began as a forum for high-level dialogue with wide representation that included most of Lebanon's political factions to explore issues of national concern, as reflected in its formal name. At a time when Lebanon's political factions had no regular channels for sustained interaction, it provided a physical (and political) space and research and facilitation support to enable substantive interactions among its participants.

The objectives of the Common Space Initiative evolved over time, responding to the shifting needs and corresponding opportunities within the country's political space and to the input of its stakeholders. Following the launch of the official National Dialogue by the president's office, the Common Space Initiative and its core staff served as a technical support team to the presidential advisers orchestrating the official process.²³ While directly supporting the country's official National Dialogue, the Common Space Initiative's primary role was complementary, simultaneously launching dialogue processes on substantive issues not discussed at the formal table dividing Lebanon's multiple constituencies and drawing on political and civil society leadership at the Track 1.5 level.

The Common Space Initiative's hosted dialogues were designed to explore challenging issues in depth through dialogue, research, and comparative international experiences to surface new insights, new ideas, and greater understanding, as well as to craft policy proposals and draft legislative proposals, often in conjunction with Lebanese partner institutions. Issues addressed in these dialogues included a multiyear examination of Lebanese-Palestinian relations (the country is home to several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees), the development of a proposed draft law on the decentralization of Lebanon's highly centralized government structure, and legal and judicial reform measures. The goal has been to assist in stabilizing Lebanon's often fractious policy debates and to advance political reform initiatives through draft legislation, public education, and behind-the-scenes advocacy.

A second example of the interplay and transfer of ideas between nonformal dialogues and official decision-making structures comes from recent experience in Burma. In 2014–15, a nonformal political dialogue for Burma's ethnic armed groups, called the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC), fostered consensus among its members on a framework proposal for a formal political dialogue that became a central focus of the ethnic armed groups' collective negotiations with the government over a nationwide ceasefire. The WGEC's input to the ceasefire negotiations, as with the input of a number of other entities and alliances of ethnic armed groups, such as the United Nationalities Federal Council, relied greatly on the individual stakeholders' personal influence on the negotiating teams and relations with their respective ethnic armed groups and ethnic political party constituencies. That ceasefire, signed in late 2015, laid out a roadmap for the future peace process and established a new official entity, known as the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee. The Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee became the venue for discussing the frameworks for political dialogue proposed by all parties, including the ethnic armed groups, the government, the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), and other constituencies in the country. These discussions led to the launch of the first national dialogue conference—the Union Peace Conference—in January 2016, which continues under the leadership of the new NLD-led government.²⁴

Whereas the Burma example illustrates how nonformal dialogues can give rise to an official process, in Lebanon the opposite happened, with the challenges confronting Lebanon's official National Dialogue creating an opening for the development of a nonformal dialogue, known as the Common Space Initiative.

In both Lebanon and Burma, the structure of the nonformal dialogues allows stakeholders to pursue the substantive goals of assisting the national political change processes by introducing policy proposals into the political conversation, aiding the development of a broader consensus on these issues, and serving as deadlock-breaking mechanisms at times when processes risk grinding to a halt. In their exploration of issues and development and advancement of policy proposals, their roles are similar to the roles played by diverse civil society groups—from research institutions to education and advocacy organizations—that dot the political landscape in many OECD countries. Yet they are also distinct in how they create a platform to combine these roles in a joint process engaging all stakeholders. In countries without strong civil societies, and even in those with them, nonformal dialogue processes can provide a crucial piece of the peacemaking puzzle.

Stabilizing a Process

The trajectory of peace processes is never smooth. Formal negotiations often proceed in fits and starts, and failures outnumber successes. The risks of a collapse in talks or in prior agreements are acute, often leading to a resumption of violent conflict. At their worst, these breakdowns

Box 5. Accelerating the Momentum for Peace: Two Dialogues in Nepal

Nepal's ten-year civil war began in February 1996, when the Maoist movement launched an insurgency in the country's rural western districts. Protesting decades of discrimination, the Maoists sought to overthrow the country's monarchy and establish a "People's Democracy."

Five years later, the civil war was largely stalemated, with Maoists controlling many rural districts, and the central government largely controlling urban areas and the country's southern border. The first peace talks were launched in 2001. The talks produced a short-lived ceasefire, and in November 2001 the government initiated a state of emergency, suspending civil liberties, censoring the press, and authorizing the army to attack the Maoists.

Six months later, in May 2002, Nepal's King Gyanendra dissolved parliament, which had threatened not to renew the state of emergency. Then in October of the same year he dismissed the prime minister and the Council of Ministers, consolidating his hold on government. With increasing attacks and casualties yielding little change in the relative position of the Maoists and the government, a new ceasefire was declared in January 2003.

Throughout 2003 and 2004, the monarchy and the non-Maoist political parties were increasingly at odds. In February 2005 the king declared a second state of emergency, sacking his Council of Ministers once again. The Maoists and Nepal's Seven Party Alliance (comprising its leading democratic parties) began their own talks in July, leading to the announcement in November of a "12-point agreement" calling for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. It was during this period that the nonformal dialogue known as the Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) Initiative began to take shape.

Initiated with the support of the two senior former political leaders (one affiliated with the Nepali Congress Party and the other known to have good contacts with the Maoists) who had played key roles in the earliest peace efforts, and supported by US and Swiss donors, the NTTP initiative engaged the major non-Maoist political parties in a regular structured dialogue; supported outreach to the Maoist movement, which had not yet formally entered the peace process; and worked in parallel with the monarchy's representatives through the National Peace Secretariat. With the reinstatement of Nepal's parliament in May 2006 and the king's loss of power, the NTTP Initiative focused its efforts exclusively on dialogue among the nation's political parties and representatives of the Maoist movement.

During the same period, another nonformal process, known as the Security Sector Reform (SSR) Dialogue, began to take shape; it originated in a five-day workshop conducted by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies and sponsored by the US embassy. Recognizing that security sector reform issues posed one of the most significant challenges to the peace process, particularly the need to forge an agreement on the integration of a portion of Maoist combatants into the Nepalese Army, many of the initial Nepalese participants elected to continue meeting, and did so three to four times in the early years of the process. Like the NTTP, this nonformal dialogue has continued its efforts since the signing of Nepal's Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006.

can derail years of prior progress. For example, peace efforts seeking to end Nepal's civil war, which pitted a largely rural-based Maoist insurgency against the central government, saw the breakdown of two ceasefires before a third held long enough for negotiations to conclude with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006.

When formal processes break down or crises develop, nonformal processes can sustain contact among stakeholders, essentially serving as a safety net for the official peace process. Maintaining contact among participants, even at a confidential or unofficial level, can help minimize the consequences of a breakdown in talks. This connection often reduces the risks of violence reigniting and makes it easier to resume formal talks.

Two crises from Nepal's peace process, one in 2007 and the other in 2008, illustrate this capacity of nonformal processes. In both these incidents, the stakeholders in a nonformal Track 1.5 dialogue known as the Nepal Transition to Peace (NTTP) stepped up to defuse tensions that threatened to destabilize the peace process.²⁵

The 2007 incident followed the promulgation of Nepal's interim constitution and subsequent protests in which individuals of the Madhesi minority group were killed. (The Madhesis are an ethnic group situated in the Terai, the lowlands of Nepal along the Indian border.) Following these killings, the Madhesis' political leadership publicly broke off talks with the government, insisting that the home minister (responsible for internal security), Krishna Sitaula, resign. As Sitaula was leading the government's dialogue team in sensitive negotiations with the Maoists, this demand was rejected by the government. However, because the Madhesis are one of the largest and most important ethnic blocs in Nepal's diverse political landscape, the need for communication with their political leadership was acute. The nonformal NTTP dialogue process was able to host regular, confidential talks between Madhesi leaders and other stakeholders (respected former senior political leaders and members of what was referred to as the "second-tier" leadership of political parties) when official talks would have been impossible, owing to the Madhesi stance on the home minister's resignation.

In 2008, a second crisis threatened to derail the election for Nepal's Constituent Assembly, an important step in Nepal's still-unfolding political transition. Just two days before the election, a clash in outlying districts resulted in several Maoist supporters being shot and killed, followed by the murder of another party candidate. A team was quickly assembled from the NTTP stakeholders. It included two well-known and widely respected national facilitators (both former senior politicians), civil society members, and one of the NTTP's international advisers, all of whom were rushed to the scenes by government helicopter. This group managed to persuade the agitating local parties whose colleagues had been killed "not to let the incident obstruct the CA process."²⁶

The capacity of nonformal dialogues and their supporting institutional structures to play constructive roles, whether in times of crisis or simply in the course of a peace or political change process, arises from several sources. As in the Nepalese crises described above, nonformal structures can exert influence both openly and more quietly, by drawing on the reputations of those stakeholders, such as respected former political figures or well-known civil society leaders, whose participation is not tied too closely to any one constituency. Separately, participating in a respected but nonformal dialogue process as a mechanism for communication provides a veneer of ambiguity for parties who may not be ready to acknowledge their contact with one another. As one Nepalese stakeholder explained, if anyone criticized him for participating in a nonformal dialogue that included adversaries he was not talking to in public, he could simply shrug off the criticism on the grounds that participation involved merely informal contact. Minimizing such contact, or even denying that it had occurred, would be much harder if the parties were exposed as holding direct, bilateral, and confidential talks with their adversaries after a breakdown in negotiations.

Expanding Engagement

One of the major contributions of nonformal dialogues and the structures that support them has been to broaden participation in national peace efforts. For example, dialogues such as the NTTP Initiative purposefully engage multiple parties representing all major constituencies and groups, many of whom may have been excluded from prior, often elite, negotiations.

Expanding participation and promoting greater inclusivity in national peace and political change processes can result in greater public awareness and ownership of those processes. By increasing input into the decision-making process, nonformal dialogues hope to ensure better outcomes that reflect the contributions of all parties and to secure greater buy-in to the results

of that process, whether the end product is a formal accord or an informal understanding.²⁷ The extent to which greater public participation in national processes translates into better outcomes and ownership is shaped by several factors: the degree to which existing constitutional mechanisms of government are perceived as unrepresentative or simply failing; the strength of ties between the leadership of political parties and their formal membership, as well as between the leadership of political movements and their broader constituencies; the ability of populations to see and hear that their concerns and perspectives are represented in national debates; and the nature of the conflict itself and whether it has affected constituencies at the local, regional, or national level.

The conflict in Nepal and the ethnic conflict in Burma, both of which were experienced most strongly in rural areas, presented particular challenges to expanding public participation in the national peace process. Creating processes that engage dispersed populations affected by violent conflict is much more difficult than expanding a dialogue in a capital city. In both Nepal and Burma, national-level dialogue initiatives led to complementary dialogue initiatives at the state and local levels. Nepal's nonformal NTTP process served as the incubator for a national-level effort to develop local peace committees in most of the country's seventy-five districts.²⁸ In Burma, prior to the second round of the Union Peace Conference in September 2016, multiple initiatives were underway to develop regional "common spaces" and provide venues for facilitated dialogue among diverse local stakeholder groups, their goal being to provide input into and receive information from both the Union Peace Conference and national and regional parliamentary bodies. Large scale ethnic based national dialogues (shorter term than the efforts above) continued to be convened into 2017 as well. These drew broad representation from within many of Burma's distinct ethnic groups with the goal of feeding their communities' concerns into the Union Peace Conference.

Calibrating what degree of expanded participation will be required in a dialogue process requires an assessment of what constitutes "sufficient" inclusivity. The modifier "sufficient" recalls South Africa's transition from apartheid, when the term was used to characterize voting procedures that might not require 100 percent consensus. In the context of participatory dialogues, sufficiency signals the need to engage at least the minimal number of credible stakeholders in the processes for them to be perceived broadly as legitimate, and as many as are necessary for the development of a comprehensive solution. Although many formal national dialogue processes, such as Burma's Union Peace Conference and Yemen's National Dialogue, involve large assemblies of representatives, numbering in the hundreds, other countries, including Lebanon, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Cyprus, each have had both formal and nonformal dialogue processes that were relatively small, with participants in individual processes numbering fewer than one hundred.

In assessing whether a formal or nonformal process is sufficiently inclusive, what matters more than the number of participants is the nature of the conflict, where constituencies have been affected, and the degree to which the leaders of political parties and movements are seen as representing their constituents' interests. The experience of Yemen illustrates the challenge of engaging the right stakeholders. Initially, Yemen's National Dialogue was widely perceived as among the most inclusive of official national dialogues convened in the wake of the Arab Uprisings. Its participants included youth, women, and representatives of the nation's major ethnopolitical factions. While there are many analyses of what led to the dialogue's failure, one underreported criticism was that despite the diversity of participants, specific representation from those parties that had the most political clout was poorly selected. Few of the top leaders—the "sheikhs of the sheikhs," as one observer put it—of the Southern Movement, the

Houthis, and others attended.²⁹ Ultimately, large swaths of Yemenis were skeptical of the dialogue and felt that it poorly represented their interests. This skepticism was one of the factors that contributed to the failure of the process.

Yemen's experience serves as a reminder that large numbers of stakeholders in a national dialogue process, no matter how diverse their makeup, cannot guarantee the perception of legitimacy if important constituencies are not represented or if participants representing particular blocs do not possess influence within their constituencies. Changing or expanding membership midstream can serve as a corrective action, but this is less likely to happen in formal national dialogues, which are generally of shorter duration. Dialogue processes that take place over the course of several years are better able to adjust their membership in response to the changing needs and dynamics of conflicts.

The Importance of Internal Support Structures and External Environments

Every national political dialogue requires institutional support for its development and operation. This applies to formal and nonformal political dialogues alike. While external partner institutions can offer some of the essential services needed, most dialogue processes require a host institution that also functions as a secretariat to provide a range of necessary services.

Differences among countries and conflicts lead to different forms of support structures for dialogues. For example, the forms of the institutional structures hosting and supporting nonformal dialogue processes in Lebanon, Burma, and Nepal reflect the diversity of the national context, the way in which each dialogue came into being, and the range of services and activities undertaken as part of the dialogue's mission. In some cases, it is difficult to distinguish between the dialogue and its support structure; in others, the line is easier to draw, though it is rarely as clear-cut as in a client-service provider relationship.

Differences among countries and conflicts lead to different forms of support structures "for dialogues."

Independent or Embedded? Two Support Structures in Nepal

Two of Nepal's nonformal dialogues, the NTTP Initiative and the SSR Dialogue, offer contrasting examples of how nonformal dialogues originate and the degree of integration with their host institutions and secretariats.

Nepal's NTTP Initiative provides an example of the way that a support structure and a nonformal dialogue can be deeply intertwined. NTTP hosted a multiyear Track 1.5 nonformal dialogue, known as the NTTP Forum, which was launched in the years leading up to the Comprehensive Peace Accord and which has met regularly in the decade since. The stakeholders of both bodies—including the senior principals of the initiative and the participants, advisers, and facilitators of the forum—overlapped. In terms of sequence, the institutional structure (the NTTP Initiative) developed first as an independent initiative that received support from bilateral donors through international civil society organizations. It then gave rise to the dialogue (the NTTP Forum). Both benefited greatly from the reputations and relationships of their two senior facilitators, as well as from the political networks of the forum's core stakeholder group, whose members were drawn from the second-tier leadership of their political parties.³⁰ The NTTP's influence also benefited from the ongoing support of senior leaders of the parties in and outside government and from the changes in status of many of its participants, many of whom assumed ministerial positions in subsequent governments, facilitating input from informal talks into the formal policymaking process.

The NTTP Initiative, the support structure, and the NTTP Forum, the nonformal dialogue itself, operated symbiotically, with regular meetings and frequent consultations, from the start of their operations. The national facilitators of the forum maintained offices within the initiative's space. The crisis management interventions described previously relied on the initiative and its senior staff, while drawing on the membership of the dialogue itself. Similarly, the contributions in 2005–07 of the forum and the initiative to multiple formal agreements in Nepal's peace process, including specific policy ideas and provisions as well as draft language, were possible only because of the technical expertise available within the initiative and the political clout of the stakeholders in the forum. The influence of the forum and its stakeholders on the peace process was reaffirmed when the group was recruited by the government to serve as an official Peace and Conflict Management Committee just prior to the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections.

In contrast, unlike the NTTP process, the SSR Dialogue did not have an independent secretariat or structure. Instead it depended on an international embassy for its institutional support. The SSR Dialogue's structure resulted in part from its origins. It emerged from a five-day workshop coordinated by the US embassy and conducted by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, a US Department of Defense institute. The workshop included separate and joint meetings with Nepal's non-Maoist political leaders and representatives from Nepal's armed forces. Since then, the US embassy's defense attaché's office has continued to support the largely volunteer effort, helping in the convening and coordination of periodic meetings and supporting the Nepalese facilitator of the dialogue, Professor Sridhar Khatri.

The SSR Dialogue's ability to rely on the services provided by the US defense attaché's office likely resulted in part from its discrete initial objectives and less demanding schedule. Launched approximately a year after the NTTP Initiative, in the run-up to the signing of Nepal's Comprehensive Peace Accord, the SSR Dialogue was an occasional dialogue (meeting much less frequently than the NTTP Initiative or Forum). Also, it initially focused solely (as its name suggested) on security sector issues, including the difficult issues of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of members of the Maoist People's Liberation Army (which were also issues addressed by the NTTP's efforts as well). A decade later, after extended periods of inactivity, the SSR Dialogue was renamed the Security Sector Development (SSD) Dialogue as it pursued an expanded agenda that encompassed issues beyond security sector reform. It continues to hold meetings several times a year.

For all dialogues, the ability to construct and pursue an agenda that is independent of donor interests and interference is critical to the dialogue's legitimacy. Even the perception by participants and observers of undue influence by donors is risky. However, Nepal's example demonstrates that backing from international donors does not necessarily compromise this perception of legitimacy. In most conflicts, a dialogue's close affiliation with a single external party, particularly the US defense attaché's office, would be unworkable, creating the appearance of undue influence being exercised over the dialogue by an interested party. In this unusual case, however, the reputation of the United States was less problematic, particularly compared with that of Nepal's regional neighbors, whose strategic interests in the country and involvement in its politics were well known, and often resented. Both the facilitator of and participants in the SSR Dialogue assert that they have enjoyed remarkable independence from their US Defense Department supporters.

Similarly, the NTTP process also enjoyed remarkable independence from its donors, which included another branch of the US government, its development assistance arm, the United

States Agency for International Development. Donor flexibility and initial arms-length support, coupled with transparency regarding the source of funding, aided both dialogues in managing to avoid, at least to some extent, being seen as unduly influenced by foreign parties. Although problems did arise from time to time, especially early on, they were not crippling. For example, US policies prevented groups it funded from fully engaging Nepal's Maoists, who were officially listed as a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist," without special approval. These regulatory barriers caused occasional disruption at key moments, much to the consternation of stakeholders and their donor partners, but were eventually addressed to allow US government support for Nepal's unfolding peace process (see box 6).

Despite their very different structures, these two processes have shared remarkable longevity, continuing to function more than a decade after they were founded. While their differing structures may have had an impact on the range of the contributions, the commitment of their participants, most of whom have devoted a significant amount of time to these dialogues, indicate each has a role to play. This is also attested to by the fact that some members have participated in both dialogues.

The close relationship between the NTTP Initiative and the NTTP Forum, their staff capacity and independence, and the frequency of the dialogue members' interactions (especially in the early years of operation) aided the NTTP's ability to make a wide range of contributions to Nepal's peace and political change processes. The SSR (SSD) Dialogue has played a different role, focusing on a narrower range of issues. Though meeting far less frequently than the NTTP Initiative, the SSR Dialogue was able to provide an additional forum for relationship building and discussion of one of the most difficult issues in Nepal's political transition: demobilization and disarmament of the Maoist forces and their integration into the Nepalese

Box 6. Regulatory Barriers to Peace Initiatives

Integrating nonstate armed groups into national peace processes has long posed substantial challenges. These have become acute in the past several decades. The global fight against terrorism has resulted in a raft of regulations and sanctions against individuals and institutions, many of them nonstate armed groups and their members, complicating and in many cases constraining effective and timely support for peace initiatives.

These regulations aim to deter terrorism by preventing money laundering and by denying access to financial and nonfinancial assistance for proscribed groups. Related restrictions have been developed to deny support to actors accused of gross human rights violations.

Increasingly, international actors, from diplomats to military personnel to civilian peace advisers, have had to weigh their peacemaking objectives against the prospect of running afoul of the regulations that constrain their work. The procedures currently in place to reconcile such conflicts are rarely designed to move as quickly as a dynamic peacebuilding process requires, leaving actors facing a difficult dilemma.

In Nepal, these regulations meant that US government support for last-minute out-of-country talks between the Communist Party of Nepal Maoists and national facilitators of the NTTP Forum (acting as government interlocutors) was held up for clearance by the US State Department in Washington, DC. This delay occurred even though the objectives of the US support for the process presumed contact with the Maoists.

More recently, in Burma, international grantmakers have been required to certify that no participants involved in any US- or European-sponsored training or assistance have been credibly accused of gross human rights violations. The time constraints on grantmaking in a rapidly shifting peace process make certifying all grants with the same degree of confidence difficult at best. The decision to proceed is thus often dependent on the willingness of individual professionals to make a difficult judgment call.

Army. (That the dialogue had a smaller structure and narrower scope may have limited its range of contributions, but its low cost may have resulted in the continuity of support from its unusual partner, the US Defense Department, allowing it to focus its efforts without the distraction of having to meet the administrative and fundraising challenges that confront most civil society initiatives.) The existence of multiple forums within which to discuss the difficult and sensitive issue of what to do with the Maoist forces may well have helped prevent that issue from derailing the process.

A Third Model: Multiple Partners to Lebanon's Common Space Initiative

Lebanon's Common Space Initiative offers another variation on how dialogues relate to their support structures and how these entities come into being and evolve over time. Nepal's NTTP Forum and NTTP Initiative were in essence pieces of the same whole. The SSR Dialogue in Nepal relied on the services of a separate support staff embedded in an international embassy and able to devote only some of their time to helping the dialogue. In contrast, the Common Space Initiative developed close partnerships with a number of multilateral and bilateral institutions, which provided the human, financial, and technical capacities for a freestanding "secretariat" that sponsored several Track 1.5 dialogues on specific subjects (or "themes," as their stakeholders referred to them) and provided support to Lebanon's official National Dialogue.

Like the NTTP Initiative, the Common Space Initiative both hosts and supports these nonformal dialogues, providing participants with a range of services and a secure physical space for meetings. The location of the Common Space Initiative was chosen for its symbolism and for its access.

Unlike the two Nepal processes, the Common Space Initiative developed after, and partially in response to, the launch of the country's national dialogue. The high-stakes circumstances in which the very public Lebanese National Dialogue originated contributed to its veering toward a positional bargaining process among Lebanon's major factions, rather than becoming a dialogue in which a free-flowing exchange of ideas could take place. The need for another, less public venue for dialogue, one where the country's disparate parties could talk freely and seek consensus, came to be recognized by a subset of national leaders, who lent their support to the founding members of the Common Space Initiative.

In the deeply factionalized political environment of Lebanon, earning a reputation for independence and "multipartiality" (that is, for giving equal attention to all stakeholders and ensuring their equal participation) was and remains challenging. No single institution, stakeholder, or international partner could confer this on the Common Space Initiative. Particularly in the early stages of development, any new initiative seeking to work in the fractious political landscape of Lebanon was (and still is) likely to be scrutinized intensely and runs the risk of being criticized, however unjustly, as biased.

One way the Common Space Initiative attempted to address this challenge was to recruit staff members and advisers from throughout the diverse confessions that make up Lebanon's cultural and political tapestry. Unusually, once recruited, though dedicated to the Common Space Initiative, the staff members and advisers were paid or seconded by other organizations. A second step, particularly in the initiative's early days, was to maintain a very low profile, so as not to attract too much attention (and potential criticism) until it was more firmly established. A further step toward enhancing its independence and building a broader ownership of its work was the establishment of a series of advisory, governance, and partnership councils composed

of individuals and institutional representatives with national and international backgrounds. While these various steps produced a complex and occasionally cumbersome set of management structures, they nonetheless allowed the process to cultivate a reputation for independence.

Bridging Government and Civil Society: Why Hybrid Structures Matter

The independence that nonformal dialogues establish is central to their ability to influence other formal peace and political change processes. As the experiences in Nepal and Lebanon suggest, achieving this independence requires institutional support structures (whether independent secretariats or partner institutions) that insulate the dialogues from external pressures, allowing them and their facilitators to be multipartial. Additionally, independence depends to a great extent on the nonformal dialogue's capacity to attract membership from across political and social divides. In turn, the institutional locus of a nonformal dialogue—where its institutional “home” is perceived to be—can play an important role in engaging stakeholders across the spectrum.

Nonformal dialogues and their support structures, such as Lebanon's Common Space Initiative, the NTTP Initiative, and, to a lesser extent, Burma's WGEC, have an independent or quasi-independent status and tend to straddle governmental (including political) and civil society sectors. The nonformal dialogues' membership, from which these dialogues derive much of their legitimacy, is drawn from political parties (both those in power and those in opposition), nonstate armed groups and their political wings, and civil society. In transitioning societies, an assembly of such diverse groups in a dialogue is highly unusual. The hybrid quality of these dialogues' institutional locus—occupying the space between official government processes and unofficial processes most often sponsored within civil society—reinforces their openness to all these parties, particularly those situated outside government.

This hybrid quality also offers one of the few clear demarcating lines between formal and nonformal dialogues. Formal national dialogue processes are more clearly seen as “official,” sanctioned and supported by governments and their oppositions and often operating within the government's sphere of influence. Whether consisting of small groups or large conferences, these formal processes can engage diverse representation from across the political spectrum and offer a presumption of an official path to policy change (though in practice, this path is often strewn with the same obstacles that nonformal processes encounter). Yet official processes can also pose obstacles to broad participation. For example, Burma's Union Peace Conference, an official government-sanctioned body whose participants include both political and nonpolitical stakeholders, has been hampered by significant questions as to whether key stakeholder groups—such as nonsignatories to the country's nationwide ceasefire agreement—would be invited or would accept an invitation. (Almost all parties ultimately did attend the August–September 2016 conference, though several walked out of the proceedings, and their attendance at future sessions was still in question.)

By contrast, the interrelated aspects of nonformal dialogues and their support structures—that is, their unofficial character, their hybrid quality, and the perception, whether fully accurate or not, of their independence—reduce barriers to participation for all stakeholders and bolster the dialogues' potential to contribute to the peacemaking and policy change processes.

The Core Functions of Support Structures

Support structures, whatever their form, function as conduits for a range of services. These services may include facilitating; conducting research; creating a knowledge-sharing infrastructure;

providing administrative support, technical assistance, and training; offering financial support; and creating a secure physical space for holding meetings. As with many startup initiatives, the provision of these services may be limited in the early stages of a nonformal dialogue's work, whether because of resource constraints or because the mission is evolving. However, over time these services may expand as the capabilities of the structure and the needs of the process evolve.

The services provided by dialogues' support structures play an important role in enhancing, if not fully equalizing, the capacity of stakeholders to engage in the dialogue process. For a dialogue to function well, it needs to fulfill the first of Allport's criteria, that of ensuring equal status for its members. To ensure equal status, support structures must treat all stakeholders as equal participants and work to enable their equivalent, if not fully equal, participation.

Facilitation and Research Support. Facilitation is one of the most significant services provided by support structures. In all types of political dialogues, the need for multipartial facilitation is paramount.³¹ Ensuring that facilitation is respected and perceived as fair has resulted in a number of approaches. For example, in the negotiations leading up to Burma's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, facilitation and advice were provided by a two-person team. A facilitator with strong ties to the country's ethnic armed groups was chosen to work alongside a facilitator who worked within the government's MPC. The idea was, in part, to equalize any potential influence that might be wielded by any one facilitator.³²

In Track 1 encounters, using international third-party facilitators has often been seen as a quick solution to the need for multipartiality. In the nonformal dialogue processes profiled here, the practice has been to rely on national facilitation. This practice is sometimes referred to as "self-mediation," drawing on one or several respected host country nationals who can serve long-term processes regularly as multipartial facilitators. The motivations for this practice arise from the perceived benefits of drawing on a compatriot who has a deep understanding of the political and cultural context at the outset and the challenge of identifying an international actor acceptable to all parties. It can also have the ancillary benefit of saving money (as long-term international facilitators must be paid, if their services are not donated by a foreign government).

Whether provided by a team or by a single individual, facilitation in the nonformal dialogue processes examined in this report was often backed up by strong research support. In Lebanon's Common Space Initiative, the facilitators for each of the separate thematic dialogues were paired with a staff member who coordinated research for and at the request of the dialogue's participants. In some cases, this entailed commissioning external studies; in others, it involved engaging the participants themselves in the research process. In Nepal's NTTP Forum, a two-pronged approach was taken to research: each of the major parties had individual researchers assigned to it to provide the information that would enable it to participate more effectively in the dialogue. In addition, separate staff conducted research for the forum as a whole.

Training and Knowledge Infrastructure. Staff members and advisers working for nonformal dialogues in several countries have cited the lack of capacity of political parties that are stakeholders in the process as one of their principal challenges. When parties had more members with the background, skills, and knowledge to stand in for designated stakeholders in specific dialogues, including participating in research efforts, the dialogues benefited. When human resources were thin or nonexistent, much more time and support were required to enhance individual stakeholders' capacity to fully participate in and contribute to a process.

The services provided by dialogues' support structures play an important role in enhancing, if not fully equalizing, the capacity of stakeholders to engage in the dialogue process.

Historically, much of the international support given to stakeholders in dialogues and negotiation processes has come in the form of training and technical assistance provided by international experts, and exposure trips to third countries to study relevant issues and solutions (such as federal arrangements or transitional justice mechanisms). At their best, such training and trips provide insights and exposure that resonate with participating stakeholders, helping them analyze their own contexts and generate new ideas and solutions. At their worst, training and technical assistance provided by international experts can lack contextual knowledge, fail to build on what has been offered previously, or be directed toward stakeholders who, for whatever reason, may not be receptive to engaging with the subject matter. Additionally, exposure trips to third countries, while often thought to be immensely valuable, can be a distraction and poorly timed, removing stakeholders from more pressing matters in their own countries at critical junctures. They can also be resented by nonparticipants, damaging the reputations of those who do participate and potentially undermining the legitimacy of the processes they are designed to support.

In the dialogue processes studied in Lebanon, Burma, and Nepal, great emphasis was given to building the institutional knowledge infrastructure. Resources were allocated to hiring research staff; constructing virtual and physical information libraries, including remotely accessible databases; exploring existing and newly commissioned research; and developing new computer infrastructure (see box 7). The emphasis on building internal capacity within the structures supporting dialogue processes has helped leverage and channel the resources offered by international parties, contributing to greater continuity and more appropriate tailoring of training and technical assistance provided by all sources.

Physical Space. Several of the processes studied here provided a common physical space where stakeholders could meet safely and access needed support services. Lebanon's Common Space Initiative and Nepal's NTTP Initiative both provide such space.

As noted earlier, Lebanon's Common Space Initiative is located in central Beirut, across from the country's parliament and close to churches and mosques of many of the country's religious communities. Both its central location and the design of its offices reflect the initiative's openness to all stakeholder groups. The physical layout of the office is dominated by spaces for formal and informal meetings by stakeholders and visitors; and the space also includes a library with books, publications, and access to online databases. The walls feature historical photographs of Lebanon's prior negotiations and dialogues.

Nepal's NTTP Initiative's physical space was for many years located in a historic building in Kathmandu, off the main roads. The siting out of the public eye reflected in part the need for stakeholders in the dialogue to come and go without notice during the most intensive phases of dialogue and negotiations in the country's peace process. Several of the groups organizing Burma's state-based common spaces are in the process of establishing dedicated physical spaces for regional dialogues. With stakeholders in national conflicts often separated by ethnicity, ideology, geography, social class, and other limiting factors, having a common physical space open to all is essential to fostering intergroup contact.

Relations with Members and External Parties

Nonformal political dialogues exist within an ecosystem of peace assets. Their effectiveness depends on how they interact with and draw on other assets in this system. Among the most

visible elements of this ecosystem are institutions; some of the different forms include formal political dialogues, international agencies, government ministries, commissions, committees, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, and research institutes. Other peace assets with which nonformal dialogues may engage include civil society networks, a wide range of social and political movements, individual political, religious, and business leaders, and activists. The less visible, intangible peace assets of this ecosystem include political and cultural traditions, particularly those relating to dispute resolution, and values and cultural norms, such as those relating to fairness, reciprocity, and justice.

The resources within individual conflict ecosystems include those that can be leveraged and those that are best avoided by stakeholders of nonformal national dialogues. Just as with formal political dialogues, the individual and institutional affiliations that a nonformal dialogue and its host structures choose to develop, and the values and norms that they express through their words and actions, can propel their mission forward or derail it before it even starts. A partnership with a foreign donor whose reputation is poor among segments of a dialogue's stakeholders could undermine the dialogue's operations. Among the first tasks undertaken by a dialogue's initiators must be to map these resources and assess their potential to contribute to or endanger the attainment of the dialogue's objectives.

The primary constituencies of dialogues and their support structures are their members. Which members a dialogue chooses to engage and which stakeholders it chooses not to engage will reflect its design and objectives and partially determine its potential impact. Some institutions are essentially unilateral structures representing distinct constituencies, such as political parties and ethnic minorities. Others are joint structures representing multiple constituencies, such as Burma's WGEC, and the more recently formed supporting structure known as the Ethnic Armed Organization Peace Process Steering Team (founded in 2016), both of which brought together representatives from many of the country's ethnic armed groups and their political branches. Still others are fully inclusive structures that aim to represent all parties to a conflict, such as Lebanon's Common Space Initiative and Nepal's NTTP Forum.

No one type of institution, whether a unilateral, joint, or fully inclusive structure, is necessarily better than another. The benefits of unilateral structures may include the ability to enhance a distinct community's or political party's engagement with a peace process. In some conflicts, these unilateral structures can also serve as precursors to the development of other, more broadly representative bodies. However, without parallel joint or fully inclusive structures providing opportunities for sustained engagement among adversaries, such capacity-enhancing mechanisms can have only limited impact.

Nonformal dialogues themselves are primarily joint or fully inclusive structures; however, dialogue *within* a single party (that unilateral structures may support) can be as essential to political change processes as dialogue between parties. Joint and fully inclusive structures have been characteristic of peacebuilding efforts in Burma and Nepal and include structures focused on dialogue and policy formulation, as well as on policy implementation. Over the past several years, Burma has had a profusion of partially inclusive joint structures supporting dialogue and negotiations, including the MPC, which operated until 2016, when the newly elected government, headed by the NLD, decided to close it down; the WGEC, a temporary body that brought representatives of the ethnic armed groups and civil society groups together; and the United Nationalities Federation Council, a more formal organization whose members are ethnic armed groups, and which, in its current incarnation, has attempted to represent groups

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that have not yet signed on to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and have not formally joined the Union Political Conference.³³

One pitfall of structures claiming to represent several or even all constituencies in a conflict is the danger of falling short of that aim. The MPC was continually hampered by its initial statement that it was the peace support center for all stakeholders in the country's peace process, a claim it could never live up to. Ethnic armed groups never saw the MPC as their resource center, relying instead on less well-resourced but highly capable civil society organizations (for example, the improbably named Shalom Foundation, the Pyidaungsu Institute, and the Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Center), as well as on the capacities available within their own political wings.³⁴

Whether unilateral or joint, representing narrow constituencies or aiming to be broadly inclusive, institutional structures supporting dialogue can be found at every level of society, not just at the high political level of the previous examples. Regional and local structures, such as Nepal's network of local peace committees and Burma's emerging network of state-based common spaces, have also aimed to be broadly inclusive of multiple-stakeholder groups, even as they operate at subnational levels.

Entities firmly rooted in multilateral and bilateral institutions and collaborations can also support nonformal national-level political dialogue. Examples of such entities range from multidonor trust funds, which often provide financial support to national-level political dialogues, to bilateral aid agencies, regional organizations (such as the Gulf Cooperation Council), and UN bodies, such as the United Nations Mission to Nepal, which played a significant role in supporting the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts that helped end Nepal's ten-year civil war. In some conflicts, these multilateral and bilateral institutions have played a leading role in the formation of national-level political dialogues, with very mixed results. The risks of multilateral and bilateral actors taking on too great a role is discussed in the next section.

In general, relations between and among nonformal national political dialogues and the multitude of institutions that support and engage them are less hierarchical and vertical than they are horizontal. In these complex conflict environments, few structures possess authority over other structures; instead, strong and weak ties define and delimit how one influences another. The more points of connection among these entities and the more multilayered the relationships among them (for example, through overlapping stakeholder groups, shared governance, and agreements and mandates that call for cooperation), the greater the likelihood for shaping the form and substance as well as the implementation of official agreements and policies.

Seven Principles for Launching and Developing Nonformal Dialogues

The experiences of nonformal dialogues and their support structures in Lebanon, Burma, and Nepal reveal a number of crosscutting themes and instructive insights for stakeholders embarking on similar efforts. A distillation of these themes and insights renders a set of seven principles that can inform the creation and evolution of nonformal dialogues, in the process helping them maximize their impact. While not all principles apply to all processes, or apply in equal measure, collectively they address the core challenges that confront stakeholders wishing to develop national political dialogues.

A section at the end of the report provides would-be organizers of nonformal national dialogues a list of which factors to consider and questions to ask when deciding whether a dialogue might help their society advance the cause of peace.

Understand the Utility and the Risks of the Constructive Use of Ambiguity

In the development of nonformal dialogue processes in Lebanon, Burma, Nepal, and elsewhere, national stakeholders and their international partners repeatedly employed “constructive ambiguity” (for example, the implicit or deliberate act of leaving arrangements or roles inexact, of not defining boundaries) as a strategic resource to allow the structures and the dialogues they were hosting to evolve slowly and safely over time. Ambiguity in these contexts can take many forms, including but not limited to the overlapping and occasional blurring of the roles of stakeholders and nonformal dialogues and their support structures with those of the larger peace and political reform processes; fuzziness regarding the evolving roles within nonformal dialogues that individual participants and partner institutions play; and ambiguity in the form of the nonformal dialogues and their support structures.

Such uses of ambiguity can play out in a number of concrete ways. For example, when initiators of a nonformal dialogue refrain from seeking acknowledgment of their role, this can leave open the possibility of collective ownership, which allows potential participants to see both the dialogue and any initiative that springs from this platform as something that can serve their interests. Conversely, ambiguity as to the role and even the identity of key stakeholders or whether an initiative is independent or affiliated with specific parties can be used defensively. For example, it can help to shield fledgling processes from potentially damaging opposition and criticism from spoilers who might object to the involvement of specific stakeholders.

However, ambiguity in nonformal processes is not without drawbacks. It can induce a perception of informality, which can lead to reduced commitment on the part of stakeholders, reducing the potential effectiveness of the collaboration.

The hybrid bisectoral structure of many nonformal dialogues and their support structures is another important aspect that lends itself to the constructive use of ambiguity. For example, the Common Space Initiative in Lebanon, the NTTP process in Nepal, and to a lesser extent the SSR Dialogue, also in Nepal, were often perceived to be straddling the divide between government and civil society. Over time, these processes came to be seen as located within or at least closer to civil society, but in their early years most were perceived as neither purely civil society structures nor official government or multilateral endeavors. This ambiguity provided the breathing room that allowed these processes to grow.

Ambiguity relating to the sectoral locus of nonformal dialogue can have a very practical benefit. As several senior political party officials and stakeholders in the NTTP process acknowledged, the fact that the NTTP was neither an NGO (the NGO sector was viewed with suspicion by some political parties) nor a government entity was useful. It allowed government officials and other senior leaders to participate with little risk. If they were questioned about their participation, these officials and leaders could simply respond that it was just an informal meeting, not a formal affiliation with an established institution. This ambiguity gave participants the freedom to explore possibilities with less risk that their participation could undermine public postures or their individual roles in political movements, particularly in the early stages of a dialogue, when knowledge of its efforts may have been limited.

Ambiguity can also be seen in the roles that international partners and donors played in several of these processes. In Nepal, Lebanon, and Burma, international donor involvement with nonformal dialogues was understood but not highlighted, largely because too much emphasis on international participation could decrease stakeholders’ sense of national ownership. Emphasizing the role of international actors could also have affected how the structures

were perceived by external parties, both national and international. At the same time, however, downplaying the role of international donors and partners can pose risks. With less public acknowledgment of their contributions, donors may step back their commitment, which both endangers future support and potentially reduces the legitimacy a nonformal dialogue enjoys, which can be conveyed by strong international support.

The visual appearance of the Common Space Initiative in Beirut offers a clear illustration of ambiguity about the role of international donors. At its prominent location in Nejmeh Square, across from Lebanon's parliament building, a visitor to the Common Space Initiative is greeted by signs in Arabic and English, each making no reference to the initiative's affiliation with current or past major supporters, which include the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Western Asia, and the German, Finnish, and Norwegian foreign ministries. Yet the support provided by UN agencies and other international partners to the Common Space Initiative has been critical, and is evidenced in the creation of an International Partners Council that meets regularly. Similarly, in Nepal, neither the Swiss nor the US donors required highly visible public identification of their support for the NTTP Initiative. (The US government has a formal process for requesting a waiver of the usual "branding" requirements required by the United States Agency for International Development.) The lack of formal and visible identification of international support for these processes contributes to the perception of their independence.

The ambiguity of these relationships does pose challenges for both international donors and national stakeholders. One illustrative story from Lebanon describes a meeting between the recently arrived UNDP resident representative and the president of the country. The UNDP representative summarized the UNDP's banner programs in Lebanon, and mentioned the Common Space Initiative. According to some reports, the meeting did not go as well as the representative had anticipated, and subsequent communications suggested that the president was not pleased to hear UNDP claim an association with the Common Space Initiative, which the president had regarded as a Lebanese initiative. The story illustrates the potential challenge international donors face in balancing the need to highlight their good works for internal constituencies with the diplomatic requirement to downplay donor support in politically sensitive areas.

Recognize That Credibility Can Depend on Who Convenes the Dialogue and Who Is Invited to Participate

Convening a nonformal dialogue and deciding whom to invite to participate require careful consideration and diplomatic skill. Should the conveners and recruiters be external parties, reputable national leaders, forward-looking political stakeholders, or a combination of representatives from all three groups? Who should be recruited? What are the qualities that make for an effective participant in a nonformal dialogue process? The manner in which participants become connected to the dialogue process is equally important. How a participant becomes engaged in a process can potentially affect his or her ability to develop and claim equal ownership of the process as a stakeholder over time.

These central questions all demanded answers in one of the first nonformal political dialogues organized in the post-Cold War era, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue. At a time of spiraling civil conflict in the newly independent Tajikistan, the conveners of the dialogue were confronted with the daunting challenge of navigating an explosive political climate. Up to fifty

thousand had already died in 1992 alone, and hundreds of thousands of people had been internally displaced.³⁵

The convener of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue was not a government but the Dartmouth Conference, an independent entity, some of whose members had “extensive contacts” in Tajikistan.³⁶ Launched at the height of the Cold War in 1960, the Dartmouth Conference began as a US-Soviet initiative of citizens with ties to government but who largely were not part of government. It lasted for more than forty years, well into the post-Soviet era. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the rise of conflicts within and among former Soviet republics, the Dartmouth Conference’s Regional Conflicts Task Force initiated the Inter-Tajik Dialogue to “see whether a group can be formed within an intra-state conflict that can design a peace process for their own country.”³⁷

To start a dialogue of stakeholders in the newly independent country, task force members had to draw on the connections they had developed and leverage the reputation the Dartmouth Conference had acquired during decades of nonofficial contact among a diverse group of distinguished individuals from the United States, such as David Rockefeller and Norman Cousins, and the Soviet Union, such as Georgi Arbatov and Alexander Korneichuk. However, the members of the conference saw themselves not so much as third-party conveners but rather, as Hal Saunders put it, as “stewards of the process,” a process they had helped initiate but did not control.³⁸ Participants in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue were invited to the process by two Dartmouth Conference members, Vitali Naumkin and Irina Zviagelskaya. In reaching out to potential participants, they identified individuals from the “second and third levels of their institution, for example the vice chairman, the vice chancellor, the deputy director. The purpose of choosing people at this level was to avoid highly visible political figures who would understandably feel the need to defend hard positions and even to posture.”³⁹ Additionally, they sought prospective members who could credibly represent the views of their respective constituencies, people who shared the goal of ending the violence and who were willing to risk being associated with the effort, those who could “speak from the heart as well as from the mind,” and those with a capacity to listen to others.⁴⁰ Officially launched in March 1993, the Inter-Tajik Dialogue continued to meet regularly, initially outside Tajikistan but from 1996 within the country. Both the dialogue itself and its individual members played a significant role in the efforts leading to the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in 1997 and in the subsequent national reconciliation efforts.

The experience of the Dartmouth Conference in convening the Inter-Tajik Dialogue predated by more than a decade the efforts of many of the common space and Track 1.5 processes profiled here. These more recent experiences have taken a variety of different approaches to the question of who convenes and who is invited to participate. Unlike the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, the convening authority of processes in Lebanon, Nepal, and Burma rested less on external third parties and more on the national actors involved. In Burma, the reputation and track record of the Euro-Burma Office (a civil society organization led by exiles and nationals from the country), as a conduit of technical and financial support from international donors to the political organizing and peacemaking efforts of ethnic armed groups, allowed it to play an instrumental role in convening the WGEC in 2012. Nepal’s NTTP process enjoyed the early support of two senior Nepali figures, Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Daman Nath Dhunghana, who were no longer active in party politics but were respected for their impartial roles in prior peace efforts. The financial support of the US government for the initiative in its earliest phase and the credentials of its South African technical adviser, Hannes Siebert,

also aided the NTTP's convening authority. All these factors came into play in winning the support of the palace (during the period prior to the king's abdication), adding additional authority to the process.

The lesson to be drawn from these examples is that the credibility of a nonformal dialogue must be established early on. For most of the nonformal dialogues spotlighted in this report, the credibility of the process was deeply rooted in the reputations and the early-stage conduct of the national organizers and stakeholders, though it was also bolstered by the imprimatur of advisers and sponsoring institutions, including donors.

Participant selection for dialogues must also flow from the needs of the process. In Burma's ongoing armed conflict, WGEC members were largely predetermined by the appointments of the participating ethnic armed groups, with additional representation coming from civil society organizations. In Nepal, where the armed conflict involved only one political party—the Maoists—but the political conflict involved many parties, participation in the NTTP Forum involved a consultative outreach effort to all major parties that was planned in advance, after a mandate by the country's cabinet to an all-party committee to prepare for talks with the Maoists. Members of the fledgling NTTP secretariat met with political party leadership to identify two second-tier leaders from each of the largest political parties who could become regular participants in the forum. As with the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, the process avoided top leaders, who might be more constrained and less open to dialogue and considering diverse opinions. Instead, the goal was to seek out and engage individuals within party structures who worked closely with top leaders and could wield influence on party policy, but who had greater flexibility in considering others' opinions and potentially could articulate new ideas that extended beyond official party positions. Many of these second-tier leaders had served, or would again serve, in senior positions in government. However, at the time of joining the dialogue, they were not in those roles.

To be successful, any long-term dialogue process must be able to adjust participation to fit its changing needs. The NTTP Forum expanded its membership significantly at two separate times in its first three years to encompass a wider group of stakeholders, particularly those representing the Madhesi ethnic groups in the Terai, Nepal's major agricultural area. Lebanon's National Dialogue similarly expanded its membership in 2010 to reflect a change in membership criteria resulting from the recent parliamentary elections, balanced with "regional and confessional considerations."⁴¹

While changing membership midstream may be crucial to success, it also presents challenges that must be managed. In the NTTP Forum, stakeholder participants and supporting technical staff noted a change in the dialogue's dynamic when participants assumed new formal leadership roles in the Nepalese government. The new roles allowed more immediate input and the potential for discussions to have a direct impact on governmental policy, but they also appeared to lead to less constructive discussions. The opinions of persons who took on new governmental roles became more fixed.

The individual temperament of participants can also be a factor. One of the initial participants in a dialogue hosted by the Lebanese Common Space Initiative was reported to have been unable or unwilling to engage with other participants in a constructive manner, even after repeated meetings.⁴² Unfortunately, at that stage in the dialogue's development there was no mechanism to rotate out or disinvite participants, and as a result, the constructive potential of the dialogue was lost.

Protect Autonomy and Promote National Ownership

Two motivating principles inspire questions about who convenes a dialogue, how it is convened, and who participates in it: the need for local ownership of the process, and the need for autonomy of the process. No national change process can be driven by an external party. This observation does not negate or minimize the substantive roles played by international and national third-party actors and institutions in supporting the development of the common spaces and other Track 1.5 processes profiled here. However, emphasizing the central importance of local ownership helps to highlight the risks that can accompany too much involvement by external parties.

No matter how noble the intentions of international partners, their interests and agendas will never be fully in sync with the requirements and needs of a national process. This lack of harmony is particularly evident in the case of sanctions imposed by international actors on states, nonstate armed groups, individuals, companies, and other entities, particularly in the post-9/11 era. These sanctions express the views of international partners but can significantly hamper peace initiatives by governments and other stakeholders who may not wish to shut out the sanctioned parties. Both state and nonstate actors, particularly armed groups (for example, the previous military government in Burma, Nepal's Maoists, Lebanon's Hezbollah) may be subject to varying sanctions, limiting the ability of foreign governments and international organizations to engage with these actors. (See box 6, "Regulatory Barriers to Peace Initiatives," for a current example of this challenge.) At their best, international partners recognize this potential tension and create the space and conditions for stakeholders in negotiations and dialogue processes to pursue their independent role.

Ensuring the benefits of autonomy for dialogue processes can require shielding these processes from the influence of international donors, whose priorities and interests may diverge from those of national stakeholders. In extreme cases, such influence can force undesirable shifts in a dialogue process and even disrupt it. Guarding the autonomy of a process can also contribute to the sense of ownership stakeholders develop for a process and for the institution that is supporting it. Developing this felt sense of ownership often takes time. As structures and dialogue processes are launched, ownership will first be felt most keenly by the initiators, such as national figures and their national and international advisers and partners. Extending this commitment to a broader circle of stakeholders as the process grows must be a priority.

The sense of ownership of and commitment to a process can arise from multiple sources but is most often cemented by participation in the design process. Even in cases in which the initiators of a dialogue have a fairly clear idea of what the contours and structure of the process should be, those initiators should create conditions for other stakeholders to contribute to the design of the process to help it reach its full potential.

Regardless of the degree of foresight displayed or the amount of planning undertaken by the initiators, these individuals and institutions must share responsibility with stakeholders who join later, thereby allowing the process to evolve into a broader, shared commitment. As one senior coordinator of Lebanon's Common Space Initiative succinctly noted, "The transfer of ownership to the stakeholders is a process." The development of shared ownership should be seen as one of the essential requirements of nonformal dialogues, coequal with more concrete achievements of the process itself.⁴³

The origins of the Cyprus Dialogue Forum illustrate both the challenges of international support and its potential to play a catalytic role, revealing how stakeholders and their international

partners collaborated to ensure they could later reap the benefits of autonomy and strong national ownership of a dialogue process. At the outset, the reputations of the international actors offering support to the Cypriot efforts were mixed. The UNDP was scheduled to close its offices in Cyprus, and the US embassy (the primary source of financial support) was seen, in the words of one observer, as “neocolonial.” The challenge facing the initial efforts supported by UNDP and the United States was to convince potential stakeholders that the new forum was not just another whim of international organizations that would have no lasting impact. To meet this challenge, both Cypriots and their international allies adopted a low-key, nondirective approach that included hosting informal conversations, workshops, and precursor gatherings. Collectively, these efforts served to till the soil that became fertile ground for the growth of the forum. In essence, a small group of Cypriot initiators planted seeds in this soil, eventually conducting a regular series of organizing meetings from May 2014 through January 2015. These meetings utilized a single-text approach—a technique that uses a single document to reflect all the interests and proposals of stakeholders present—which resulted in a formal document authorizing the launch of the forum.⁴⁴ The final document was approved by all but two of the forty-four participating parties. In keeping with the philosophy of the initiators and their international supporters, facilitation provided to the initial group was very light, to reinforce the notion that the process would be process driven and owned by Cypriot stakeholders.

The multiple strands of activity and interests that led to the birth of the Cyprus Dialogue Forum in 2015 were not neatly organized or assembled. The forum did not result from a clear project plan with a projected timeline (indeed, the UNDP official in charge admitted that there was no approved project document for the efforts that led to the forum’s launch). The international support for efforts that led to the forum’s birth came about in part because of highly unusual circumstances, including the planned exit of UNDP from the island, interest among the UNDP staff in supporting efforts that might have a lasting impact (unlike many prior initiatives), and a reservoir of initial funds available from an international donor, the United States, that was willing to back a nontraditional effort. The prolonged gestation period, from precursor efforts in 2011 through to January 2015, resulted in occasional pressure applied by the donor, which was frustrated by the slow pace of progress in launching what was then anticipated to be a dialogue forum. Ultimately the leadership and stewardship efforts of the Cypriot organizers, the commitment of its initial stakeholders from both sides of the island, and the patience and foresight of their international supporters helped bring the initiative to fruition while also preserving its autonomy. The forum is still in its early stages, and its long-term impact remains to be seen, but the initial phases have attracted the commitment of a wide-ranging group of stakeholders from across the island’s communities.

Knowledge development efforts can simultaneously allow relationships to grow among participants, facilitate the open exchange of views, and lead to shared understanding—and even empathy—for adversaries and their positions, all building blocks for future agreements.

Support Dialogue through Emphasizing Open Inquiry and Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge generation and knowledge acquisition are crucially important for all stakeholders in a dialogue process. These actions are most effective when undertaken on a collective, not a solitary, basis, one involving open inquiry and exploratory discussions that allow new information and insights to emerge. As a collective endeavor, these knowledge development efforts can simultaneously allow relationships to grow among participants, facilitate the open exchange of views, and lead to shared understanding—and even empathy—for adversaries and their positions, all building blocks for future agreements.

A process guided by open inquiry and exploratory discussions of issues helps ensure that interactions among participants do not slip into the positional bargaining typical of a negotiation

process. With skilled facilitation and stakeholder commitment, participants learn to stay focused on collaborative learning and exploration of issues. Many of the stakeholders in the processes studied termed this broader knowledge generation and acquisition effort “knowledge sharing,” which is much more than simply the sharing of knowledge. It refers to the full spectrum of collective reflection by participants in dialogue processes on various issues through use of the techniques and principles described earlier.

Of course, these techniques are not unique to dialogues. Negotiation processes can and do incorporate many of the facets of open inquiry; however, their primary objective is a negotiated agreement. While dialogues may have this end goal as well, their focus is on expanding the knowledge base of stakeholders, exploring in depth issues dividing stakeholders, and improving relationships and building trust among stakeholders as preconditions to the development of policies that may be agreed to at a later stage.⁴⁵

A valuable aid in this knowledge-sharing process is a robust architecture of systems and tools. Prominent features of the nonformal dialogues and their support structures in Lebanon, Burma, and Nepal included their material resources (for example, physical and virtual libraries, open meeting spaces, information technologies, dedicated facilitation, research staff) and their information tools (for example, databases, conceptual frameworks, applications for issue analysis and tracking, discussion protocols) (see box 7). Architecture, in this broad sense, applies to both the process principles and the methods used to conduct the dialogues, as well as to the infrastructure and physical design of the dialogues themselves.

Unlike some other ways by which stakeholders can gain knowledge relevant to a peace process (for example, training and technical assistance efforts), the installation and focus of a knowledge-sharing architecture support a sustained capacity for knowledge generation on the part of national stakeholders themselves. This enduring capacity is tremendously valuable. Confronted with a range of substantive issues that divide their societies, stakeholders can draw on the material and information resources provided to them to actively develop their own knowledge base, integrating external information and expertise provided by third parties as needed, but doing so in a long-term, active learning mode.

When supported by a knowledge-sharing architecture, a dialogue guided by open inquiry and knowledge sharing will result in agendas that emphasize the collective examination of topics of mutual interest and importance.⁴⁶ Some topics addressed in nonformal dialogues in 2016 utilizing these resources included the parameters and overall design of a national political dialogue in Burma, relations between Palestinian and Lebanese communities in Lebanon, judicial reform, and the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The examination of these issues by the dialogue participants is most often facilitated by teams of national facilitators, who in turn are supported by teams of researchers drawn from partner institutions or designated staff, and occasionally by stakeholders themselves. In practice, the aspiration that stakeholders to a dialogue embrace and exhibit the behaviors necessary for knowledge sharing is often hard to achieve. The facilitators of one recent nonformal dialogue reported that in the early subgroup sessions, stakeholders initially needed to let off steam and make pronouncements before coming around to joining a more probing exploratory discussion. With the right level of facilitation, however, open inquiry-based discussions can be initiated that simultaneously fulfill two purposes: to explore issues, gain insights, share perspectives, and articulate differences; and to build working relationships. Pursuing both these goals creates conditions for the surfacing of policy options and proposals that can feed into the formal process.

Box 7. Technology and Paper: The Importance of Both Physical and Virtual Knowledge-Sharing Strategies

For more than a decade, advances in information and communication technologies have dramatically increased the ability of stakeholders in peace processes to securely access and share information over the web. With advances in mobile technologies, even stakeholders in far-flung locations can gain access to specialized and even restricted information that in prior decades would have been nearly impossible to share in real time. Leveraging these technologies, the support structures for nonformal dialogues in Lebanon and Burma have created physical and virtual libraries relevant to each conflict's disparate issues in an effort to indigenize and institutionalize knowledge resources in their respective processes. These physical and virtual repositories enable stakeholders to access articles, case studies, and confidential memoranda, as well as minutes of their own meetings, from secure websites. Access to online tools has also increased; various applications are now available to help analyze and organize vast amounts of information generated in peace processes.

Despite the availability of internet and computer technology, paper is still important. The use and benefits of information and communications technologies can still be limited by infrastructure constraints, cultural factors, and an individual's degree of comfort with using electronic devices and software.

Even when there is variation in stakeholders' ability to utilize these resources, the accessibility of both public and confidential information supports continuity in discussions, addressing a formidable challenge to peace processes in which dialogue and negotiation efforts start and stop frequently. Indeed, one interesting feature of the Common Space Initiative in Lebanon was its capacity to bring the historical record of prior dialogue and negotiation efforts—including photographs, press accounts, articles, and other official and unofficial documents—into a venue accessible to all interested parties.

Of course, the generation of knowledge by stakeholders themselves does not negate the need for or the utility of expert advice, technical assistance, and training. Yet the process of creating and sustaining their own knowledge-sharing systems and processes provides a counterweight to an overemphasis on knowledge transfer that can characterize much international support. When expert advice, training, and technical assistance are offered, they are best treated as complements to structured indigenous processes for knowledge sharing and generation.

Do Not Overlook the Importance of Physical Design

The physical design of spaces—room configurations, availability of light, ease of access to tools and other equipment—can have a significant impact on the productivity and success of human endeavors conducted in environments meant to promote collaboration. In addition to the practical effects of physical design on human collaboration, the physical environment can affect humans cognitively, through how our perceptions are shaped (consciously or unconsciously) by the symbolic meaning of spaces and objects. Many peace negotiations have stumbled over the choice of neutral venues whose symbolic meaning does not convey a preference for any one party. While our recognition of the ability of physical space and objects to convey meaning is not new, where and how that meaning is conveyed and how it affects individuals and groups is not always easy to discern.⁴⁷ That the physical environment could have a constructive impact on peacebuilding has received far less attention than its potential to exacerbate conflict or be used by parties to their advantage. Military strategists and scholars have long noted how weather, geography, the built environment (the design of cities, towns, and fortresses), and the natural environment (the location of rivers, water supplies, forests, and other natural resources) have been central to conflict outcomes.

The impact of the physical environment on conflict stakeholders, of course, does not end with battlefield outcomes. From a historical perspective, the interaction between physical environment and stakeholders has gradually become more intentional in postconflict situations as a community's attention turns to rehabilitation of the physical environment and frequently to the symbolic action of memorializing a conflict and its victims through monuments, museums, and other public spaces. The community's aims are centered on how humans will react emotionally and intellectually, not just physically, to that environment.

The idea that interaction between humans and their physical environment can have emotional and cognitive components, not just a physical one, is at the foundation of a growing field of study that looks at the impacts of design on group interaction and human cognition. Research into these questions draws on a diverse set of fields, including neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, architecture, and design.

Several of the processes profiled here were attentive to the physical design of the spaces in which people met. Many of the nonformal dialogues paid careful attention to the physical location of their institutions and meeting sites, not just with regard to the convenience of the facilities used but also for the symbolism of the spaces. For instance, the Cyprus Dialogue Forum (a formal dialogue process established in 2015) was organized out of the Home for Cooperation on the Green Line (the buffer zone) separating the two sides of the conflict on that island. The location of Lebanon's Common Space Initiative is a reminder of the diversity of Lebanese society, which has been cleaved by religious divisions throughout much of its recent history. The Common Space Initiative has interpreted its role to include the collection and display of the historical record of all prior dialogue and negotiation efforts, a history not well known even to the lead negotiators in Lebanon.

In another example of how participants paid attention to physical design, three support structures in three countries had custom tables built to ensure that no seat at the dialogue table would be symbolically privileged over another. The equalization of status among a dialogue's participants is one of the important conditions cited by Allport in his theory of intergroup contact. This principle has been picked up and applied in practice by design consultants, such as Scott Doorley and Scott Witthoft, who look at the specifics of room configuration, furniture, and interaction in those environments and make recommendations for effective creative and collaborative places.⁴⁸ This work has roots in facilitation practice.

Although interest in how design can facilitate group interaction and cooperation is growing, as yet the hard data to support an impact are scant. However, scholars and practitioners are beginning to take up these questions. For example, the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture has convened groups to explore the human relationship with the built environment and how the human experience of space affects decision making, emotion and affect, learning, and memory.⁴⁹

Create Continuity: Conceive of Initiatives, Not Projects

All the nonformal dialogues and their support structures profiled here have been multiyear endeavors whose institutional lives have ranged from a few years to well over a decade. Their extended institutional life spans stand in contrast to the time-limited and relatively short-term formal national conferences of the 1990s and more recent national dialogues, such as Yemen's, Sudan's, and Tunisia's. The longer time horizon of nonformal dialogues stems from several factors: the extended transition of the peace processes they are designed to support, the failure of existing mechanisms to resolve a country's conflict, the evolving

needs of the process, and stakeholders' beliefs that these processes still add value to their political culture.

The long-term nature of these processes presents several challenges. Unlike support for traditional developmental programs (for example, programs to improve health care and educational systems), peacebuilding efforts are seen as transitional. Most donor funding cycles range from one year to a maximum of three years. The patience of the donors to the Cyprus Dialogue Forum, with its extended gestation period, was unusual. In more violent conflicts, the imperative is often to move much more quickly, and long-term support for a single peacebuilding effort is uncommon. Despite this challenge, almost all of the dialogue processes and their support structures covered in this report (several structures in Burma excepted) are ongoing.

Why is this so? Ten years into the life of Nepal's NTTP Initiative and the SSR Dialogue, their stakeholders were adamant about the continuing need for the dialogue processes they have hosted and supported. The formal political channels—the Nepali parliament, for example—are not perceived as sufficient or even conducive to the communication required to develop agreements on key policies. The issues confronting the nation nearly ten years after the Comprehensive Peace Accord (signed in 2006) were still formidable. The post-civil war Nepalese constitution, adopted in late 2015, was strongly opposed by many sectors of society and for many reasons. Additionally, many in Nepalese society questioned the government's ability to fulfill prior commitments to transitional justice processes and to the victims of the conflict. Owing to the ongoing needs in the country, both processes, the NTTP and SSR, were able to sustain their operations through the commitment of their stakeholders and unusually long-term donor support.

In Lebanon, Cyprus, and Burma as well, many stakeholders spoke of the need for the long-term continuity of these initiatives. For some of these initiatives, the initial planning embraced the possibility that they would be long-term, independent endeavors, not short-term projects or transitional initiatives. However, the path to becoming institutions capable of serving an ongoing, long-term, constructive role in their country's political culture was by no means guaranteed from the outset. It evolved over time and required substantial creativity and commitment on the part of stakeholders. This creativity can be seen in the organizational form of these initiatives. Several of these structures did not possess an official legal form in their startup phases, which lasted many years. (Some never possessed a formal legal form; the SSR Dialogue—now the SSD Dialogue—in Nepal and the WGEC in Burma are examples.) They were initiatives with dedicated staff, facilities, and even advisory and governing boards, but no official status. Without legal status, they were effectively supported as “projects” by donors and other supporters, sometimes involving multiple groups working collaboratively, with external parties providing guarantees on leases and bank accounts, seconding staff, cofunding the initiative's work, and employing other nontraditional arrangements to supply the needed infrastructure. Despite the strong degree of donor engagement, these partners generally subscribed to the independence of the initiatives, which were largely self-governing.

This organizational structure promoted flexibility, creating the conditions that allowed the dialogues and their support structures to adapt to changing circumstances, including the ebbs and flows of donor support. This flexibility facilitated both administrative and programmatic changes. For example, two of the structures profiled, Lebanon's Common Space Initiative and Nepal's NTTP Initiative, formally registered as corporate entities (under different legal regulatory regimens in their respective countries) years after their founding. The formalization of the structures and the processes they supported was done in part to create greater independence from donor partners and in part because many of the stakeholders recognized that the role

of the institution was important not just as a transitional mechanism but also as an enduring structure in their emerging democracies.

The shift from initiative to formally registered national institution was not uniformly supported in all cases. In one instance, stakeholders criticized the move to register, saying that becoming a formal institution—perceived as an NGO, a connotation that was not viewed positively by all parties—would make it more difficult for senior political stakeholders to participate. Several stakeholders preferred the ambiguity of an initiative that was not formally located in one particular sector.

The continuity of an initiative can be ensured by means other than institutionalizing a support structure for dialogue as a legal entity. It can also be achieved through the long-term commitment of stakeholders and partners, such as Nepal's SSD Dialogue, which has been functioning for nearly ten years, though it has no formal legal status and is supported by US embassy staff.

As the duration of these processes extended from months to years, they often were accompanied by an evolution in both the emphasis and the direction of their programs. After eight years, the SSR Dialogue expanded its focus from security sector issues and began to address other political issues confronting Nepal's peace process (precipitating the name change to Security Sector Development Dialogue), such as those related to controversy over the constitution promulgated in 2015 and ongoing transitional justice concerns. Lebanon's Common Space Initiative has continually adapted its programmatic emphasis to reflect the changing internal and regional dynamics affecting the country, with its most recent iteration of thematic dialogues focused on the challenges to Lebanon posed by the massive influx of Syrian refugees into the country.

While these dialogues have adapted successfully in their administration and programs despite differences in their governance and legal structures, the larger challenge to the institutionalization process of nonformal dialogues may be how to ensure and sustain collective ownership and management of the initiatives that are evolving into new, potentially permanent, national structures. Over the expanded time frame of a peace process, representatives of stakeholder groups may change. Individuals may retire, alliances may shift, new parties may develop, and reputations may falter. The extent to which an institution is perceived to serve the interests of select individual stakeholders, or even a select set of political parties, as opposed to the process itself creates the risk that it will lose relevancy. The guardians and stewards of institutions must stay attuned to the needs of the process and to new issues as they develop. Newly formed NGOs, no less than companies or research institutions, may fail to keep pace with fast-changing environments. They need strong, broadly shared leadership that transcends individual and party interests. They need leaders who see themselves as stewards of a process in service of national priorities and who are capable of adapting and innovating to further that goal.

Build Bridges to Achieve Impact

The relationship between a nonformal dialogue, especially one that is national in scope, and official negotiation processes, existing legislative bodies, and other decision-making authorities is critical to its success. How will the dialogues influence these official entities? The elements of their relationship with other institutions and processes will help determine how the work, knowledge, and recommendations emerging from dialogues, whether nonformal or formal, can be fed into the work of official decision-making bodies.

In rare cases, usually where formal mandates are in place, dialogue processes can lead directly to formal agreements, which are then ratified by political stakeholders. In the most

famous political transition of the last half century, that of South Africa, agreements on an interim constitution, an Electoral Commission, and other subjects emerged out of the Multi-Party Negotiating Process.⁵⁰ More often, unlike South Africa's experience, the ideas, policy options, draft agreements, and legislation developed in dialogue structures must travel a path through formal legislative bodies or official negotiation processes before being adopted as official agreements.

Ideas that travel the distance from a dialogue process (whatever its degree of formality) to being adopted by an official body rely on a number of factors to help them complete the journey. One of the most important structural factors is the relationship between the nonformal dialogue and the formal negotiations or constitutionally mandated process. Variables in this relationship may include the type and quality of the dialogue's mandates, the degree of overlap between the members of a dialogue and the members of official decision-making structures, the influence a dialogue's members wield with official negotiators and their party's elected or appointed leaders, the strength of the ties between stakeholders, and the nature of broader constituencies whom the stakeholders represent. The relationship will also be greatly affected by the quality of the ideas emerging from a dialogue. In other words, the policy proposals and agreements themselves are of central importance.

These multiple factors affecting the ability of dialogues to have an impact on policy should be taken into early consideration in the design and implementation of a nonformal dialogue; otherwise, dialogue efforts can be quickly undermined. Examples abound of disconnects between stakeholders in a dialogue or negotiation process and their constituencies creating insurmountable barriers to the later adoption of reforms arising out of those processes. The negotiations leading up to Burma's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, signed in the fall of 2015, offer one example. One of the principal negotiating parties among the ethnic armed groups was the team of representatives of the Kachin Independence Army. After reaching a consensus in the negotiation process on most of the core demands, the Kachin delegation felt it was important to go back to their people for approval before they signed the final agreement. In a meeting organized by the Kachin Baptist Convention in the town of Laiza, those present overwhelmingly objected to joining the final agreement. The home constituency had not been brought along throughout the process and was suspicious of the agreement and the compromises it seemed to make on core Kachin demands.

A similar failure can be seen in the rejection of the Annan Plan for Cyprus (the effort led by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that created a nine thousand-page plan for a path to reunification) when it was put on a referendum in 2004. Although approved by a majority in the Turkish Cypriot north of the island, it was resoundingly rejected by the Greek Cypriot south, effectively ending the progress of the official UN negotiations up to that point. In the current environment, the island's political leaders are aware that public opinion must be nurtured throughout the process, not just left to a final referendum.

When dialogue stakeholders are highly skilled and have strong ties with political decision makers, these factors can pave the way for effective diffusion of policy proposals and agreements first forged in nonformal dialogue processes. In a multiday retreat, several key members of Nepal's NTTP Initiative, all senior second-tier leaders in their political parties, were able to overcome a deadlock on the issue of the integration of Maoist forces into the Nepalese armed forces. These representatives were then able to take their compromise solution back to their party leaders, which paved the way for progress in the stalled negotiations. The relationships of stakeholders in dialogue with their political leadership, such as in this NTTP example, and

with their constituencies, such as in the Cypriot and Burma examples, are influences that can be enhanced or, conversely, overlooked in the design of a dialogue process.

A dialogue's impact can also be influenced by external environmental factors, such as the stage of a peace process, the presence and influence of international actors who can contribute to or detract from the process, and events affecting the issues and proposals being addressed. In Nepal, the devastating earthquake in 2015 created a rare moment of unity among the Nepalese, one of the unanticipated side effects of which was the opening of a political space for the rapid passage of the country's constitution. External factors are by definition less controllable, but they can signal and even create windows of opportunity, or "policy windows," through which dialogue processes can enter into a peacebuilding process and contribute to peace and political change efforts.⁵¹ The Lebanese Common Space Initiative, for instance, developed out of the efforts of newly installed President Suleiman to maintain peace in the wake of the Doha Accord by reconvening Lebanon's National Dialogue with an agenda encompassing the broad challenges the country faced. The resistance by some parties to that expanded agenda created the opportunity for parallel dialogues at the Common Space Initiative to develop.

As with other factors, the external environment can increase the likelihood that a dialogue will have impact by assisting in the transmission of its output—the ideas, agreements, and policy proposals emanating from sustained discussion—to official decision-making bodies. However, the lack of propitious environmental factors should not deter efforts from proceeding, even in the most challenging circumstances. Indeed, the scholars Michael Mintrom and Philippa Norman, building on the research of John Kingdon on policy windows and "policy entrepreneurs" in political reform efforts more generally, note that the contributions of policy entrepreneurs can be decisive when contextual factors are less favorable to policy changes.⁵² Their findings, that individual policy entrepreneurs often have the most impact on policy innovation in challenging circumstances, is especially important in the difficult context confronting dialogue initiatives in entrenched conflicts. As the cases profiled in this report have shown, participants in nonformal dialogues who bring a diverse set of skills and experiences, as well as social and political networks, have been central to the positive impacts arising from these initiatives.

Conclusion: Nonformal Dialogues—Platforms for Peace and Democracy Building

Nonformal national dialogues can arise at any stage of a conflict resolution process, from early efforts to seed the ground for formal talks through later-stage postconflict reconstruction. An exemplar of one type of national architecture for peacebuilding, they offer the potential to make a significant impact on peace, as well as on the broader political change processes in conflict and postconflict environments. Today's nonformal dialogues build on earlier efforts, such as John Burton's and Herb Kelman's pioneering work on problem-solving workshops and the Track 2 diplomacy initiatives of Hal Saunders and others. Yet they also represent a departure from these prior efforts, and their distinctive features carry implications for their national organizers, and their technical and financial supporters.

The national origins and attention to process design are the central distinctive features of nonformal dialogues. As indigenous long-term responses led by national stakeholders, these initiatives are deeply rooted in their unique conflict environments. Their emphasis on inclusivity, relationship development, sustained dialogue based on open inquiry, and consensus-based decision making allows these dialogues to serve as a much-needed complement to official

processes. In violent political conflicts such processes, whether formal negotiations or processes conducted by legislative bodies or other constitutional structures, are frequently deadlocked, prone to breakdown, and often rejected as nonrepresentative by significant portions of national stakeholders. Nonformal dialogues can offer a path forward for stymied official processes, though there is no guarantee that path will be taken.

Five major factors distinguish nonformal from formal processes:

- their membership and degree of inclusiveness,
- whether they are public or held out of the limelight,
- their mandate,
- the degree of ownership of their stakeholders, and
- their duration.

Nonformal dialogues can bring to the table critical stakeholders who may be sidelined in official processes. This ability to integrate proscribed groups is aided by their being less public and generally possessing an informal or less visible mandate. These features facilitate the participation of stakeholders for whom engaging publicly with adversaries may carry significant risks. At the same time, the less formal quality of the mandate can hamper a nonformal structure's ability to influence official processes. Formal national dialogue processes frequently have a public, predetermined path for the introduction of any agreements arising out of their deliberations to formal decision-making bodies, though the existence of such paths is not sufficient to ensure agreements will be adopted. In contrast, nonformal dialogues usually must rely on the exercise of their members' influence with their represented constituencies to achieve an impact on official decisions. The dialogue's smaller size affords individual participants a greater opportunity to contribute to both its design and its daily functioning, which increases participants' sense of ownership of their dialogue process and their willingness to advocate for its outcomes.

Finally, nonformal dialogues, unlike their official counterparts, are generally not time-limited. The extended duration of many nonformal dialogues signals their members' belief that the initiative, for which they have developed a sense of collective ownership, has a utility that stretches beyond a particular phase of a peace process. While nonformal dialogues may begin as transitional mechanisms to assist during a specific moment of a conflict resolution process, in several of the cases profiled in this report the stakeholders elected to continue operations for years. These initiatives became platforms for multiple specific dialogue and related peace initiatives, responding to the evolving needs and continuing challenges of lengthy political transitions requiring dialogue and creative solutions.

As these bodies continue to function over time, their contributions will shift in emphasis. The roles of early-stage nonformal dialogues that bring previously excluded actors to the table and serve to stabilize peace processes at critical moments may evolve into other roles as official agreements pave the way for newly formed or reformed legislatures and other representative bodies to undertake more formal processes. However, even when formal legislative bodies acquire greater legitimacy in societies emerging from conflict, the need for deadlock-breaking mechanisms is likely to remain. The emphasis of nonformal dialogues on building relationships among long-term adversaries, on dialogue based on open inquiry, and on policy formulation remains valuable and can serve to further the dialogues' purposes on an ongoing basis.

In several of the cases profiled here, most notably in Nepal, nonformal national processes have presented an opportunity for international donors and allies to support nationally led efforts that bridge the peacemaking, peacebuilding, and democracy-building phases of national political conflicts. In other cases, such as the MPC's and WGEC's efforts in Burma and the

Cyprus Dialogue Forum, these processes function more directly as complements to official negotiations at a given point in time. Lebanon's Common Space Initiative shares aspects of both: it originated as a complement to an official process but has emerged as a more enduring mechanism to support Lebanon's democracy-building agenda.

The evolution of the contributions of nonformal dialogues over their extended life cycle reveals a similarity between their roles and those of civil society and even governmental bodies focused on policymaking in well-established democracies. Although arising in very distinct political environments, both nonformal dialogues and civil society and quasi-governmental bodies, such as the research institutes, think tanks, and special commissions of inquiry that are commonly found in established democracies, share broad goals of building consensus on particularly challenging policy questions through the use of strategies such as research, investigation, inquiry, and dialogue. All political systems, whether long-standing democracies or those struggling to achieve some degree of representative governance after years of violent political conflict, can benefit from platforms outside government that facilitate greater engagement and effectiveness of diverse stakeholders in the policy formulation process.

The potential trajectory of long-term nonformal dialogues in national conflicts, from transitional structures to enduring platforms for dialogue, has implications for their supporters, particularly international donors. A basic precept is that peacebuilding assistance and democracy-building assistance must be closely aligned, not siloed, administratively or otherwise. Within many international organizations, governmental and nongovernmental alike, peacebuilding assistance programs are situated apart from democracy-building support, which often resides in institutions and departments that focus on development assistance more broadly. Though observers and practitioners have long noted the need for greater continuity and coordination among distinct types of overseas development assistance, whether peacebuilding aid, democracy building assistance, or more traditional forms of socioeconomic development support, as recent internal UN reviews have noted, more can be done (see box 8).

At the same time however, international bodies should not blur the significant differences and requirements of each of these categories of international assistance. Time horizons, the modalities through which assistance is provided, planning and evaluation frameworks, and practices relating to the engagement of local and international partners must be contextualized to the types of assistance and the needs of unfolding political change processes.

Sustaining international support remains one of the greatest challenges to national stakeholders and international partners alike. International donor funding, overwhelmingly drawn from governmental and multilateral sources, is finite and subject to many competing priorities. Long-term conflicts wherein little progress has been made risk losing the attention of donors. At the same time, countries that achieve an important symbolic benchmark, such as national elections after a conflict, similarly risk losing donor attention because of their success. Both are subject to shifting donor priorities and diminishing aid flows, particularly when crises flare up elsewhere and when their country is perceived as secondary to the strategic interests of a donor.

While by no means a panacea, nonformal national dialogues offer one path for a sequenced and structured yet flexible engagement by national stakeholders and their international partners. Nonformal dialogues offer an alternative that may reduce the risks and costs of investing in early-stage large-scale formal processes or provide a means for sustaining engagement in the wake of more intensive support that has already yielded significant progress, such as peace agreements, elections, and even new constitutions. In the former scenario, by initially focusing on lower-profile nonformal processes, the efforts of national stakeholders may help create the

All political systems, whether long-standing democracies or those struggling to achieve some degree of representative governance after years of violent political conflict, can benefit from platforms outside government that facilitate greater engagement and effectiveness of diverse stakeholders in the policy formulation process.

Box 8. UN Peacebuilding Reform: Supporting Greater Local Ownership and Capacity

Many positive steps have been taken by international donors in the past two decades to enhance the effectiveness of global support for peacebuilding. In 2015 alone, the UN system conducted two reviews of its ongoing peacebuilding-related operations and organized a third conference under the auspices of the Future of the United Nations Project to probe how to pull together “the UN systems in conflict-prone states.”⁵³ The conference emphasized the need for greater local ownership and control of peacebuilding efforts, and also noted the need for longer-term peacebuilding presences in some complex, drawn-out conflicts—something that the United Nations often has difficulty providing because of its funding cycles and funding shortages. In advice that could be drawn from the experience of the nonformal dialogues profiled here, the conference reports stated that “[in light of] the sensitivity of the work involved in peacebuilding...the choice of UN personnel can be even more critical than the existence of a clear mandate and strategy.”⁵⁴ Participants called for personnel with greater expertise in analyzing conflicts who were focused on building local capacity. If implemented, these ideas augur well for the future direction of UN involvement.

conditions for an expansion of peace efforts, such as formal negotiations or public and official national dialogues. In the later postconflict scenario, nonformal dialogues can continue to serve as both a vital safety net for newly representative national legislative bodies still prone to deadlock and as a vehicle by which to contribute new insights and policy options.

Nonformal processes are not without risks, nor do they guarantee results. Their flexibility and less public face may allow stakeholders to defer difficult conversations and decisions that greater transparency and external or even self-imposed deadlines might accelerate. The structure of the nonformal processes explored here—involving wide representation of senior stakeholders and providing them with facilitation, research capacity, often a dedicated physical space, and access to additional resources from external partners—illustrates how these processes seek to overcome these potential deficiencies. Additionally, the drumbeat of regularly convened meetings led by national stakeholders willing to explore challenging issues dividing their societies may add to the momentum of these indigenous processes.

Nonformal national dialogues may also address some of the criticisms of the “liberal peace” model prevalent today. Critics charge that efforts to promote—and sometimes impose—international norms associated with liberal democracy and market economics ignore or ride roughshod over indigenous values and traditions. Nonformal national dialogues, however, emphasize national ownership and indigenous responses to national problems. The contributions of these enduring structures for dialogue, particularly when they are present at all levels of society, can provide a powerful channel for input into local, regional, and national governance in societies emerging from conflict. These nonformal dialogues do not negate the influence of international normative constructs in peacebuilding, but they aim to tip the scales so that national actors (from across the social and political spectrum) can incorporate a broader set of perspectives in their decision making. There is no guarantee that this consideration and infusion of multiple voices will occur; nonformal national dialogue processes can be captured by elites, just as formal national dialogues have been. Still, engaging leaders from across social and political spectrums, including neglected and marginalized communities, can yield agreements and recommendations that, if not revolutionary, may nonetheless result in policies and new governance structures that are longer-lasting and more representative than prior political orders.

Advice for Organizers of Nonformal National Dialogues

Although each nonformal national dialogue will arise and develop in a unique way, the experiences of multiple past initiatives reveal common organizational challenges and responses, as well as innovative design elements. The following guidelines for would-be organizers of a nonformal national dialogue distill factors to consider and questions to ask when deciding whether a dialogue is an appropriate mechanism to advance the cause of peace.

1. Timeliness

Assess whether the political and security climate is conducive to the launch of a nonformal national dialogue. In particular, ask the following questions:

- Do potential stakeholders have the ability to participate (for example, political agency, ability to travel, demonstrated interest)?
- Are political forces open to genuine dialogue or are they likely to try to capture the initiative or use the dialogue primarily to provoke or denigrate other participants?
- Is a public dialogue more suited to current conditions and popular expectations, or should the dialogue be conducted out of the limelight?

In answering each of these questions, the organizer should remember that the goals and structure of the dialogue can evolve over time, both in anticipation of and in response to changing circumstances and priorities (for example, stakeholders who may be reluctant to join initially may decide to join later; dialogues begun discreetly can become more public as conditions warrant).

2. Need and Opportunity

Is there a pressing need to broaden participation in national peacemaking efforts?

- If so, determine which stakeholders should be recruited. Some of these may have been excluded from prior peacemaking efforts, while others may have chosen not to participate.
- Develop a plan for their engagement. What will be needed to enlist their participation?

Is there opportunity and need for the nonformal dialogue to lead to a formal, official national dialogue?

- If so, identify influential stakeholders who can assist with making this transition.
- Consider which partners and allies may be helpful in achieving this outcome.

If a formal process already exists but would benefit from the support of a complementary nonformal dialogue process, how will relations with that formal process be established?

Options include:

- Creating overlapping membership by including participants from the formal process in the nonformal process.
- Developing an official relationship as a designated partner of the formal process.
- Maintaining an unofficial relationship coordinated through intermediaries or partners.

3. Convening and Mandate

Recognize that mandates for nonformal processes generally develop over time in response to the active participation and support of individuals, groups, and institutions. Occasionally, mandates will be derived from official bodies, but if these mandating institutions lack legitimacy or

credibility (for example, if they are perceived as biased by some parties), the mandate may undermine the dialogue's prospects of success.

Be attentive to the reputations of the conveners of a dialogue, those whose moral authority or reputation allows them to invite parties to the dialogue table. A convener—whether an individual, a group, or an institution—should either enjoy broad respect from all parties or be paired in such a way as to signal a balance of political views and a commitment to inclusivity. Similarly, be attentive to the reputations of all others who provide initial support (for example, a council of advisers) because they will be the first signal to others of where and how a mandate will develop.

In selecting conveners and initial supporters for an initiative, consider:

- How will their support be viewed by prospective participants and by the broader public?
- Will their participation signal that the process will be serious, respectful of diverse stakeholders, and impactful?

4. Location and Design

Choose a location or locations for meetings and offices that ensure ease of access and appropriate security for all stakeholders. In addition, be attentive to the symbolism of location:

- Consider locations that carry positive symbolic meaning for all participants.
- Avoid locations with problematic associations for potential stakeholders.

In choosing locations, and in developing an infrastructure, consider how both physical design and the design of the dialogue process itself can contribute to communication among stakeholders and achieving the desired impact.

- Seek input from architects, designers, historians, those skilled in dialogues, and others regarding how a dialogue space and a dialogue process can be constructed to reinforce the principles of inclusivity, open inquiry, equal access to information, and multipartyity.
- Incorporate historical and cultural elements into the design process that will resonate with all parties, while acknowledging the diverse heritages and perspectives of participants.

5. Participation

Ensure diverse and adequate participation.

Participants should be drawn from all constituencies whose input will be essential to achieve the dialogue's intended impact and whose representation will be needed for the process to be perceived as both inclusive and legitimate. Among other groups represented in the dialogue, consider recruiting participants from the government, the opposition, political parties, civil society, women's and youth groups, religious institutions, business associations, and labor unions.

In some cases, organizers may be able to directly engage prospective participants; in other cases, organizers may have to ask particular constituencies to nominate members to participate. In all cases, consider or convey to nominators the qualities you seek:

- Will participants have the confidence of their constituencies?
- Are they able to exert influence or persuade their constituencies to support proposals emanating from the process?
- Are they interested in engaging in a dialogue that will be characterized by inquiry and research, and in which they may play a leadership role?

Before contacting constituencies, consider whether major parties should be given increased representation, and how this will be perceived by other parties.

Encourage all prospective stakeholder groups to select alternates from within their group who will be kept informed of the work of the dialogue and be able to step in if and when needed.

Avoid recruiting top-tier decision makers from political parties, and focus instead on individuals in the second tier of political leadership, who may have more flexibility in what they can say.

6. Process Support and Long-Term Governance

Assess who will coordinate and support the dialogue, at least initially. Options include:

- Establishing an independent secretariat to provide management and support services.
- Engaging one or more domestic and international partner institutions to do the same.

Identify prospective donors to support the dialogue, and engage them in advance.

- Ensure enough initial support to get the dialogue started.
- Engage and educate prospective donors regularly, paying attention not only to current and mid-term needs but also to the dialogue's long-term needs should it endure, expand, and evolve.

Consider how partnerships with some entities (for example, foreign governments, domestic institutions) may affect the process (for example, will some donors be perceived as too allied with one party's positions, reducing their inclination to participate?). Minimize the potential negative influence (or the public perception of the undue influence) of any single institutional partner by balancing its support for the dialogue with support from other institutions.

Anticipate how governance of the dialogue may develop over time:

- Under any governance structure, a dialogue will need to be independent.
- Are management and coordination likely to shift from organizers in the initial startup stages to stakeholders as the dialogue develops? When and how will this be presented to initial participants?
- What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of the dialogue having unofficial or official status (for example, flexibility that may come with unofficial status versus simpler administration and other potential benefits of public, official status)?

7. Facilitation

Ensure long-term, skilled facilitation at all meetings hosted by the dialogue.

Determine the process for providing facilitation, including whether and how participants will have a role in selecting and evaluating facilitators. Options include:

- Having the participants facilitate the meetings themselves (with the role of facilitator either being assigned to specific participants or rotated among all participants).
- Engaging professional facilitators as external consultants.
- Relying on the dialogue's dedicated support staff.

Ensure facilitators are prepared to initiate and support dialogue among stakeholders:

- Assess whether additional training and exposure to other dialogue processes are needed.
- Prepare guidelines, review sample process rules and procedures, and discuss the frequency and timing of projected meetings.

- Identify resource needs and the sources of those resources, with an emphasis on domestic providers where possible; include international resources as needed.
- Establish a mechanism for orchestrating ongoing support (for example, a facilitation task group or technical committee).

8. Knowledge Sharing

Develop a plan for the regular and equitable sharing of information among participants:

- Assess the technological proficiency and access of participants.
- Assess the nontechnological needs of prospective participants (for example, interpretation, translation, transportation).
- Develop options to meet the anticipated research needs for stakeholders (for example, developing a physical and virtual library to provide access to publications, providing dedicated research staff to undertake specialized research tasks).
- Determine what technology infrastructure, both hardware and software, may be needed to share relevant information.
- Develop a process for documenting and recording meetings in keeping with confidentiality requirements; and determine how records of meetings will be archived and shared with participants.
- Consider what process principles and practices should be embedded in the dialogue's design to ensure routine sharing of knowledge.

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Notes

1. The explosive growth of civil society is well documented; see, for example, Lester Salamon, “The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector,” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 4 (1994). See also David Bornstein, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Many of the most well-known international NGOs working in the peacebuilding field were launched in the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall, including Conciliation Resources (1994), Interpeace (1994), the International Crisis Group (1995), Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (1999), and the Crisis Management Initiative (2000).
2. Chetan Kumar attributes the term “infrastructures for peace” to Tobi Dress, an independent peacebuilding practitioner: Chetan Kumar, “Building National ‘Infrastructures for Peace’: UN Assistance for Internally Negotiated Solutions to Violent Conflict,” in *Peacemaking from Practice to Theory*, vol. 2, ed. Susan Allen Nan, Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, and Andrea Bartoli (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012). See also John P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), “The Origins and Evolution of Infrastructures for Peace: A Personal Reflection,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 7, no. 3 (2012), and Luc Reyhler, “Peace Architecture,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9, nos. 1–2 (2002), <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol9/iss1/2>.
3. Todd A. Eisenstadt, A. Carl LeVan, and Tofiq Maboudi, “When Talk Trumps Text: The Democratizing Effects of Deliberation during Constitution-Making, 1974–2011,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015). In this study the authors lay out an empirical case for the positive impact of greater participation in constitutional development processes, particularly in the early drafting phases. For a review of the mixed record of external mediation and the need for further research, see Peter Wallensteen and Isak Svensson, “Talking Peace: International Mediation in Armed Conflicts,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (2014).
4. Oxford Dictionaries online, s.v. “Dialogue,” www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/dialogue.
5. *Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and General Literature*, vol. 18 (New York: H. G. Allen, 1888), 302, entry “The History of Parliament.”
6. Website of the UK Parliament, “Birth of the English Parliament, Anglo-Saxon Origins,” www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/originsofparliament/birthofparliament/overview/origins/.
7. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Iroquois Confederacy,” www.britannica.com/topic/Iroquois-Confederacy.
8. Michael Lund and Carlos Santiso, “National Conferences,” in *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators*, ed. Peter Harris and Ben Reilly (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1998), 252–72.
9. Wallensteen and Svensson, “Talking Peace,” 322. The authors cite Greg and Diehl in suggesting that using criteria in which parties “reach any type of agreement (from ceasefire to comprehensive settlement)...mediation during the Cold War, although less frequently used, tended to have a higher success rate than mediation efforts later on.”
10. “Remarks to the Dartmouth Conference Regional Conflicts Task Force,” May 1992, Moscow, quoted in James Voorhees, *Dialogue Sustained: The Multilevel Peace Process and the Dartmouth Conference* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002), 292.
11. The qualifiers “formal” and “nonformal” are used here to distinguish types of national dialogue processes that share many characteristics but differ in design and in degree of structure. The descriptors are adapted from the field of education, in which formal, nonformal, and informal education are defined as distinct

areas, though there are debates regarding their boundaries. Informal national dialogues—conversations that may take place in diverse locations and environments but are not designed with a direct or clearly defined method of influencing decision-making processes—are not addressed in this work.

12. Lund and Santiso, “National Conferences,” 269.
13. Diana Chigas, “Capacities and Limits of NGOs as Conflict Managers,” in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, ed. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013), 561–62.
14. In one set of interviews, stakeholders to a national process referred to the structural constraints placed on political office holders who in their earlier contributions as stakeholders to political dialogues were able to voice greater empathy for their political opposition.
15. Interviews with several MPC staff in Yangon, Burma, March 2016.
16. Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), chap. 16.
17. *Ibid.*, 281.
18. Jared B. Kenworthy, Rhiannon N. Turner, Miles Hewstone, and Alberto Voci, “Intergroup Contact: When Does It Work, and Why?,” in *On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years after Allport*, ed. John F. Dovidio, Peter Glick, and Laurie A. Rudman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 285–86. See also Thomas Pettigrew, “Intergroup Contact Theory,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998): 66–85.
19. Kenworthy et al., “Intergroup Contact,” 287.
20. Maurice E. Schweitzer and Leslie E. Gombert, “The Impact of Alcohol on Negotiator Behavior: Experimental Evidence,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 31, no. 10 (2001): 2118.
21. Maurice E. Schweitzer and Jeffrey L. Kerr, “Bargaining under the Influence: The Role of Alcohol in Negotiations,” *Academy of Management Executives (1993–2005)* 14, no. 2 (2000): 48.
22. Schweitzer and Gombert, “The Impact of Alcohol.”
23. The author would like to acknowledge and thank the many individuals who offered their perspectives on and insights into Lebanon’s National Dialogue and Lebanon’s Common Space Initiative for Shared Knowledge and Consensus Building, including Karam Karam, Walid Moubarek, Soha Frem, Jaber Suleiman, Ali Chahine, Chetan Kumar, Martin Wachlisch, Hannes Siebert, and many others.
24. Following the inauguration in early 2016 of Aung San Suu Kyi as the leader of a new civilian government, plans for the second phase of the national dialogue were high on her government’s agenda. However, in the interim period, individual and institutional relations have shifted as alliances have adapted to new power dynamics, new institutional mechanisms have formed, and individual leadership roles have changed. Despite the dramatic shift from a military-dominated government to Aung San Suu Kyi’s civilian-led government, key questions still loom over the future direction of the Union Peace Conference, including the scope of its agenda and how its framework agreement will be adopted or ratified by Burma’s parliament. The failure to address these questions in advance to the satisfaction of stakeholders has the potential to derail the process and prolong the conflict.
25. The author would like to acknowledge and thank the many individuals who offered their perspectives on and insights into the nonformal structures in Nepal’s peace process, including Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Daman Nath Dhunghana, Sajana Maharjan, Kimlal Devkota, Dr. Sridhar Khatri, Stella Tamang, the late Madhav Ghimire, Prakash Mahat, Vidhayar Mallik, Arjun KC, Bishnu Pathak, Bishnu Upretri, Lt. Colonel Joe Evans, Ajaya Khanal, Bishnu Sapkota, Lydia Cordes, Hannes Siebert, Jeannine Suurmond, and many others.
26. Bishnu Sapkota, “Track 1.5: An Insider’s View” (unpublished paper written during a fellowship at the Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2011), 13.
27. In a 2015 paper by Todd A. Eisenstadt, A. Carl LeVan, and Tofigh Maboudi, “When Talk Trumps Text: The Democratizing Effects of Deliberation during Constitution-Making, 1974–2011” (*American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 [2015]), the authors lay out an empirical case for the positive impact of greater participation in constitutional development processes, particularly in the early drafting phases. Their research findings are suggestive of the importance of increased participation in other stages of conflict transformation efforts, which deserve study.
28. In Nepal, the formation of a nationwide network of local peace committees, initiated in the early phases of the country’s peace process in 2007 and still active today, required that organizers in the communities where they were formed ensure that all parties were represented at the local level. While that was ostensibly a worthy goal, many communities did not have the same patterns of political participation visible at the national level, resulting in local peace committees sometimes creating or enhancing political factions in order to fulfill the mandates of the national organizers. Conversation with Jeannine Suurmond, Kathmandu, Nepal, April 24, 2016. See also Andries Odendaal and Kiran Prasad Dhungel, “Local Peacebuilding in the Interaction between National and Local Dynamics: Why Did Some Local Peace Committees in Nepal Perform Well and Others Not?,” in *Nepal Transition to Peace: A Decade of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (2006–2016)*, ed. Pankaj Adhikari, Subhash Ghimire, and Vidyadhar Mallik (Kathmandu: Nepal Transition to Peace Institute, 2016).

29. Amat Alsoswa, in conversation with the author, Washington, DC, March 2, 2016.
30. The NTTP process drew extensively on two of its senior advisers, both former politicians involved in earlier peace efforts, Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Daman Nath Dhunghana, who were called “national facilitators.” Their role might best be described as interlocutors, individuals whose reputation and relationships allow them to serve as conveners of nonformal dialogues and important meetings.
31. Multipartiality or multipartial facilitation has been defined as “facilitation that focuses on balancing social power, independent of and in contrast to dominant norms in society”; Natalie Zappella, “Balancing Social Power in Dialogue” (handout, Program in Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan, Fall 2007), https://simmonsigd.wikispaces.com/file/view/Multipartiality+-Balancing+Social+Power+in+Dialogue_F2007.pdf.
32. In the multiphase negotiations leading up to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, the negotiators benefited from the services of two advisers whose role included some facilitation. One adviser came from the MPC; the other adviser was the executive director of Shalom (also known as the Nyein Foundation), a well-respected civil society organization with strong ties to the ethnic armed groups that also had a reputation for independence and integrity.
33. The author would like to acknowledge and thank the many individuals in Burma/Burma who offered their perspectives on the unfolding process, including Aung Naing Oo and Min Zaw Oo of the Myanmar Peace Center, Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw Zahkung of the Shalom (Nyein) Foundation, Lian Sakhong, Isaac Khin, Victor Lian, Vanessa Johansson, Sai Latt, Steve Ainsworth, Elizabeth Armstrong, Kwe Htoo Win, Hannes Siebert, Susu Thatun, and others.
34. Though not formally a part of the peace process through 2015, the National League for Democracy (the opposition party led by Aung San Suu Kyi that assumed leadership of the government in 2016) was also deeply skeptical of the MPC. Despite the diversity of MPC staff and the much-touted good intentions of the Burma government, the institution could not overcome the opposition’s suspicion, leading to the new NLD government’s decision to close it down in April 2016. It was reconstituted later that year as the National Reconciliation and Peace Center.
35. Shirin Akiner and Catherine Barnes, “The Tajik Civil War: Causes and Dynamics,” in *Politics of Compromise: The Tajikistan Peace Process*, ed. Kamoludin Abdullaev and Catherine Barnes, Accord 10 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2001), www.c-r.org/downloads/10_Tajikistan.pdf. Conciliation Resources publishes physical copies of Accord, a series on individual peace processes with multiple constituent essays.
36. Voorhees, *Dialogue Sustained*, 297.
37. *Ibid.*, 313.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, 311–12.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Walid E. Moubarak, “The National Dialogue of Lebanon: An Experiment beyond Mediation” (draft paper, Lebanese American University; final paper later delivered at “International Conference on the ‘State’ of Lebanon: Concepts of Political Order in Crisis,” October 15, 2015, Orient-Institute Beirut, Lebanon).
42. Conversations with Common Space Initiative staff and advisers, Beirut, Lebanon, November 2015.
43. Karam Karam, Head of Research, Common Space Initiative, as discussed with the author on several occasions, Beirut, Lebanon, including in November 2015.
44. For a copy of the Cyprus Dialogue Forum’s single text document, see www.cydialogue.org/index.php/the-forum/structure-single-text.
45. The implicit pedagogy of the knowledge-sharing approach resonates with the perspectives on dialogue of physicist (and early arms control activist) David Bohm and, more recently, the systems theorist and organizational learning specialist Peter Senge. They, as well as many other scholars of pedagogy in the present day, hold that learners learn best when engaging fully with a subject rather than being passive recipients of information. The knowledge-sharing approach also challenges the international peacebuilding community to do a better job of serving the knowledge needs and requests emanating from peace processes. In at least a few cases, such requests have resulted in a stream of international consultants who “share” their knowledge, with little opportunity for ensuring continuity between prior and future experts who may be offering similar views. See David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).
46. These indigenous national processes in many ways extend the work of noted practitioner and conflict resolution theorist Herbert Kelman, who pioneered the use of problem-solving workshops in conflict resolution. Yet they also depart from these earlier incarnations in the length of the dialogues, in the proximity of their relationship to formal processes, and in the locus of affiliation (i.e., as national institutions, not internationally convened workshops). For an example of the application of Kelman’s interactive problem solving, see “Interactive Problem Solving in the Israeli-Palestinian Case: Past Contributions and Present Challenges,” in *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking*, ed. Ronald J. Fisher (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

47. A study by the psychologists Sophie Trawalter and Kelly Hoffman at the University of Virginia reveals how perception of public space shapes a sense of belonging on the part of students of lower socioeconomic status, contributing to negative outcomes if not counterbalanced. See “Out of Place: On the Importance of Public Space for Perpetuating (or Reducing) Social Inequity,” unpublished manuscript.
48. Scott Doorely and Scott Whitthoft, *Make Space: How to Set the Stage for Creative Collaboration* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012).
49. John P. Eberhard, “Applying Neuroscience to Architecture,” Biourbanism.org, n.d., www.biourbanism.org/applying-neuroscience-to-architecture/.
50. Even in the South African transition, the process stumbled on multiple occasions, with two prior dialogue efforts, CODESA I and II, failing to yield any concrete agreements before the Multi-Party Negotiating Process was convened.
51. The concept of windows of opportunity has been explored in the work of scholars such as John Kingdon, Michael Mintrom, and Philippa Norman, who write on the need for “policy windows” and for “policy entrepreneurs.” To take advantage of contextual or environmental factors, they must be recognized by individuals, the policy entrepreneurs, who may be within or outside government. See also Voorhees, *Dialogue Sustained*, 13; and Michael Mintrom and Philippa Norman, “Policy Entrepreneurship and Policy Change,” *Policy Studies Journal*, 37, no. 4 (2009).
52. Mintrom and Norman, “Policy Entrepreneurship and Policy Change,” 651.
53. Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Peacebuilding Challenges for the UN Development System* (FUNDS: Future United Nations Development System, 2015), 11, www.futureun.org/media/archive1/reports/PeacebuildingChallenges_FUNDS2015.pdf.
54. *Ibid.*, 13.



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Nonformal, inquiry-based dialogues have played an important role in advancing peacemaking and other political change processes in countries such as Nepal, Lebanon, and Myanmar. Such dialogues, when sustained and supported by robust structures, create the space for constructive working relationships to develop among diverse stakeholders, generating both knowledge and new policy proposals that influence and directly contribute to political decision making in countries struggling to emerge from violent conflict. Nonformal dialogues are often a complement to formal national dialogues, sharing many of the same attributes but usually preceding and extending beyond the life of formal processes. This report identifies the factors that contribute to the impact that nonformal dialogues have on peacemaking and political change processes and the characteristics of the support structures that prove critical to the success of those processes.

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