

# National Dialogues and Development

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February 2017

## **Abstract**

The article considers the potential for National Dialogues to create substantial development outcomes that go beyond immediate political and security settlements. Using insights from various National Dialogue processes, the conditions, dynamics and potential barriers to these outcomes are explored. The article also describes entry points and strategies for external development actors to contribute to the attainment of substantial development outcomes in transition processes that include National Dialogues.

## **About the Publication**

This publication was produced in the framework of a two-year project (March 2015 – April 2017) to develop a Handbook on National Dialogues funded by the German Federal Foreign Office in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the Handbook is to offer a practice-oriented guide for comprehensively designing and implementing National Dialogues. It rests on participatory methods including 1) strategic dialogue and exchange between local stakeholders, international development and peacebuilding practitioners, and policymakers, 2) a comprehensive mapping exercise of National Dialogues across the world, and 3) in-depth case studies on National Dialogues produced by local researchers on Guatemala, Lebanon, Libya, Nepal, Sudan, and Tunisia. The project is implemented by the Berghof Foundation, in cooperation with swisspeace. This publication is one of three conceptual studies; others include Dilemma in National Dialogues and National Dialogue and Constitution-Making. The overall aim of the project is to improve National Dialogues and enhance

the capacities and contributions of conflict parties, local stakeholders and external actors towards their successful implementation.

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### **To cite this publication:**

**Hartmann, Henrik** 2017. National Dialogues and Development. National Dialogue Handbook Background Paper No. 3. Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

Online at: [www.berghof-foundation.org/publications/national-dialogue-handbook](http://www.berghof-foundation.org/publications/national-dialogue-handbook)

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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Recent National Dialogues have often taken place in the context of political upheavals that were caused by socio-economic grievances. Issues such as a lack of economic opportunities, unemployment, corruption or the unequal distribution of wealth and resources contributed to frustrations, which ultimately led to far-reaching regime change and political transition. There is thus an obvious link between the context in which National Dialogues operate and questions of human development. The present article looks at National Dialogues through a development lens, which goes beyond the political power brokerage within National Dialogues. Instead, it considers their wider consequences for the transition into new political settlements, which may create peace dividends for the population at large.

There are two main questions that the article will attempt to answer. Firstly, how are National Dialogues related to development? This question focuses on how development issues are negotiated in or around National Dialogues, how National Dialogues affect the subsequent development of a society, and under which conditions National Dialogues can create peace dividends and sustainable political settlements. Secondly, what contributions can external development actors make in relation to National Dialogues and their subsequent implementation? Here, the focus is on experiences, standards and good practice, as well as the challenges, trade-offs and dilemmas, which may inform the choices of external development actors in the context of National Dialogues. These questions will be discussed in the two main sections of the article, which follow a brief contextualisation of National Dialogues in the development discourse.

In order to illustrate its core arguments, the article will use examples from recent and past transition processes that featured National Dialogues, including Myanmar (2013-present), Lebanon (2007-present), Mali (present and 1991-1993), Tunisia (2011-2014), Yemen (2012-2014), Nepal (2005-2010) and South Africa (1991-1996). As the article draws lessons from each of these cases that may be useful in other situations, it is important to acknowledge that each political context presents its protagonists with unique challenges and there are limits to the degree to which insights from one case can be transferred to other contexts. Development actors must understand the socio-political background and engage flexibly and adaptably with the context in which they operate if they are to be effective in supporting National Dialogues and the wider political transitions surrounding them.

## 1 National Dialogues as Political Settlements: A Development Perspective

National dialogues represent a means to establish a new political settlement during a phase of transition. Political settlements are essentially agreements forged between the major stakeholders within a society on the organisation of political and economic power and the allocation of resources. They include institutions such as peace agreements, systems of governance, electoral processes and market regulations (Laws and Leftwich 2014). In a fragile or post-conflict environment, political settlements are crucial to consolidate primacy of politics as the non-violent means to deal with conflicts

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Andries Odendaal, Anne-Lise Klausen and Wolfram Zunzer for helpful comments and suggestions in the drafting of this article.

over interests, ideology and power. The type of political settlement that a society crafts in the aftermath of crises or during political transitions creates powerful path dependencies for the way in which it subsequently develops. Particularly in fragile and post conflict settings, it is essential that a political settlement be inclusive of the relevant players at the right time to be sustainable (Kelsall 2016).

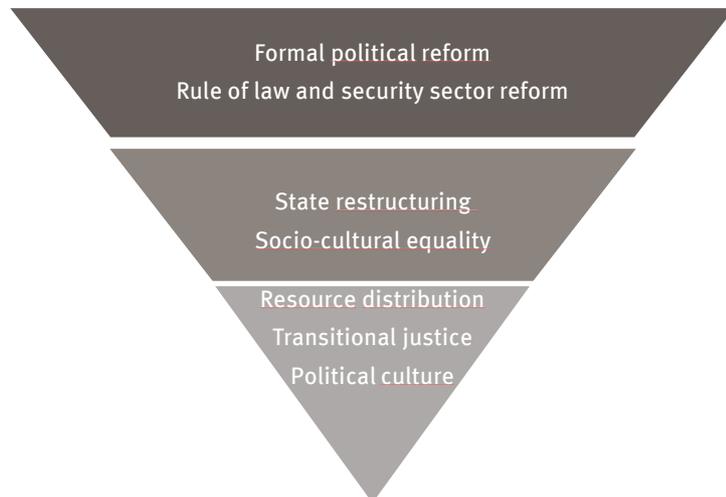
## 1.1 The development outcomes of political settlements

The politics of political settlements becomes a relevant development issue when looking beyond power brokerage between elites and considering the dividends of peace for the population at large that a settlement creates. Peace dividends in post-conflict settings are generally considered to include political and security dimensions, socio-economic development and reconciliation and justice:

- ≡ Political frameworks and capable institutions enable citizens’ access to law and the provision of key basic services
- ≡ Functional security institutions enable the rule of law to be upheld and ensure the protection of human security
- ≡ Rebuilding socio-economic foundations is the key to addressing structural violence and exclusion, and to enhancing a society’s capacity to prevent violence.
- ≡ Reconciliation and justice have the potential to heal the trauma of conflict and to reconnect society for a forward-looking social contract

(OECD DAC 2008; Smith 2004)

The relevant question for National Dialogues from a development perspective is how to move towards a complete materialisation of those deeper development outcomes. All too often, political settlements focus on formal political and security reforms between elites, stopping short of outcomes such as state restructuring, socio-cultural relations, resource distribution, political culture, or transitional justice. Exclusionary political settlements that do not contain these types of peace dividends lack legitimacy and provide a fertile



Outcome inclusivity of political settlement (Dudouet and Lundström)

ground for a relapse into conflict. Attaining a deeper inclusivity of development outcomes requires effective mechanisms for implementation and continued dialogue, financial and technical capacities to implement agreed reforms, the political will, cooperation and consensus of elites, and support from international actors. Outcome inclusivity will be reflected in how representative state institutions are of the structure of society and how responsive agreements and legislation are to the equitable distribution of rights and entitlements across groups within society (Dudouet and Lundström 2016).

National dialogues represent a particular form of political settlement with regard to development outcomes and peace dividends. In their ideal form, they aim less at the signing of agreements but rather

at an environment for long-term stability and improved relationships between the major actors on issues of common national interest. Authentic National Dialogues have the potential to address the root causes of conflict and to facilitate fundamental change (Siebert 2016).

## 1.2 Responding to state fragility

National dialogues as a mechanism for crisis management and consensus-building are initiated predominantly in socio-political contexts that are characterised by fragility, violence and rapid transformation. In many cases, National Dialogues take place in authoritarian states on the onset of social change (Heibach 2011). Fragile states are often trapped in a vicious cycle of political instability and underdevelopment. Whereas governments usually strive to curb social exclusion and to provide equal protection before the law, governments in deeply divided societies tend to exacerbate exclusion. The key to overcoming exclusion and fragility, therefore, is to foster a shared sense of identity, built on robust institutions that serve people equitably. Transitions, sparked by the end of a conflict or other critical junctures, offer the best opportunities to break the cycle of fragility and poverty. They may introduce policy innovations in the form of better political frameworks, more inclusive social dynamics or better institutions (Kaplan 2015).

Improving the capacity of state institutions has been at the heart of development efforts in response to state fragility. Purely technical approaches to institution-building, however, potentially miss some important drivers of fragility that are political in nature, e.g. rent-seeking behaviour, factionalism, hybrid governance systems, or groups that have the desire to resist state power or even fight the state (Carayannis et al. 2014; Denney and Barron 2015). Good development approaches need to come to grips with these realities. This involves understanding interests aligned for and against a specific policy, gaining an overview of historical legacies and current realities, and the ability to identify those individuals and groups well placed to bring about positive, incremental, change. In short, it requires working with political settlements rather than outside of them (Leftwich 2011).

## 2 Development Issues and National Dialogues

The previous section established that National Dialogues, in their ideal form, have the potential to establish an environment for long-term stability and consensus on issues of common national interest, which may address the root causes of conflict and facilitate fundamental change. However, National Dialogues rarely exist in their ideal form, and participants have to make important choices that have repercussions for the political transition and the peace dividends that a political settlement can provide. These choices include trade-offs that determine how inclusive, coherent, timely – and ultimately, how sustainable – the political settlement is that they create.

Many National Dialogue structures contain commissions, ‘tables’ or working groups for development issues. In Yemen, nine working groups prepared the decisions on substantive issues for a vote in the plenary meeting. While some working groups focused on the most pressing political issues, others dealt with development, rights and freedoms, transitional justice, good governance and independent institutions (Hassan and Eshaq 2014). The eight thematic committees for the Panglong conference in Myanmar include committees on economic development and reform, humanitarian aid and relief, national reconciliation, and judicial reform / public security / access to justice (Yawnghwe 2014). The National Peace Convention in South Africa in 1991 focused mainly on codes of conduct for

political parties, security forces and the media, but it also had a working group on socio-economic development. The consequent peace accord contained a chapter with measures to facilitate socio-economic reconstruction and development, although these measures were kept vague and the theme disappeared from subsequent rounds of negotiation (Eloff 2015). Other National Dialogues, such as Tunisia's, made no provision for discussion of development issues. These examples show that the formal inclusion of development issues varies widely. While some National Dialogues preclude development discussions altogether, others dedicate several working groups to socio-economic and governance matters. The formal inclusion of these issues does not, however, say much about their relevance in the process and the efforts for implementation.

This section will look at how development issues are negotiated in National Dialogues as root causes of conflict and in terms of potential peace dividends. It will consider early entry points for development issues in National Dialogues, barriers that may prevent a focus on development issues, and facilitating factors that may guarantee or at least aid their inclusion

## **2.1 The relevance – and difficulty – of including development issues in National Dialogue processes**

The inclusion of development issues in National Dialogues opens up opportunities to discuss long-term perspectives and peace dividends, which enhances the legitimacy of National Dialogues for the wider population. The quality of development outcomes that are associated with National Dialogues may create the eventual tipping points for the success or failure of a National Dialogue process, as the example of Yemen shows. In the wake of the National Dialogue in Yemen in mid-2014, the transitional government decided to lift existing fuel subsidies, amounting to around USD 3 billion, i.e. one third of the state's revenues, in an effort to reduce the budget deficit and conclude negotiations on an IMF loan. This decision had an adverse effect on socio-economic conditions and hence on the transitional arrangement and the National Dialogue process as a whole. It allowed the Houthi insurgent opposition to mobilise large demonstrations for a reinstatement of the fuel subsidies and against the transitional government. Although the Houthi movement at the time did not represent the majority of Yemeni society, it was able to capitalise on the popular discontent. The Houthis took over the Yemeni capital Sana'a and consequently forced President Hadi to flee the country, leading to a violent escalation of the conflict and the collapse of the agreements reached in the National Dialogue Conference (Hamidi 2015).

The events in Yemen demonstrate the importance of quick impacts and visible peace dividends for the success of National Dialogues. This goes to show the relevance of considering development issues early on in National Dialogue processes. Yet this justified case for an inclusion of development issues is often compromised by pragmatic considerations, such as time pressure or elite demands. At times, the inclusion of development issues also creates trade-offs for the process of a National Dialogue itself by increasing the number of topics on the agenda and the need for coordination between stakeholders.

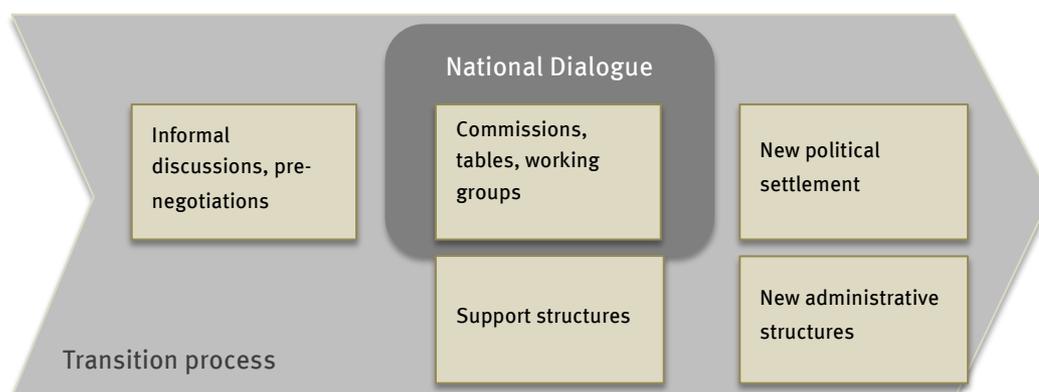
### **2.1.1 Balancing power brokerage and development concerns**

The National Dialogue Conference in Yemen was highly inclusive, involving more than 500 delegates including an unprecedented number of young people, women and civil society activists. In total, the conference yielded 1,800 recommendations on a wide range of topics. However, the National Dialogue eventually did not succeed in working through the major political roadblocks facing the country,

especially in relation to the political status of southern Yemen and the fragile balance between Yemen's main political parties. It has been suggested that the all-inclusive and public nature of the conference ran counter to the resolution of key political questions, which would have required a discussion by smaller groups of the right political actors (Gaston 2014). The lesson from the Yemen experience is that the 'when' and 'how' matter when it comes to balancing political power-brokering with decision-making on long-term development concerns. The latter may require a different format for discussions than negotiations on core political and security concerns. This can be realised through an adequate structuring of National Dialogue proceedings so that they offer flexibility and a variety of discussion formats and levels of inclusion. In the National Dialogue process in South Africa, this dilemma was resolved through the principle of 'sufficient consensus'. It stipulated that any decision that could not achieve a full consensus in the multi-party negotiation forum would move forward as long as the main parties which had primary interests, or could exert a substantive veto, agreed (Graham 2014).

The balancing act between political power brokerage and development considerations can also succeed if development issues find suitable alternative fora for decision-making outside formal National Dialogue proceedings. This may include strategies of mandating and sequencing. Development issues can be mandated from the main negotiation forum to related decision-making or consultative bodies which are part of the infrastructure for peace and dialogue. The Nepal Transition to Peace Institute is an informal Track 1.5 initiative developed by the Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction and the major political stakeholders in the country. Its mandate is to maintain a high-level dialogue between the major political parties and representatives of civil society. In Lebanon, the Common Space Initiative was established as a permanent knowledge-based dialogue structure to address root causes and advise the formal National Dialogue process. Sequencing refers to the referral of decision-making on matters of national development to newly established structures after the emergence of a political settlement. In South Africa, the vital issues of economic reconstruction and social inclusion of previously excluded groups, which had fallen out of the National Dialogue process, were picked up by the office of the President after the establishment of a government of national unity, which set up a reconstruction and development programme.

The figure below illustrates the possible entry points for development issues in the process of political transition and National Dialogue. Ideally, relevant development issues and the policy choices that they require will be taken up during informal discussions or pre-negotiations at the beginning of a political transition. Relevant stakeholders can then decide if these issues should enter the National Dialogue, be mandated to support structures or sequenced to different stages of the transition process. Discussions of development issues within National Dialogue proceedings can take the form of specific commissions or working groups, which present resolutions for approval. Mandating requires the existence or establishment of viable peace and dialogue support structures. If participants agree that the decision-making power on development issues should rest within the new political settlement, they would be taken up by political principals or mandated to the administrative level.



Entry points for development issues in the processes of political transition and National Dialogue

### **2.1.2 High stakes and tight deadlines**

In Tunisia in 2013, a quartet of unions, employers, lawyers and human rights advocates stepped up to facilitate a National Dialogue between the country's divided political elites. At the time, the country had experienced months of deadlock in the transition process from authoritarian rule, and instability and political violence were looming over the process. Although socio-economic grievances such as unemployment and inequality had sparked the civic protest at the start of the transition process, the quartet decided on a narrow focus for the National Dialogue, which would include only a resolution of the outstanding constitutional questions and a decision on the formation of a new government. In particular the unions, which were the largest group within the quartet, were sympathetic to a social change agenda. However, in the heated and volatile situation, none of the quartet members saw it as feasible to add socio-economic issues to the agenda, which was left for the future government to address (Claes 2016).

The case of Tunisia shows how difficult it is to include development issues in National Dialogue process that go beyond power brokerage. National dialogues operate in a context of violent conflict, post-war or fundamental transitions. Where stakes are high and time is precious, participants tend to focus on fundamental decisions about political and security provisions. Peace agreement can only carry 'what the traffic can bear'. Sometimes, negotiators have to decide that key issues will be left undecided in the interest of reaching an agreement (Yvon 2009). Comparative research on peace agreements has shown that they generally emphasise issues of security and political power over provisions for socio-economic development, governance, human rights and reconciliation. More recent peace agreements tend to include more development provisions compared to earlier ones. They increasingly make reference to issues such as reconstruction of infrastructure as well as to macro-economic policies and frameworks. This indicates a gradual increase in peacemakers' awareness of the relevance of peace dividends (Suhrke and Wimpelmann 2007).

### **2.1.3 Elite demands that stand in opposition to development priorities**

The politics of peacemaking on the one hand and the requirements for human development on the other place competing demands on National Dialogue processes. A political settlement requires trade-offs between the reduction of absolute poverty and the specific demands voiced by aggrieved groups. Furthermore, groups that hold political, military or economic power may demand a disproportionate share of peace dividends in exchange for their consent, which may lead to higher inequality and counteract development goals (Addison et al. 2015).

Such elite clauses are a common feature in many National Dialogue processes. In South African transition process, the multi-party negotiation forum agreed on security guarantees for the old apartheid rulers. Popularly known as 'sunset clauses', they included provisions for a government of national unity over a period of five years and employment safeguards for civil servants and security personnel during the transition period (Odendaal 2014). In Myanmar, many ceasefire agreements between the government and armed ethnic groups prior to the National Dialogue were secretive 'gentlemen's agreements'. They granted special economic privileges to armed groups, which were often used to trade in illicit drugs. This led to protests by ethnic civil society, which demanded a viable political settlement instead of economic privileges (Yawnghwe 2014).

The example of Myanmar shows how the discussion of socio-economic issues in National Dialogues can be sensitive because they touch upon strategic interests of participant groups. In resource-rich countries in particular, attempts by National Dialogue proceedings to set out fundamental principles for resource management have often met with less than optimal outcomes (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2014, 270).

## **2.2 Facilitating factors for the inclusion of socio-economic development issues in National Dialogues**

How do development issues enter National Dialogues? While elites usually focus on the bargaining for political power, questions of peace dividends and development are more likely to find advocates from the wider society who are able to make their views heard. These are mostly civil society actors, interest groups or specific constituencies. Beyond that, there are cases where external actors are also able to lobby elites for a development-oriented agenda (see next section).

### **2.2.1 Civil society, interest groups and political movements**

In South Africa, a coalition of civil society groups was instrumental in the initiation of multi-party negotiations for a political settlement after apartheid. When initial talks between the apartheid government and the liberation movement ANC began in 1990, the atmosphere was filled with tension, suspicion, and mutual blame for ongoing violence. The ANC, entering the negotiations after years of banning, exile and armed struggle, received negotiation support from the United Democratic Front, a collection of labour unions and community organisations. In this context, the South African Council of Churches issued a declaration that denounced the apartheid system, calling for a democratic constitution and a more equitable distribution of wealth. A loose group of progressive business leaders formed the Consultative Business Movement, which called for an end to violence and a democratic transition to prevent a collapse of the economy. Together, churches, business leaders and labour unions engaged in intensive shuttle mediation and eventually reached the agreement of the political parties for a National Peace Convention that would focus on the cornerstones of a political transition, including measures for political and security reform, prevention of violence, reconstruction and development, and transitional justice (Eloff 2015).

The South African case shows the potential of civil society organisations as torchbearers for a political settlement that contains a viable war-to-peace transition and a strong focus on peace dividends such as socio-economic reconstruction, transitional justice and violence prevention, which would benefit society at large. Unfortunately, the South African transition was still to suffer a number of setbacks. When political settlement was finally reached after tense multi-party negotiations, many of the development-oriented provisions had to give way – as occurred in subsequent National Dialogue processes in other countries such as Tunisia.

### **2.2.2 Political contestation of development issues**

The political transition in Nepal demonstrated how political movements – in this case the Maoists – were able to bring issues of social exclusion and socio-economic inequalities to the table in a National Dialogue. At the same time, the case shows that questions of development can become deeply contested and politicised. The Maoists fought a ten-year civil war to end monarchy in Nepal, mobilising support from economically and socially disadvantaged groups. The signing of a peace agreement, national all-party talks and the establishment of a Constituent Assembly elevated social inclusion to an issue of overarching importance for society as a whole. The Maoists, who emerged as the strongest party in the Constituent Assembly, were able to devise a national development plan that was committed to social inclusion by reducing disparities, promoting justice and fulfilling basic needs. However, the Maoists' advocacy for disadvantaged groups led to antagonism and resistance from traditionally privileged parts

of society, who support exclusionary practices such as the caste system which prevail in contemporary Nepal. The success of the Maoists and the consequent backlash created a division within society to the detriment of a political settlement (Druzca 2016; Sapkota 2016).

The current political transition process in Mali provides another example of the differing perspectives on development priorities in the context of a National Dialogue. The overthrow of long-time president Amadou Toumani Touré in 2012 went alongside a Tuareg rebellion in the north of Mali and enduring public frustration with high levels of corruption, poverty and insecurity (Wing 2013). The government of Mali set up a Ministry for Dialogue and Reconciliation, tasked with convening a *Conférence d'Entente Nationale* to resolve the country's most pressing issues. However, views on exactly what issues are to be discussed in the upcoming National Dialogue differ between government and civil society. The government is intent on negotiating primarily the 'northern issue' of the Azawad region as a political and security challenge for the country. In contrast, civil society leaders see the conference as a unique opportunity to rebuild the state and to address development issues that impact the whole of Mali, including corruption, governance weaknesses, unemployment and poverty. Civil society organisations therefore advocate for locally-led citizen consultations that will set the agenda for the National Dialogue. How these differences are reconciled in the planning stage of the process will determine the nature of the dialogue and likely the future political settlement (Kante 2016).

### 2.2.3 Inclusion of broader constituency groups (especially youth, women)

The National Dialogue Conference in Yemen made efforts to include participants beyond the political power centres, particularly through the inclusion of women, who had traditionally been excluded from political decision-making, and young people, who had been the most active members of the protest movement. The conference allocated 20 per cent of seats to youth delegates and 30 per cent to women. Naturally, neither women nor young people could be considered homogeneous groups. They consisted of independent individuals and party supporters with different political orientations. Even so, they were able to engage in strong advocacy for civic freedoms, which are rarely considered by the political class. This had the potential to shift the agenda and the tenor of discussion on some of the issues tabled. While the central political bargain was still negotiated by small groups of core political actors, many of the recommendations from the National Dialogue conference touched upon the war-to-peace transition and wider considerations of development, civil rights, provisions for female participation in government and security sector reform (Gaston 2014; Hassan and Eshaq 2014).

#### Types of development aid (OECD 2016)

**Budget support:** A transfer of resources from an external financing agency to the recipient government's budget (non-earmarked or sector-specific).

**Core contributions and pooled programmes and funds:** Contributions to the work of multilateral institutions or NGOs as well as pooled funding between multiple donors, usually with clearly defined sectoral, thematic or geographic focus.

**Project type interventions:** A set of interventions, agreed with the partner country, to reach specific objectives/outcomes within a defined time frame, budget and geographical area.

**Experts and technical assistance:** The provision of know-how by sending experts and conducting training and research.

**Other types:** Such as scholarships and student costs, debt relief, administrative costs, development awareness and support to refugees.

## 2.3 Managing realistic expectations about peace dividends and long-term development outcomes

An important long-term aspect for the acceptance of National Dialogues and their subsequent development outcomes is managing the wider public's expectations. National dialogues are often a watershed moment in a country's history. In these phases, emotions and enthusiasm run high. In South Africa, for example, the multi-party negotiation process aimed to shape the country's future after generations of apartheid and racial oppression. In Tunisia, the quartet-led National Dialogue brought a political conclusion to a revolt that had ended half a century of authoritarian rule through civil resistance. Many Tunisians had the expectation that, following the successful transition, their country's economy would soon reach a new level of development with a significant dispensation of wealth for its citizens. This expectation was soon disappointed, leading to frustration and renewed strikes and protests (Claes 2016).

State fragility is a serious problem for development. The fastest successful transitions from violent conflict to stable institutional arrangements have taken thirty years or more. Often, conflict societies still face 'acute-chronic' recovery needs for decades afterwards (World World Bank 2011). In South Africa today, two decades after the transition process, the political settlement appears to be fraying in the absence of an economic and social transformation that the population had expected as a post-apartheid dividend. High levels of poverty and inequality prevail, land and resources are still concentrated in the hands of a small minority, and a large number of South Africans continue to be excluded from the formal economy. Distrust between state and citizens is increasing, with a rise in the number of civic protests and the levels of associated violence (Graham 2014). Despite missed opportunities, some domestic analysts suggest that the process of economic transformation has to be seen in even longer time frames:

*“The social engineering of skills, capital, and economic opportunity for a small minority of white South Africans under Apartheid has created a profound structural imbalance that permeates every aspect of society. It will surely take two generations, if not more, to rectify this. Even if the government had performed better in recent years, the gains for socio-economic inclusion would still have been limited due to macro-economic challenges. Factors like declining economic growth, rapid urbanization and a growing population far outstrip the Government's ability to correct these structural imbalances” (Gounden 2016).*

The examples show that it is important for participants in National Dialogues not to raise unrealistic expectations. A research study conducted by USIP during the National Dialogue process in Yemen collected interviews with a large number of local community leaders in several districts of the country (Gaston and al-Dawsari 2013). It shows how the political process is perceived 'from below'. Essentially, the interviews demonstrate that while the dialogue process at the national level is recognised and valued, the weaknesses of local service provisions and justice and security conditions are much more relevant for the citizens' everyday lives. How the transition is perceived depends to a large extent on tangible signs of progress, which manifest at the local level. Although many respondents denied that they had experienced positive change, the overwhelming opinion was that it was still too early to see meaningful outcomes of the transition and many people were hoping for tangible results. The high degree of good will and patience is a strong political asset that should not be underestimated – nor should it be abused.

## 3 External Development Actors and National Dialogues

Although National Dialogues are in essence nationally owned processes, there is a significant degree of influence from external actors, defined as parties “without direct participation in the dialogue, or a direct stake in the outcomes of the processes” (Siebert, Kumar and Tasala 2014, 36). It is useful to distinguish between external political/diplomatic actors and external development actors. The political realm includes the UN through its Security Council decisions, special representatives and envoys, agencies and programmes, and regional organisations such as the African Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and influential governments with global or regional reach that see their own interests at stake (e.g. USA, EU, India, China and the Gulf States). The variety of organisations reflects the range of development aid approaches (see Table X). It includes financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, bilateral development funds and agencies, and NGOs.

A division of roles between diplomatic and international development actors used to be well-established. When a conflict became ripe for resolution, international diplomats would assist the parties in negotiating an end to violence. After a political agreement, development organisations would enter and assist in reconstruction and development efforts during the war-to-peace transition. As the conflict theatres of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have become more complex and prolonged, the relationship between political and development actors has changed as well.

A response to these new realities has been a higher level of integration between political mediation, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and development. Particularly in the context of National Dialogues, which are not merely understood as a tool to end violent conflict but rather aim to create new political, social and economic foundations of a society, added complexities and a larger variety of actors make conflict resolution more difficult and time-consuming. Therefore, it is vital that development actors enter at an early stage and seek close coordination with diplomats and political actors, steering attention and resources towards the creation of peace dividends in order to prevent a relapse into conflict. Interviews with practitioners from various countries suggest that diplomats and development actors have understood this paradigm shift, and pragmatic means of coordination increasingly exist. Yet a compartmentalisation remains between political affairs and development issues in the structures of many international organisations and governments, which may lead to conflicts over competency, leadership and funding. Such gaps and divisions need to be bridged in order to provide effective support to National Dialogues.

### 3.1 Motivations and strategies of external development actors

Not all external development actors that operate in fragile or post-conflict countries choose to set their focus on conflict or dialogue-related issues. At times, development actors may be risk-averse and choose to avoid an engagement in what they regard as political issues that are outside of their mandate and would pose risks to their work. This perspective, however, appears to be shifting as more development organisations realise that their work has a political dimension, hoping that a constructive engagement with political settlements has the potential to prepare better aid strategies, in particular for post-conflict reconstruction (Wennemann 2010). The motivation of international development agencies to engage in National Dialogues is informed by several factors, which include the overall development discourse and practice, perceived windows of opportunities and geostrategic considerations.

### **3.1.1 Changes in development discourse and practice**

The now well-established ‘do no harm’ discourse (Anderson 1999) has contributed to a sense among development practitioners that it is difficult to remain entirely apolitical and uninvolved in the face of conflict and fragility, and in recent years approaches that aim to ‘think politically’ have entered the mainstream of development discourse and practice. These approaches emphasise the importance of working with diverse coalitions and interests and gaining a deep understanding of historical legacies and local political realities (Booth and Unsworth 2014; Leftwich and Wheeler 2011). Today, good development practice in conflict and fragility includes working *on* and working *in* conflict. The former includes active contributions to the management and transformation of conflicts, which are regarded as critical stumbling block that stifle development gains. These contributions focus on more technical issues, while proactively mitigating risks and avoiding unintended negative consequences of external interventions in conflict areas (Goodhand 2000).

Responding to state fragility has become an important priority for international development discourse and practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. OECD figures show that official development aid (ODA) to fragile countries has increased significantly in the past decade. Since 2007, the majority of ODA has been allocated to countries on the Fragile State Index (OECD 2015). This reflects the recognition of a growing gap between countries with functioning institutions that have vastly improving development indicators, and fragile countries with reduced state capacities that are left behind and where wars and poverty appear to concentrate. However, there are large geographic imbalances in the distribution of ODA to fragile countries, which are based on major donor countries’ geostrategic considerations. Between 2003 and 2012, 22% of all ODA to countries on the Fragile State list has gone to Afghanistan and Iraq, commensurate with military expenditure. On the other hand, there are fragile states such as Nepal, Chad and Niger, which are described as “aid orphans” or “potentially under-aided countries”.

### **3.1.2 Utilising windows of opportunities**

International development actors tend to support National Dialogues when they regard them as windows of opportunity for sustainable political change. The ‘Arab Uprising’ renewed the interest in National Dialogues as a methodology for nationally owned, inclusive peacemaking – although, essentially, only Yemen and Tunisia have so far undertaken such a process. It appears that international development organisations’ interest in providing financial and technical support for National Dialogues is increased when there is a real sense of a substantial political transition taking place, e.g. after the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, since the beginning of the democratic transition in Myanmar, or during the first wave of National Dialogue processes after the end of the Cold War.

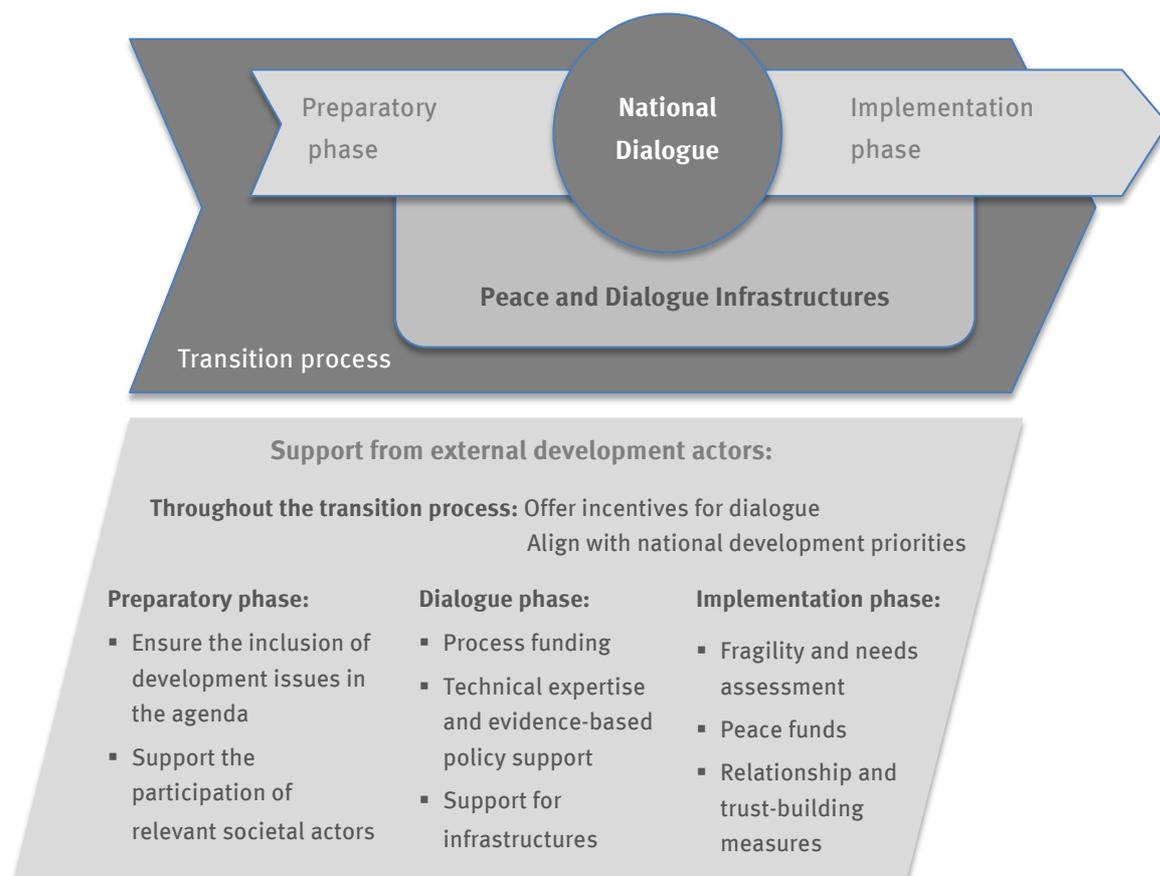
### **3.1.3 Geostrategic interests**

Regional or global powers’ geostrategic interests certainly impact on their priorities for development assistance, as the targeting of ODA on countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq shows. Geostrategic considerations also have a bearing on the allocation of development assistance to National Dialogue processes as a means to create stable political settlements. The regional and global spillover effects of instability in North Africa and the Middle East have attracted new attention from donors, especially from Europe, and development aid tends to be geared increasingly towards mitigating conflict costs and creating peace dividends. The European Union and its member states have recently set up a range of programmes to promote stability in the MENA region and to reduce push factors of irregular migration. One of the focal areas for these programmes is support for political dialogue and peacebuilding

processes (European Commission 2016a). Tunisia, for instance, entered a ‘privileged partnership’ with the EU in the wake of the 2011 revolution and in 2015 entered negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. The EU states as its rationale its “commitment to supporting Tunisia’s transition as it tackles a number of interrelated challenges in a fragile regional context: the consolidation of democracy (primarily by implementing the Constitution of January 2014), difficult socioeconomic conditions (including high youth unemployment) and the terrorist threat” (European Commission 2016b).

### 3.2 External actors’ contributions to National Dialogue processes

External development actors can provide contributions to National Dialogues at various stages and levels of the process (see figure below). Throughout the process, external development actors should offer incentives for dialogue and ensure that their work is aligned with national development priorities. A core concern should be that political relationships are normalised, security dilemmas and commitment problems are resolved, and root causes of conflict are addressed – throughout the National Dialogue process and crucially also in the long-term implementation of agreements (Joshi and Quinn 2015). This section will give an overview of the most common approaches.



### 3.2.1 Incentives for dialogue

International aid can assist in providing incentives for dialogue and cooperation at all stages of the process. A unified position of external actors most effectively creates incentives, as it reduces the alternatives to a negotiated agreement for elites and key decision-makers. In Yemen, this was one of the strongest safeguards for the participation of the country's major stakeholders in the National Dialogue Conference:

*“International support has accompanied Yemen’s political settlement since its inception. Members of the UN Security Council visited Sana’a in January 2013 demonstrating the attention the Security Council gave Yemen. The unified position of the international community towards Yemen has been one of the strongest guarantees for a peaceful transition. This unified approach was manifested through the work of the G10 committee of ambassadors, which was formed to safeguard the process of transition. The G10 is composed of a group of ten ambassadors of the permanent five members of the UN Security Council, the GCC and EU. Other EU states such as Germany provided technical expertise to support the NDC and the transition process in general.” (Hassan and Eshaq 2014)*

However, the provision of incentives towards dialogue and political settlement by external actors is not without controversy. Peace conditionalities and sanctions have the potential to ‘muscle’ potential spoilers into participation or agreement. At times this may be necessary – especially when the protection of civilians is at stake – but these approaches will almost certainly have a negative bearing on the process (Planta, Prinz and Vimalarajah 2015, p. 13)

The National Dialogue in Tunisia is an example where international cooperation operated at the razor’s edge between nudging stakeholders towards the tipping point for a political settlement and contributing to a politicisation and polarisation of the process: In September 2013, at the height of the political crisis caused by the impasse in the constitution-making process, the IMF decided to delay a much-needed tranche of a USD 1.7 billion loan to the country. Some within the troika government saw this as a direct attempt to further weaken the government’s standing and to cause its collapse. Shortly afterwards, the troika government agreed to the roadmap proposed by the quartet of civil society organisations, leading to the resignation of the Prime Minister and a National Dialogue. At the conclusion of the National Dialogue in December 2013 and the formation of a new government, the IMF released more than USD 500 million of the loan that had previously been blocked, and the European Union provided an additional EUR 250 million in macro-financial assistance. Some regarded the delay and subsequent release of funds as a decisive factor that led to a solution to the political crises, while others regarded it as political blackmail intended to push the government to resign (Thornton 2014).

### 3.2.2 Alignment with national development priorities

With the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action, donor countries under the OECD umbrella confirmed their commitment to a better partnership with recipient countries in order to enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation. In particular, donors agreed to an alignment of international aid behind recipient countries’ own strategies for poverty reduction, using local institutions and systems for external support. Fragile and conflict-affected countries, however, are difficult environments for international aid and the context poses challenges to the principles of ownership and alignment. Institutions and absorptive capacities for aid in these countries tend to be low and they are often ill-served by supply-driven approaches. In the absence of strong in-country leadership and a functional administration, there is a tendency for donors to bypass governments and to establish parallel structures and budgets.

The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States offers a novel avenue for a more equitable partnership between donor countries and fragile states. The New Deal aims to establish a development architecture that supports the foundations necessary to build peaceful states and societies. At the core of the New Deal are five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding 2011). The five goals are:

- 1) Legitimate Politics - *Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution*
- 2) Security - *Establish and strengthen people's security*
- 3) Justice - *Address injustices and increase people's access to justice*
- 4) Economic Foundations - *Generate employment and improve livelihoods*
- 5) Revenues and Services - *Manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.*

The New Deal has been well-received by donors and the governments of fragile states alike, not least because the process was initiated by recipient governments, which demanded that international aid should better reflect the specific challenges posed by state fragility. However, initial impact assessments of the New Deal suggest that with very few exceptions, donors have not significantly increased their aid allocation towards the Peace and Statebuilding Goals (PSG) so far.

The first of the New Deal's five goals– fostering inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution – is of the highest relevance in the context of National Dialogue processes. A recent independent review attempted to gather initial evidence of how donors support PSG 1 for legitimate politics (van Veen et al. 2017). The authors found that the fragmented and highly contested nature of politics in fragile societies still poses a significant challenge for external actors. They recommended three shifts in the programming of development assistance that will allow donors to make more meaningful contributions to inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution.

Firstly, donors should improve their capabilities for understanding the domestic politics of fragile societies. External interventions to promote inclusive and legitimate politics risk doing more harm than good if they are not based on a thorough understanding of the political context. External actors are therefore encouraged to improve their tools for socio-political analysis, and to find better ways to absorb such knowledge and to establish the necessary human resources on the ground. Secondly, donors should orient themselves more towards outcomes and political substance of their interventions rather than focusing too much on input and process. According to the authors, development-oriented outcomes may be more successfully achieved by working through established political processes – even if they are illiberal – than delivering a standardised liberal political support package. Thirdly, the authors encourage donors to engage much more beyond the national representatives of the state to promote inclusive and legitimate politics. This includes the promotion of local conflict resolution initiatives to foster legitimacy and inclusivity from the bottom up, as well as supporting social and political forces that are not part of the establishment in order to enhance the capacities for peaceful social contestation.

### **3.2.3 Technical expertise, evidence-based policy support with a focus on development**

While external expertise in facilitation and process management is often provided by international organisations (e.g. UN Mediation Support Unit) or specialised NGOs, development agencies can provide additional support and complementary input. They often have a longstanding presence in-country and possess a profound understanding of the social and political context. This is of high relevance in order

to find entry points to support a National Dialogue, which depends not only on high-quality technical expertise but also equally on interpersonal and engagement skills.

External technical expertise may provide management and thematic inputs to the participants in National Dialogues. Process management experts can assist by providing options, introducing innovative methodologies, and providing comparative perspectives from other contexts. Subject matter experts can provide input on certain thematic areas, e.g. constitution-making. Technical support may also include formal training for participants in relevant aspects of the process, as well as coaching for individuals and groups. Coordination is key in particular for international organisations that offer technical support for peace and dialogue processes. With a large number of specialised agencies and NGOs, the field is highly crowded and the supply of external support far exceeds the demand. At the initiation of the National Dialogue in Myanmar, for instance, a coordination meeting for international cooperation saw the participation of over 120 organisations (Siebert et al. 2014).

A good example of how established cooperation between countries can add value to National Dialogues is the Swiss engagement in Nepal. Switzerland was one of the first countries to provide development assistance to Nepal in the 1950s, which has resulted in a highly respected and trusted relationship between the countries. At the beginning of the transition process in 2005, this relationship allowed Switzerland to dispatch a peacebuilding advisor in order to establish rapport with and between the conflict parties. The support intensified gradually into problem-solving workshops, assistance to local facilitators, and the joint establishment of peace infrastructures such as the Nepal Transition to Peace Institute (Stürzinger 2015).

German development cooperation, with its focus on capacity development and institutional support, has been able to build up substantive experience in promoting peace settlements in a range of countries. This includes individual and institutional capacity development for conflict parties and facilitators of dialogue, the establishment of networks and alliances, and the creation of space for dialogues with a multi-track and multi-issue focus. The technical development agency GIZ has been able to work with ministries and peace secretariats in countries such as Yemen, Mali, Malawi, Colombia, Afghanistan and Guatemala. It has also contributed to regional cooperation mechanisms and mediation support structures of international organisations such as the African Union and the Southern African Development Community. On track 2 and 3, Germany deploys Civil Peace Service staff, who support local and non-governmental organisations in order to reinforce civil structures for peaceful conflict resolution (Vimalarajah 2012).

Development actors can also provide external expertise to enhance evidence-based policy-making in the context of National Dialogues. This is important to allow participants of National Dialogues to make informed choices and to foster realistic expectations among the wider population about the development prospects and peace dividends that follow from political settlement. World Bank and regional development banks are experienced in providing National Dialogue processes and their stakeholders with relevant economic data to make informed policy choices. In Yemen and Libya for example, this has included public expenditure reviews, poverty data, information on institutional options, e.g. on wealth sharing, decentralisation choices, and option papers on demand (Bartu 2014).

### **3.2.4 Process funding**

The planning of National Dialogues can incur significant costs. The budget of the National Dialogue in Yemen was reported to amount to USD 37 million per year. The National Dialogue in Myanmar was billed at a similar level, with costs of USD 35 million USD (Siebert et al. 2014). For developing countries in particular, this is a heavy load to shoulder and financial assistance from donors is often requested.

Development actors should proceed with caution in order not to compromise the local ownership and legitimacy of the process, particularly in countries that are heavily donor-reliant. Mali, which is currently in the planning process of National Dialogue, depends on donor funds for the majority of its national budget. The heavy dependency on foreign aid has led Malians to accuse the government of squandering aid funds and seeking the approval of donors over the interests of the public (Bleck 2011). Against this backdrop, external development actors make efforts to tread carefully in the current peace process. External technical advisors take the position that a National Dialogue with a limited scope is preferable to a process that is perceived by the population as overly donor-reliant (Kante 2016).

### **3.2.5 Support for peace and dialogue infrastructures**

Peace and dialogue infrastructures refer to domestic governmental and non-governmental structures and financial systems whose aim is to support National Dialogues and other forms of peace and dialogue processes. They can be established at any stage and any level of peace and dialogue processes. Their possible functions include capacity-building and advisory services, communication and facilitation between conflict parties and stakeholders, and the implementation, monitoring and coordination of activities. Some of the possible elements of peace and dialogue infrastructures include peace ministries, national steering committees and peace secretariats, consultative dialogue platforms, think tanks and backchannel structures (Hopp-Nishanka 2012).

The role of external development actors in the context of peace and dialogue infrastructures revolves mostly around technical assistance. Development agencies may support organisational development processes for the establishment of structures, deploy technical advisors or provide logistical or financial support. Here, too, alignment is key for international actors as peace infrastructures are most effectively designed by national stakeholders themselves. Authentic structures and common spaces can act as an “immune system” that strengthens a society in transition from within (Siebert 2014, 37).

In the case of Nepal, the peace infrastructure beyond the National Dialogue itself includes the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction, which was established to manage and strengthen the all-party talks and peace process; the Peace Secretariat, which helped to facilitate the National All-Party Talks until 2010 and also organised regular dialogues with civil society and the media; and prior to that the Peace Negotiation and Coordination Secretariat, which institutionalised peace negotiations at an early stage. The ongoing Nepal Transition to Peace Initiative continues to provide a safety net for cooperation among the main political stakeholders (Siebert 2012).

As in any other area related to National Dialogues and political settlements, external development actors must recognise that they operate in a political arena and think politically about their support. In Myanmar, the EU support to the government’s Myanmar Peace Centre, which was established for the neutral management and facilitation of the National Dialogue, was challenged by local civil society actors, who saw it as an attempt to impose the government’s agenda (Yawnghwe 2014). After the 2015 elections, the new government of Myanmar sought to take control of the National Dialogue process and to reorganise the Myanmar Peace Center under its own direction.

### **3.2.6 Fragility and needs assessments**

It has become an established practice for internal and external development actors to jointly conduct post-conflict needs assessments in parallel to peace negotiations. The assessments serve to conceptualise, negotiate and finance a shared strategy for post-conflict recovery and war-to-peace

transitions (World Bank and UNDP 2007). The New Deal has introduced inclusive and participatory fragility assessments as a related tool. The purpose is to generate a better understanding of the sources and drivers of fragility from the perspective of the country's citizens. Such assessments may also explore opportunities for action based on shared analyses of scenarios that may arise. In the context of National Dialogues, a fragility assessment can set priorities and targets for addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility. Development partners can support participatory fragility assessments through the provision of technical assistance, but more crucially, the assessment should serve as a guideline for the alignment of their own priorities to those of national stakeholders (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding 2015). Project-type intervention should consider if fragility assessment could benefit the design of project priorities. At the very least, development partners should conduct peace and conflict impact assessments in their intervention areas in order to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach.

### **3.2.7 Multi-donor trust funds**

Multi-donor trust funds, which pool financial support for fragile and post-conflict countries, present a good opportunity for funding post-conflict development and reconstruction on the basis of the mutual accountability principle. Recipient governments benefit from the strategic alignment of donors to their development strategy and from increased predictability of funding. Donors profit from a reduction of fiduciary and political risks and a higher degree of transparency and accountability, facilitated through formal steering committees, progress reports and financial data. Crucially in the context of political transitions, trust funds provide flexibility for donors and recipients and allow a change of funding areas and channels should new challenges arise (World Bank 2007).

Existing evaluations of multi-donor trust funds indicate that in most cases, funds contributed positively to the harmonisation between donors and the effectiveness of aid. However, existing multi-donor trust funds show a mixed record in terms of country ownership and the alignment with national and local development priorities. The reasons seem to include a lack of adaptation to the political environment and security concerns, a lack of involvement of national governmental and civil society stakeholders in the design of the fund, and a lack of donor trust in governments and agencies that are viewed as weak or corrupt (Barakat, Rzeszut and Martin 2012).

From the perspective of National Dialogues and political settlements, the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility (SDRF) under the Somali Compact provides an instructive example. The SDRF was established in 2014 on the basis of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States with the intention of piloting the New Deal principles of local ownership and donor coordination. Somalia has been in the process of finalising a provisional constitution by 2016. This made the establishment of the Somali Compact politically sensitive, as it could have significant implications for the negotiations and trust-building surrounding the new political settlement. Despite setbacks including a central bank scandal, the SDRF was implemented in a manner which allows the federal government of Somalia to guide peacebuilding and statebuilding activities funded through the Somali Compact. The SDRF is directed by a common Financial Governance Committee, which was established to restore donor confidence in the government's capacity and willingness to tackle corruption. The Somali Compact has been described as a "paradigm shift" in national leadership and ownership of priorities in transition from fragility (Hearn and Zimmerman 2014).

### 3.2.8 Long-term focus on trust-building measures and reconciliation

Relationship- and trust-building is not frequently referred to as a requirement at the beginning of dialogue and negotiation. Yet it is in the implementation phase of a political settlement when newly established relationships are normalised and where security dilemmas and commitment problems must be resolved. A security dilemma arises when one actor distrusts the commitment of others to uphold an agreement that has been forged between them. These security fears may lead to escalations and the use of force, even if none of the parties considers this as their preferred option and the goals between them are in principle compatible. Security dilemmas need to be resolved if a political settlement is to be sustainable (Babbitt, Chigas, and Wilkinson 2013).

External actors can become important third parties to facilitate confidence-building measures in order to resolve security dilemmas. Such measures may include impartial monitoring, e.g. in the case of human violations, or bringing parties together in low-entry cooperation formats that allow them to test each other's intentions and commitments. Especially following an elite-dominated political settlement, such trust-building measures will be required to resolve security dilemmas at lower levels of society. Development programmes that work *in* but not directly *on* the implementation of political settlements can and should include confidence-building measures in their work as well. Development actors would engage in an analysis of their local context and identify connectors that may assist in resolving security dilemmas and building trust in their area of intervention.

## 4 Concluding Remarks

The present article looked at National Dialogues from a development angle. The overarching question was how National Dialogues, as a means to reach a new political settlement after conflict, can go beyond pure power brokerage and focus on development outcomes. The creation of tangible peace dividends for the public at large is crucial if National Dialogue processes are to succeed and create lasting results. However, political and security dilemmas, tight deadlines, high external pressures and demands made by elites and potential spoilers reduce the space for the negotiation of development issues in National Dialogues. An active role for civil society actors, contestations by political movements, and the inclusion of constituent groups such as women and young people have shown to be 'torch bearers' for bringing development issues into National Dialogue processes. From an international development practitioners' point of view, an engagement in National Dialogues requires a high degree of alignment with national ownership as well as trustful cooperation with political actors and peacemakers. Development actors would do well to focus on the unique contributions that they can make to National Dialogue processes. Development approaches that think and act politically and are mindful of local contexts will be most likely to make an impact in the politically sensitive context of National Dialogue processes. Initiatives such as the New Deal are based on this thinking and offer innovative opportunities for development partnerships that are waiting to be harnessed.

This article separated development concerns from the core political nature of National Dialogues, in order to extract practical insights and orientation points for practitioners. In reality, the distinction between political and development dimensions is of course much less neat. Decisions that determine the future development of a country emerging from conflict depend to a large extent on the interests of local elites and the political and economic concerns of powerful regional and global players. The notion of a political settlement, which organises political and economic power and the allocation of resources, was introduced at the beginning of this article and it is useful to reconsider it in closing. If development issues are regarded as add-ons in National Dialogue processes, they will always come

second. National dialogues by their very nature need to be considered a key factor for development. They structure and regulate the access to political and economic resources far into the future. Resolute political leadership that creates development opportunities at every step of the process is needed to craft outcomes that create a basis for economic development and social justice.

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