The Political Transformation of Armed and Banned Groups

Lessons Learned and Implications for International Support

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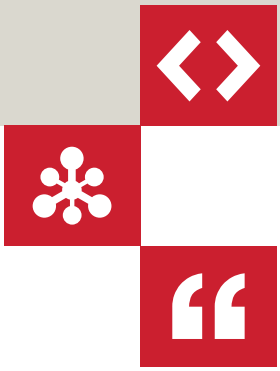

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Conflict actors have the potential to serve as partners in statebuilding and peacebuilding endeavours

1. Background and purpose of this paper

The majority of armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War have been characterised by an asymmetric paradigm with State actors (governments, security apparatus, etc.) on one side of the 'front' and non-state actors (opposition parties, irregular armed forces, etc.) on the other. Not only is the world currently experiencing a resurgence of such conflicts – as evidenced by the on-going conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Syria, amongst others – but the cross-border, regional and global implications of these conflicts have also significantly increased in scope and complexity. These dynamics affect regional stability, the strategic and economic interests of States, levels of development, as well as the influence of international organizations, which are purely based on the relations between and among States.

Researchers and policy-makers alike are increasingly aware of the need to understand the motivations of non-state armed groups and to engage with them in order to prevent, manage and mitigate impacts on human security, international peace and deteriorating rule of law in countries and regions affected by their presence and operations. While the global "war on terror" discourse tends to regard many of these actors as security threats and, therefore, as obstacles to sustainable peace (Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta 2012b), such an assessment hampers a more constructive approach to engaging with conflict actors, who may have the potential to serve as partners in statebuilding and peacebuilding endeavours. In particular, the "demilitarisation of politics" (Lyons 2006) as a result of the transformation of non-state armed groups into peaceful political entities forms an important part of creating sustainable peace settlements; this process helps assure militants that they can effectively protect their interests and voice their views through non-violent channels i.e. it generates the political will to undergo disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes and to then enter formal political channels.

However, while some of these groups manage such transitions effectively and are able to become major democratic players in the post-agreement political landscape, other groups fail to embark upon or complete the transformation into peaceful and democratic actors and, therefore, remain excluded from the political system; others, furthermore, may abuse their newly gained political power. These dynamics often lead to an entrenched risk of such groups becoming "spoilers," creating potentially risks for a return to violence.

Consequently, this paper seeks to answer several key questions: how can we define and explain successful political transformations on the part of armed and banned groups, and how can we account for varying degrees of success regarding integration into the formalised political landscape? What factors help or hinder armed and banned groups in the process of transitioning into actors capable of engaging in peaceful political activity, and willing to pursue their goals through peaceful means? Are there particular strategies or actions that international actors can pursue in order to help support such groups to undertake this transition? What are the lessons learned from past engagements by external actors, and which approaches/instruments can be nurtured to support such transitions, notably by UNDP?

This framework paper has been commissioned by UNDP's Bureau for Policy and Planning Support (BPPS) in the context of its ongoing reflection regarding the transformation of armed and banned groups towards actors engaged in peaceful political activity. Findings are based on collaborative research activities carried out by the Berghof Foundation since 2006 with support from the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC); this research, which has examined non-state armed groups' transitions to peaceful politics in a range of contexts, including Aceh, Burundi, Colombia, El

Salvador, Kosovo[1], Nepal, Northern Ireland and South Africa, served as an initial catalyst for this paper. These findings have since been substantially enriched through scholarly resources, lessons learned from reflecting upon internal UNDP e-discussions, and as a result of a three-day retreat on the political transformation of armed and banned groups.[2]

The paper begins by clarifying some key terms that will be used throughout this work, before analysing the factors that support or impede such transitions, including: the nature of the actors under scrutiny; the characteristics of the conflict and its settlement; and, the international context. It then concludes with key implications and recommendations for external actors –and more specifically UNDP –concerning how to effectively support these transitions.

1 References to Kosovo in this paper shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

2 The workshop entitled "The challenge of political transformation of armed and banned group", held in June, 2014 in Naivasha, Kenya was organized by a team from UNDP's former Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) as part of its endeavour to (re)define new approaches for UNDP engagement in this domain. Facilitated by the Berghof Foundation, the workshop brought together representatives from HQ and UNDP Country Offices, as well as international experts and representatives from former armed groups. (The workshop report is available separately.)

2. Transition towards peaceful political processes

This section aims to clarify the boundaries and scope of this paper by, firstly, defining our understanding of armed and banned groups and their peaceful participation in conflict transformation processes; and, secondly, suggesting a set of criteria for measuring "success" in war-to-politics transitions..

2.1 Terminological clarifications

Armed and banned groups

This paper focuses on armed groups as the primary unit of analysis, examining the nature and causal mechanisms that form part of their transition towards peaceful political participation. Armed groups are conventionally described as entities that: possess a hierarchical structure (or a basic command structure); use violence for political ends; are independent from State authority; and, have some degree of territorial control over a geographic area (Bruderlein 2000). Various definitions have been offered in the context of political science and conflict resolution literature –from minimalist approaches characterising armed groups as "challengers to the State's monopoly of legitimate coercive force" (Policzer 2005), to more sophisticated descriptions; Ricigliano (2005), for example, defines armed groups as actors "operating primarily within State borders engaged in violent attempts to challenge or reform the balance and structure of political and economic power, to avenge past injustices and/or to defend or control resources, territory or institutions for the benefit of a particular ethnic or social group." This latter definition points to the organizational and motivational diversity of the actors under scrutiny; these characteristics will be covered in Section 2 in the context of a discussion on the factors that promote or impede effective political transitions.

Despite these definitions, it should be noted that most political actors associated with "armed groups" strongly object to being primarily defined by the fact that they possess arms, since the use of (armed) force only represents a temporary means to achieve their broader socio-political aspirations (Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta 2012a, 2012b).[3] It is also important to note that although the primary focus of this paper is organized opposition groups that took up arms to pursue their objectives, most lessons learned explored in this paper can also apply to political groups or social movements that made the transition from being "underground groups" (i.e. as proscribed actors) to conventional political actors, without necessarily pursuing armed activities themselves. Groups such as, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia, but also Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland or Herri Batasuna in the Basque Country could all be included in this category.[4] While being aware of the limitations of such terminology, for the purposes of this paper we will use the all-encompassing label "armed *and banned* groups".

Peaceful political participation

Participation in peaceful political processes should be understood as encompassing various forms of non-violent political activities that take place through legal or institutional channels. A primary emphasis is placed on party politics and participation in executive and/or legislative power at the national or local level. However, political activity can also imply other channels of participation, as described in the next sub-section, which explores the nature of "successful" transitions to peaceful politics in greater detail.

3 For the purposes of our research, we have coined the term "power contenders" in order to stress our focus on armed actors that pursue primarily political objectives. As we argued, this term intends to redirect the focus to the core of the problem: violent conflict over the legitimate use of power and responsibility for governing the people. Power contenders, no matter how they are labelled by themselves or their opponents, seek to gain, shift, or transform power (Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta 2012b).

4 For an in-depth analysis on the distinction and relations between political and military components of 'armed political organizations' such as Sinn Fein and IRA, see Berti 2013.

2.2 Criteria for "successful transition"

> *The renunciation of force and the acceptance of basic rules of political competition represent minimal criteria for successful transformation*

The most tangible measure of a successful transition towards peaceful political participation can be defined as "taking part and winning seats in the governing authority" (Engeland and Rudolph 2008: 181). However, given the wide diversity of actors – in terms of their political aspirations, size/scope and means of leverage, for example – we find it problematic to reduce "success" to electoral results alone. It is preferable, rather, to identify criteria that can assess a *qualitative* shift in the strategies, behaviour and preferences of armed and banned groups in the context of their transformation processes.

Combining key scholarly literature on the transformation of rebel organizations into political parties (e.g. Söderberg Kovacs 2007, Guáqueta 2007, Deonandan et al. 2007, Manning 2007, De Zeeuw 2008, Sindre 2014, Söderström 2014) with our own research findings, therefore, this section of the paper presents a set of indicators organized on a scale – ranging from "negative/minimal" to "positive/optimal" levels of transformation. We conceptualise the transformation of armed and banned groups on a continuum of incremental changes, indicating different stages and steps. At the lower end of this continuum the renunciation of force and the acceptance of basic rules of political competition represent minimal criteria for successful transformation. At the "higher" end of the continuum, "positive" indicators include internal democratisation processes through organizational and programmatic adjustments, as well as the viability of the actor's political project, and their level of influence over State power and governance.

Shift in the means and arena of struggle

The first steps of a successful transformation involve, first, the group undertaking a verifiable *shift in the means of struggle* by demonstrating its willingness to abandon its capacity to conduct armed activities and demobilise its military apparatus; and; second, the group undergoes a *shift in the arena of struggle* by continuing its political engagement through active participation within the existing legal democratic framework i.e. by accepting to abide by the institutional 'rules of the game'.

While this most commonly implies a collective transformation into a political party (or the consolidation of a pre-existing party) and access to formal State processes through electoral or power-sharing arrangements, political (re)integration also entails other channels of participation or influence in policy-making and public debates at the local and national levels, such as through think-tanks, NGOs, social movements, veteran associations, lobby groups, journalism or jobs in the public sector – which all provide non-violent outlets for pursuing political agendas.

Organizational and programmatic democratisation

Democratisation refers to the "transformation of the 'political culture' of an armed group", from a "command and control approach to an approach suitable for a pluralistic political reality" (UNDP e-consultation). This process entails two dimensions: on the one hand, *organizational democratisation* implies the capability to move from vertical command structures (designed for military struggle), to a more horizontal and participatory internal decision-making structure. This process should include some degree of leadership regeneration, offering the opportunity for all members (including youth and women) to participate in the political project at all levels. Another important dimension of transformation is the willingness to recruit new members and broaden the group's support base beyond its war-time constituency. However, these processes should not be expected to happen quickly, but should, rather, be understood as an organic dynamic process that can stretch over several decades (UNDP e-consultation).

Programmatic democratisation entails the adaptation or recalibration of war-time agendas to the complex reality of post-war politics, including the shift from a resistance/liberation mentality to a comprehensive governance and policy implementation agenda. This shift includes managing popular expectations and

delivering on war-time promises, while simultaneously serving the needs and interests of all citizens. However, this process does not necessarily entail a complete ideological shift; the newly-formed political entities may wish to continue striving for their pre-existing aims (be it national liberation, inclusive democracy, socialism, Islamism, etc.), albeit through peaceful means and from within the (reformed) conventional political system.

Viability of the political project

Successful transformation can also be measured by the degree of sustainability vis-à-vis the group's organizational and strategic shifts. Transitions to peaceful political processes are sometimes temporary or may be only partial in form. Former armed groups (or some internal factions) may relapse into armed struggle or abandon political struggle altogether by disbanding and disappearing, or by evolving into criminal entities. In fragile post-war situations especially, initially promising steps towards a sustained transformation can easily fail to consolidate or materialize, so that what may have been regarded as a success shortly after a peace accord may turn out to be a pitfall or set-back later on. A newly established political party, for example, may seem viable if it survives two consecutive post-war elections for the national executive; however, many former armed groups which transition into political parties and then accede to government display the opposite problem: once in government they often face the challenge of (democratically) yielding their power and/or sharing it with political parties they had previously fought, or at least not entered into alliance with due to diverse differences.

Many groups try to seize full control of power during the transition period and are reluctant to cede it until the "transformation" of the State is "fully completed". More often than not, the former power contenders are tempted to transform themselves into the same type of autocratic rulers that they have succeeded in removing from power. Possible explanations for this behaviour include: the personal agendas of leaders unwilling to foster democracy and to allow free and fair elections; internal group dynamics, such as the need to control all levels of power in order to gather enough patronage to maintain group cohesion throughout the transition; and/or a lack of trust in the overall transformation process and/or the rejection of the existing (still unreformed) political system (see Section 3). Consequently, an additional important variable for effective transitions includes the ability to face and accept electoral defeat, and to hand over power – and accept an opposition role – peacefully.

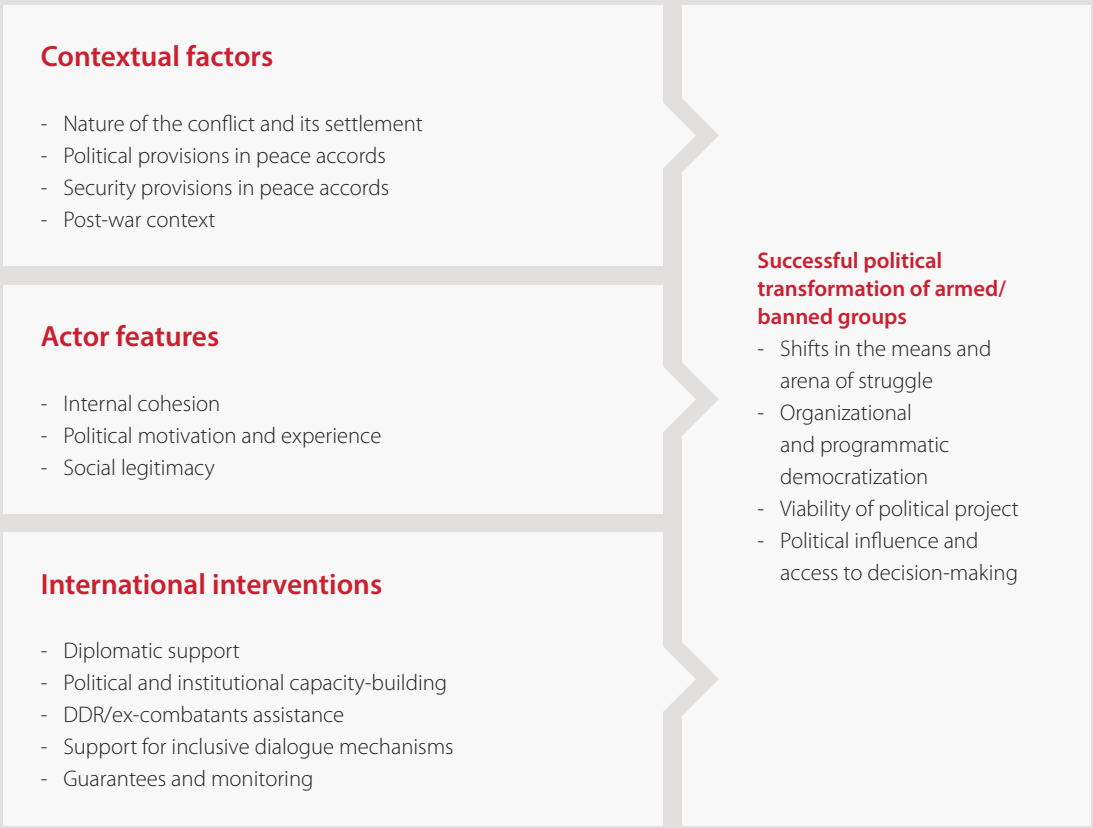
Political influence and access to decision-making

Although we argued above that successful transformations should not be measured only in terms of electoral results, one cannot assess the effectiveness of armed and banned groups' post-conflict political projects without examining their degree of political leverage i.e. their effective participation in national and/or local decision-making and governance processes. This measure of effectiveness is all the more important given the extent to which political leverage influences the other dimensions previously discussed: a prolonged lack of leverage (be it through the executive power, parliament or lobbying channels) is likely to affect the viability and behavioural shift of such actors by discouraging them from staying on the course of peaceful engagement. In turn, political influence without internal democratisation cannot be considered a successful transition, as demonstrated in countries such as Eritrea, Ethiopia or Uganda, where former State challengers have established and strengthened authoritarian systems of governance once in power, albeit within a framework of multi-party competition in the latter two cases. Such examples demonstrate the complementary and inter-dependent nature of all the aforementioned variables when accounting for sustainable and legitimate political transformations.

3. Factors supporting (or impeding) effective political transformation

This section turns to the factors that might explain why some armed groups undergo effective transformations from engaging in war and violence to participating in peaceful political processes, while others fail to implement or consolidate their political project. Some of the illustrations are drawn from the eight cases under scrutiny from our previous research, while other examples are derived from the UNDP e-consultations and some lessons learned from a UNDP workshop in June 2014.[5] We begin by examining factors related to the nature of the groups and their social environment, before reviewing the impact of contextual factors, and the role of international actors.

Figure 1: Criteria and factors for successful political transformation of armed/banned groups



5 See Annex II for a summary of the post-war political trajectories undergone by most groups mentioned in this paper.

If a movement is united in its decision to make the transition to peaceful politics, it is more likely that it will become a viable political party

3.1 Nature and features of the group

The literature on armed conflicts presents diverse typologies that classify and label armed groups according to their objectives, target groups, tactics, geographical scope, organizational features, initiation mechanisms, relation to the State, etc. (e.g. Mair 2003, Schneckener 2009, Schlichte 2009). The purpose of this section is not create a new typology of armed and banned groups, but rather to explore general patterns that help us to better understand the internal dynamics that facilitate or impede these actors' effective conversion to peaceful politics. Predictive tools (i.e. under what conditions can one anticipate a successful transition?), and guiding criteria for intervention (i.e. when and how to intervene to support a group's political transformation?) can help to make transformation scenarios more effective.

Organizational structure: Leadership and cohesion

The organizational features of armed groups influence their post-war trajectories. First, it can be assumed that movements organized around a hierarchical command and control structure (as opposed to decentralised networks or cell-based units), and with a minimum level of internal cohesion, are more likely to undergo political transitions in a coherent and disciplinary fashion, as leaders can instruct members down the chain of command about post-war trajectories and transformation mechanisms. Research has highlighted the importance of charismatic leadership for adopting decisions in favour of a transition process in spite of internal scepticism and fears. For example:

- In **Colombia**, the commander of the 19th of April Movement known as "M19", Carlos Pizarro, made a bold disarmament offer without any prior consultation with his own movement or with other guerrillas; the decision was later confirmed internally by democratic vote in favour of ending the armed rebellion.
- In the case of the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) in **Nepal**, the leadership seized a bold opportunity when it unexpectedly declared a unilateral ceasefire in August 2005. This proactive move forced the King to respond and gave the Maoists an opportunity to resolve intra-party divisions and form a new alliance with mainstream political parties against the monarchy.
- **South Sudan**, on the other hand, provides an example of the consequences of a lack of charismatic leadership. The loss of John Garang, the founding father and visionary leader of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) might well be one of the key factors that explains the SPLM's internal fragmentation that eventually pushed the new country into civil war in late 2013. However, it must also be noted that authoritarian leadership can have detrimental effects if it continues to dominate the group well beyond its transition.
- In cases where hierarchical command-and-control systems remain in place and under powerful authoritarian leaders, some armed groups have evolved into vehicles for former rebel leaders to dominate State affairs, especially when the boundaries between military and civilian leadership are blurred. This is well illustrated by Mugabe's **Zimbabwe** African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) and Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) in **Uganda**, which substituted their collectively-determined transformative agenda with that of the leader.

It can also be argued that if a movement is united in its decision to make the transition to peaceful politics, it is more likely that it will become a viable political party. According to Engeland and Rudolph (2008), fragmentation at the leadership level, or fragmentation that is publicly exhibited, is more likely to impede effective transformation than fragmentation at the outskirts of the movement. During post-war transitions, the institutionalisation of armed groups tends to be accompanied by internal tensions with hardliner militants or members protesting against their alleged marginalisation. For example:

- In **El Salvador**, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) successfully transitioned into a major opposition party that went onto win the presidential election in 2009. However, it was affected by multiple individual defections and collective splits (e.g. by two of its five constituting former guerrillas) throughout the 1990s. However, these processes eventually helped to unify the remaining party members around a cohesive leadership and coherent programme.
- One factor that can exacerbate intra-party tensions is the return of exiled or imprisoned leadership figures, creating possible dissensions, misunderstandings or rivalry. In **South Africa**, for example, political tensions between the ANC's former internal, external and prison forces (the "Robben Islanders") still have repercussions today. The challenges of consolidating a cohesive post-war movement, for example, were demonstrated by the 2008 leadership crisis and the formation of a breakaway party.
- In **Aceh**, the return of an exiled government official led to a split of the former guerrilla group, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), with field commanders presenting distinct candidates for the provincial elections shortly after the 2005 peace accord.
- In **South Sudan**, highly qualified diaspora returnees were excluded from taking over Governmental positions and accused of having abandoned those who stayed to fight for national liberation.

In short, the leadership's willingness to engage in, and remain committed to, a peaceful political transformation towards multi-party democracy as well as its ability to keep the majority of their movement united behind a common position represent key factors for successful transformation.

Political motivations and experience

Armed and banned groups whose goals are based on ideology or a political agenda, and which have an interest in participating in State governance, are evidently more likely to become effective post-war political actors. This raises a crucial question regarding the conditions under which other types of armed actors might become interested and able to integrate into the political framework – as political parties or through other forms of participation in political processes; actors pursuing primarily economic or criminal agendas, for example, and which have little ideological orientation (while acknowledging the fluidity of such artificial boundaries in contexts of protracted social conflicts) may prove particularly challenging in this regard. Findings from the UNDP e-consultation reveal a strong tendency for groups lacking a coherent political discourse and/or an ideologically-driven agenda (such as the March 23 Movement (M23) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone to show no interest in transitioning to conventional politics, or to fail in their attempts to do so. Implications for international engagements in such contexts will be explored further below.

Another major research finding concerns the degree of previous political experience: research finds that such experience can condition armed and banned groups' ability to adapt their programme and agendas in post-war environments. Indeed, movements that emerged from political formations that: (1) pre-existed the armed conflict; (2) maintained a distinct political branch (or government in exile) throughout the conflict; or, (3) ran parallel governance structures in areas under their control, are more able to build upon such experiences in the post-war environment. Most groups mentioned in this paper shared one or several such characteristics.

- For example, the rebel group the National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) in **Burundi** was led by an executive committee affiliated with a pre-existing party, and many leaders within the group had previous political experience as deputies or ministers. When the group entered the peace process and began demobilising its troops, it also made use of its extensive political apparatus (e.g. its network of political commissioners) to continue liaising with civil society and mobilising its constituency for the post-war presidential elections.

Actors that mobilise a large socio-ethnic constituency during their armed struggle, are more able to re-mobilise public support in post-war peaceful political contexts

By contrast, guerrilla groups organized as "political-military organizations" – in which military leaderships took political decisions and/or led the negotiation teams – faced difficulties in establishing a cohesive party in the wake of the peace process.

- For example, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in **Kosovo** was initially established as a military organization which, in turn, created a political directorate in charge of representing the movement during negotiations. This relative lack of experience with political leadership may help explain why the movement did not form its own distinct party after the war; instead, individual leaders went onto establish their own entities, competing with each other over governing power in the newly-independent state of Kosovo.
- For its part, the demobilisation of the M-19 guerrilla group in **Colombia** was accompanied by the formation of a coalition party with other leftist activists, the Democratic Alliance-M19 (ADM-19). While it achieved remarkable electoral results in the immediate post-agreement phase (1990-1991), it steadily lost its initial support and was later dissolved. This failure to consolidate into an effective party can be partly attributed to the group's lack of experience in electoral processes and the institutional arena, although some M-19 veterans have joined other political parties or civil society organizations through which they are now successfully influencing local and national politics.

Social legitimacy and war-time behaviour

A third set of factors affecting armed groups' post-war transformation concerns the war-time behaviour of such groups and public perceptions of their social legitimacy. In particular, it can be argued that actors that mobilise a large socio-ethnic constituency during their armed struggle, and that are considered as legitimate representatives of the grievances and interests of these broader constituencies are more able to re-mobilise public support in post-war peaceful political contexts. In instances where political parties emerge from movements advocating for self-determination, their ethno-national community represents an obvious source of electoral support; similarly, religious groups mainly rely on faith-based constituencies, while revolutionary movements often develop strong support bases thanks to their inclusive political agendas; other groups may rely upon providing socio-economic services under their control as a way to garner greater support.

- For example, the CPN-M in **Nepal** claimed to represent the grievances of all marginalised communities (such as ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, dalits, women).

Behavioural patterns i.e. the tactics and strategies employed by armed groups during the conflict also influence their ability to mobilise large political constituencies during their post-war electoral campaigns. A particularly salient factor is the behaviour of these actors vis-à-vis the civilian population, namely, whether they prey on the population as a source of income, target civilians as part of terrorist tactics, or cultivate mutually-supportive relations with their social surroundings as potential allies.

- This set of factors might partly explain why the guerrilla M-19 in **Colombia** enjoyed a degree of popular legitimacy disproportional to its numerical strength: it had less than 1,000 members, but gained 26% of the votes in the 1991 Constituent Assembly election that immediately followed its political transformation; this was in sharp contrast with the low level of civil society support for the FARC's current political project as ascertained by public opinion surveys.
- In **Sierra Leone**, the RUF did not enjoy much appeal or credibility with local communities. While the group – largely composed of marginalised youths – represented legitimate political grievances, it was ill-equipped to channel these grievances into a political dialogue with civil society, making its transformation into a political party impossible (UNDP e-consultation).

3.2 Contextual factors: Features of the conflict and its settlement

Armed groups do not undertake a transformation into conventional politics in a vacuum. As evidenced by scholars working on social movements, the "political opportunity structure" within which societal actors operate influences their dynamics and strategic choices. In the specific context of "war-to-politics transitions", three types of factors should be explored in greater depth: the socio-political environment in which armed and banned groups emerge; the nature of the conflict settlement and, in particular, the specific security and political agreements regulating the post-war context; and, finally, the post-war environment in which they evolve during their political transformation.

3.2.1 Nature of the conflict

The historical, cultural, political and security dimensions of the conflict context in which armed or banned actors operate affect the pace and nature of their strategic shift towards peaceful participation. Indeed, the root causes of the conflict, and the factors that contributed to collective violent mobilisation are likely to positively or negatively influence the prospects for political (re)conversion amongst conflict stakeholders. For example, it can be argued that civil wars rooted in the exclusive nature of the political system – whereby power contenders seek to democratise the State and participate in governance – are more amenable to accommodate such actors into the State apparatus after a peace accord, than conflicts fought by revolutionary (e.g. Marxist-Leninist or Islamist) groups that seek to radically transform the nature of the State, or form a breakaway State of their own.

The evolving power dynamics between the State and its challengers also affect the strategic options available to the parties; in situations of military or diplomatic stalemate, negotiated power-sharing solutions seem more attractive and less risky than opting for a "winner-takes-all" approach. In contexts of ethno-political conflicts in particular, armed groups may anticipate the difficulties of recruiting across ethnic divides in the post-agreement phase, which can discourage them from turning to conventional party politics, especially if they represent a minority community. In protracted conflicts, experiences of previous cycles of violence and peacemaking efforts are also likely to affect armed actors' calculations regarding the prospect of successful political participation.

- One can assume that FARC members in **Colombia**, for example, are particularly eager to avoid the serious security and political challenges faced by smaller guerrillas who demobilised and sought to join mainstream politics in the early 1990s; consequently, FARC members have been seeking alternative guarantees for effective political transformation.
- By contrast, **Nepal** has a long history of opposition movements initially launching an armed insurrection to increase their power base, on which they subsequently capitalised upon in order to climb the political ladder. All major contemporary parties have taken this route. Consequently, it can be assumed that the Maoists felt confident about their electoral prospects when opting for a peace strategy in 2006 (Thapa 2014). The case of Nepal also demonstrates the impact of cultural norms (e.g. such as the legacy of the caste system) on internal power structures within armed groups despite their inclusive agendas – as evidenced by the informal hierarchies within the Maoist movement.

3.2.2 Nature of the conflict settlement: Guarantees for safe political participation

Peace accords: A precondition for successful political transformation?

The ways in which conflicts are brought to an end (i.e. through military victory/defeat; as a result of

regime overthrow; partial or comprehensive peace agreement; or through DDR processes outside the context of a peace accord) also strongly influence the quality and possibility of post-war participation. For example, settlements brought about by military victory and "negotiated" settlements undermined by power asymmetry and/or "winners'" mentality tend to lay the ground for a transformation towards authoritarian regimes – often followed by a relapse into violence. Particularly in Africa, there are numerous instances – including in DRC and Uganda, for example – of rebel groups that took power by force, and whose rule later became contested by newly emerging armed groups.

The so-called Arab Spring revolutions resulted in banned groups (e.g. Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia) and newly-formed armed militias (e.g. in Libya) being democratically elected following nonviolent or armed regimes being deposed. Other alternative scenarios, largely under-researched to date, concern armed groups that engage in self-managed DDR processes and transformations from armed to peaceful politics in the absence of any formal negotiations or peace agreements with the State. Cases in point include, for example, the progressive (and unfinished) political transitions of the Polisario guerrilla front in the Western Sahara, and the Islamist group (*Gamaa Islamiya*) in Egypt – which self-demobilized its troops in the late 1990s, long before forming a political party in the wake of the 2011 revolution. Such cases have the potential to provide important insights concerning the potential for political transformation in contexts that are 'unripe' for negotiated transitions.[6]

Most of the cases examined in this paper concern actors that became signatories to a peace agreement, and which were therefore able to negotiate for the terms of their political reintegration. The following sub-section examines the terms of such settlements, especially the political and security incentives or guarantees introduced in order to facilitate the peaceful participation of former armed groups – ranging from single "cosmetic" measures to far-reaching institutional reforms.

Guarantees for political participation and institutional reform

A significant set of variables that influence effective transitions concern the specific mechanisms through which armed groups become political actors, including elections, institutional power-sharing arrangements and/or affirmative action, such as quota systems. Peace accords usually include provisions that enable armed opposition groups to compete in upcoming elections, or to take part in interim institutions; these measures include, for example, the removal of legal impediments (such as bans) and the introduction of clauses explicitly allowing for the creation of new political parties emerging from former power contenders (e.g. in El Salvador, Colombia, Aceh and Nepal).

Transitional justice mechanisms also condition the terms of participation on the part of former rebels within post-war institutions. Full amnesties were common during the early 1990s (e.g. in El Salvador or Colombia) but these are no longer the norm in the current international context. Judicial amnesties for former combatants or members of banned groups can be made conditional upon collaboration with truth-seeking efforts, thereby providing incentives for demobilisation while simultaneously preventing impunity, and contributing to the establishment of a historical "memory" of the conflict.

Political participation can also be facilitated through "positive discrimination" measures that institutionalise the role of former armed groups within State structures prior to competitive electoral processes, and in accordance with the "'institutionalisation before liberalisation" thesis (Paris 2004). This mechanism grants former armed groups seats in government, parliament or a constituent assembly, territorial administration, diplomatic corps or within public enterprises. From a political perspective, such positive discrimination of armed groups is seen as necessary to compensate for the imbalance

6 For an exploration of these and other cases of 'transitions from armed to nonviolent resistance', see Dudouet (ed, 2014).

between those surrendering their arms and dissolving their armed organizations and the existing political parties – in terms of access to a legal political apparatus for campaigning.

- In **Colombia**, most guerrilla groups that signed peace accords with the Government during the early 1990s were promised reserved seats in the 1991 Constituent Assembly.
- In **Angola** and **Tajikistan**, former leaders of armed groups were granted high-level positions in the Government.

In the same spirit, formal power-sharing structures often include temporary measures– such as interim "national unity" governments, for example – put in place until competitive elections can be carried out, as occurred in Burundi, Nepal, South Africa, and Sudan. The literature on power-sharing between former warring groups has confirmed the potential benefits of such mechanisms; in divided post-war societies in particular, power-sharing mechanisms can help accommodate different interests and assure all major societal groups a place in the political system (Hoove and Scholtbach 2008).

- Former combatants from **Burundi** argue that this experience helped the party emerging from the rebel group CNDD-FDD to build its capacity to manage public affairs and to obtain its first exposure to the realities of the country; it also helped its leaders gain some time to set up their electoral machine in preparation for the first post-war elections.

However, group-based power-sharing systems tend to perpetuate societal divisions and make reconciliation more difficult – as evidenced in the Bosnian case, for example. Moreover, such systems are best considered "transitory tools" that should be replaced shortly after by more democratic and inclusive decision-making processes and platforms, such as constituent assemblies or national dialogues (Papagianni 2009). Nevertheless, in some specific cases, longer-term power-sharing mechanisms have helped to institutionalise multi-party democracy and prevent sustained majority rule from fuelling minority grievances.

- In **Northern Ireland**, all major parties, including Sinn Fein, are required to be represented in the Northern Irish Executive.
- In **Burundi** a quota system regulates both multi-ethnic and multi-party representation at different levels of Government. This legislation also applies to single parties,[7] which forced the CNDD-FDD to enhance its process of internal democratisation by recruiting Tutsi cadres.

Lastly, successful political transformation is also conditioned by the implementation of broader reforms to support a transformative agenda addressing the root causes of conflict and strengthening participatory multi-party democracy. Such measures are often in the interests of the armed and banned groups themselves, and can act as powerful incentives for them to consolidate and advance towards peaceful political transition. These measures often include constitutional or electoral reforms that strengthen the role of opposition and/or minority parties, or the devolution of power and competencies to local institutions.

- In **Indonesia** the new Law on Governing Aceh codified the principle of self-governance in Aceh, and granted the right to form local political parties, enabling GAM to take part in provincial governance.
- In **El Salvador**, the peace accord outlined procedural reform provisions abolishing the use of State resources for electoral campaigns, introducing public funding for all parties in proportion to their electoral success, and changing the composition of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

Successful political transformation is also conditioned by the implementation of broader reforms to support a transformative agenda addressing the root causes of conflict and strengthening participatory multi-party democracy

7 According to the 2003 law on political parties, no governing body of a national party can include more than 75% of its members of the same ethnic group.

Security guarantees for ex-combatants and their socio-political allies are paramount for reassuring combatants that peaceful political participation will be a viable option for them

- The most dramatic regime change took place in **Nepal**, where the monarchy was abolished in favour of a Republic. Beyond measures to enhance multi-party democracy, structural reforms also included: socio-economic measures to promote the redistribution of land and wealth; consultation channels for civil society actors to voice political demands; and, efforts to improve human security and human rights (including minority rights), the rule of law and access to justice.

Security provisions: DDR/SSR/political transformation nexus

One of the major findings from the research concerns the intertwined nature of political reforms and security transition processes (Dudouet, Giessmann and Planta 2012a, 2012b). We argue that, from the perspective of armed groups aspiring to political participation, the renunciation of force is linked to, and cannot precede, the transition of power towards more legitimate and inclusive State institutions. In other words, governance incentives – through access to political participation – should be seen as an enabling factor for DDR processes, rather than the other way round. With this caveat in mind, there are some cases where DDR and, in particular, combatant reintegration measures did facilitate the political conversion of a movement.

- In **Angola**, for example, UNITA only engaged in a formal demobilization process following its legal disposition from an armed group into a political party.
- In **Burundi**, on the other hand, it was agreed that no political party was permitted to have a (para-) military organization. To overcome this restriction to electoral participation, CNDD-FDD combatants had to wait for integration into the reformed security services, and for their effective separation from the political wing of the movement for the new party to be officially established. A similar process was later adopted for the smaller rebel group Palipehutu – Forces Nationales pour la Libération (FNL). This example shows how the facilitation of demobilisation and socio-economic integration can contribute to effective political (re-)integration; it also highlights the need for carefully designed, timed, and sequenced DDR programmes.

Finally, security guarantees for ex-combatants and their socio-political allies are paramount for reassuring combatants that peaceful political participation will be a viable option for them. This not only includes individual safety schemes for demobilising militants who have become political candidates, but also broader Security Sector Reform (SSR) provisions. Very often there is a missing link between DDR and the need for SSR as part of post-war political settlements, conveying a perception of a one-sided and biased imposition of sanctions on the armed groups by the State and the international community. In particular, paramilitary apparatuses created for counter-insurgency purposes need to be dissolved, and national security doctrines adapted to the new context.

- Vetting measures such as in **El Salvador**, whereby high-ranking army officers were removed from their charges, can be highly symbolic acts and contribute to enhancing trust in the transition process on the part of former combatants and the wider society.

3.2.3 Post-war context

Curtis and De Zeeuw (2008) have outlined a number of structural challenges for emerging political parties in post-conflict settings that can deeply affect the growth, organization, leadership and behaviour of such entities. These contextual factors, which need to be carefully analysed on a case-by-case basis, may make it particularly difficult for some armed groups to transform and sustain their peaceful political projects. Challenging contextual factors include: precarious security and rule of law dynamics; democratic and governance deficits (such as the absence of the State in parts of the country,

and hence difficulty organizing political campaigns); poor economic conditions (and hence a lack of resources to fund party activities, local offices and even electoral campaigns); and, social fragmentation and a lack of trust among the general public towards the political system.

Groups that undergo a political transition in the midst of ongoing conflict (such as the guerrillas which demobilised in Colombia in the 1990s) face not only particularly severe security challenges, but must also develop their political project within a highly polarised and volatile political context. It may also be risky for armed groups to join the political mainstream and engage in peaceful and friendly relations with "the enemy" (e.g. within power-sharing governments); these different entities will continue to compete for political and social influence. Indeed, setbacks in the peacebuilding process can be used by competitors to boost their credentials, while undermining their own support base, as demonstrated in the complex power dynamics between Fatah and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, the MNLF and MILF in Mindanao, or IRA/Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA in Northern Ireland.

More broadly, the post-war consolidation of political entities emerging from war-time formations is likely to be undermined by delays or setbacks in the implementation of peace agreement provisions, especially when such delays are caused by the reluctance of the "old" ruling elite to accept the new "rules of the game", i.e. to be constructively responsive to the political transformation of their war-time enemies into a democratic political actor.

- In **Guatemala**, the political elite dominating congress was not prepared to share power with the armed insurgency, nor was it prepared to undergo the agreed package of highly progressive reforms under the terms of the 1996 peace accord. Partly as a result of their scepticism, the constitutional framework designed to facilitate implementation of the peace accord was rejected by popular vote through referendum in 1999, just weeks after the guerrilla umbrella organization, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), had registered as a political party. This defeat of the movement's peace strategy negatively affected its prospect for political success (as evidenced in its poor electoral results since 1999).

The dynamics and pace of post-war reforms and politics can also influence former armed groups' motivations for "clinging onto" power following their political transformation. In situations where the group's agenda goes beyond promoting a particular agenda or ideology in opposition to the existing power and towards a vision for comprehensive transformation of the State and society, it is difficult for the group to participate in the very system that it considers flawed and is trying to transform.

- For example, this is a dilemma that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is facing in **Mindanao (Philippines)** where the group has registered its political party despite maintaining its military structure, whilst the law to establish the new Bangsamoro autonomous entity is still being debated in Congress. Such groups may, therefore, respond by taking control of the levers of power during the transition period in order to achieve more comprehensive transformation despite the fact that goals may still be ill-defined, thereby setting the stage for conflict with other groups.

Outside support can thus make a valuable contribution in terms of verifying and monitoring the parties' compliance with their commitments. The following section reviews these modalities for providing support and other constructive forms of international engagement.

3.3 International engagement

The international environment and the proactive role of external actors, such as foreign allies, mediators, development donors, guarantors, and/or technical experts in providing support for successful political transformations prior to, during and after peace negotiations can have significant impacts on the ability of armed and banned groups to engage in peaceful transformation processes. The degree and form of international support varies heavily from locally-owned settlements, such as those in Colombia, Nepal and South Africa, to externally-led state-building efforts, such as the international engagements in Kosovo and Timor-Leste. The following sections review three areas of engagement: political and diplomatic support; guarantees and monitoring; and, technical and financial assistance, with a particular emphasis on actual and potential roles for UNDP to support political transformation processes.

3.3.1 Political and diplomatic support

A number of armed groups, such as the FMLN in El Salvador, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Fretilin in Timor-Leste, the KLA in Kosovo and the SPLM in (South) Sudan, for example, were relatively successful in garnering international support during their armed struggle, and came to be recognised as legitimate political interlocutors by the USA, as well as western European and neighbouring States. The factors that may have contributed to such international backing include: effective lobbying and conflict "framing" strategies; perceptions of the legitimacy of claims against an oppressive regime/ in contexts of illegal foreign occupation backed by international law; efforts by these movements to abide by international codes of conducts (e.g. human rights, International Human Rights Law) in their relations with the civilian population; and/or the geostrategic interests of their international backers. Such support can enable these groups to benefit from substantial technical and financial assistance to facilitate their post-war political conversion (see below examples).

Inversely, scholarly research has shown that the lack of international legitimacy played a critical role in explaining the failure of some armed groups to transform into viable political parties (Söderberg Kovacs 2007). One of the factors at play is the impact of the post-9/11 US-led "war on terror" on the international discourse concerning armed opposition groups, affecting their interest and ability to transform into peaceful political actors. Indeed, the policy of banning, proscribing and isolating armed movements across the world has prevented them from expanding their political activities.

- In **Turkey**, despite the fact that the guns of the Kurdish organization Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) had been silenced for several years and the fact that the movement had announced its decision to dissolve and reorganise its work "using entirely peaceful and democratic methods", it was placed on the EU terrorist list in May 2002, which may have fuelled the PKK's eventual return to violence.
- In the **Palestinian Territories**, international – especially European and North American – opposition to the Hamas movement went as far as rejecting the electoral results that recognised its political legitimacy in 2006, and both its political and military branches were placed on the EU terrorist list. The perceived unfairness of these sanctions has led to its re-radicalisation and a weakening of moderate forces within the movement (Hovdenak 2009, Goerzig 2010). In addition to diplomatic isolation, international proscription also denies the targeted entities access to financial and technical support, which could help them become effective political parties.
- The CPN-M in **Nepal** is another useful example. Initially proscribed by the US as a terrorist organization, it was unable to access major sources of support to develop its political programme even after acceding to State power and taking part in the Constituent Assembly (Gross 2011).

3.3.2 Financial and technical assistance

In most transitions from war to peaceful politics, international agencies and non-state organizations have offered financial and technical support to assist emerging post-war stakeholders to participate effectively in the conventional political arena. This support has entailed a diverse set of activities that can broadly be subsumed under three areas: political and institutional capacity-building; creating dialogue and consultation mechanisms that enhance participatory decision-making and conflict prevention efforts; and, support to security transitions (and particularly DDR programming).

> *Capacity-building support for peaceful politics should be introduced as early as possible in the process i.e. during or even before peace talks*

Political and institutional capacity-building

Actor-focused capacity-building entails targeted programmes to assist with the transformation of armed groups into organizations that have a future role to play within a peaceful environment. Given the various dimensions of effective political transitions highlighted in section 2, skills-enhancement schemes are particularly helpful in the areas of election campaigning, parliamentary tasks, party financing, and organizational development (e.g. developing party platforms and designing comprehensive party programmes). A number of European and North American political foundations are conducting this type of technical support in emerging democracies and post-war countries.

Whilst these organizations do not specifically target (former) armed/banned groups, there have been some instances of specific support activities for new parties emerging from militant underground organizations. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the peer-advice support programme, "From a liberation movement to a modern democratic party" led by the Swedish Olof Palme International Center since 2008, with participants from the South African ANC, Palestinian Al Fatah, and Iraqi Kurdish Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), along with the Swedish Social Democrat Party. This yearly program assists "social democratic sister parties who are undergoing a transitional phase" in transforming "from being a secret and hierarchical organization to an open democratic party, providing scope for member influence and political accountability," through knowledge exchange amongst movements that have undergone a similar process. The organization cites the internal democratisation efforts by Al Fatah (e.g. its general congress held in 2009 in order to rejuvenate its cadres and leadership – the first in 20 years) as one example that such "party support work produces results" (Olof Palme Center 2010).

UNDP has also developed context-specific collaborative leadership programmes designed to strengthen trust and communication, and to develop negotiation, communication and conflict transformation skills among key leaders.

Given the importance of pre-existing political experience as a factor that assists successful transitions to democratic participation (as highlighted in section 3.1), capacity-building support for peaceful politics should be introduced as early as possible in the process i.e. during or even before peace talks. Negotiation skills and political leadership are indeed crucial for such groups to be able to deliver effectively on their commitments to conflict settlement, and to avoid internal and inter-party tensions that might eventually result in a relapse of violence. Given the difficulties for State and UN agencies to intervene at such an early stage due to the risks of being perceived as partial by the respective government, non-state organizations might be better suited for conducting such activities.[8]

Former combatants consulted in our past research initiatives and at the Naivasha workshop lamented the fact that most international donors shy away from supporting such programmes, as they are seen as too political and partisan; they also criticise the inability of local actors to negotiate the content of

8 Since 2009, for example, the Berghof Foundation has been running a series of bilateral and peer-to-peer exchange trainings to enhance the negotiation and political skills of leading members of resistance and liberation movements interested in undergoing peaceful transitions.

their training with international sponsors (Marhaban 2012). Furthermore, the legal environment for such activities is becoming increasingly restrictive, as several national anti-terrorist laws prohibit third-party contact with proscribed actors which could be interpreted as providing 'material support' – with such support being defined quite extensively.[9] Given these limitations to international support roles, self-managed capacity-building schemes might be better suited to the specific needs of these actors.

- For example, the "human resource development institution" created by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the **Philippines** during its negotiations with the Government is a good example of a "self-managed" capacity-building scheme. The Institute for Bangsamoro Leadership and Management Institute (BLMI), which received funding from both the Government and international donors (including Australia, Japan, and the Asia Foundation) – while being entirely managed by the MILF – provided training in public administration, leadership empowerment and international diplomacy to MILF sympathisers, so as to prepare them for tasks in a future administration.

In order to enhance internal democratisation within emerging political entities, an important component of technical assistance consists of specific outreach and support schemes directed towards broader segments of membership, beyond the leaders of (former) armed/banned group. There is enough evidence that transitions from "bullets to ballots" might lead to a disconnect between former leaders and their constituent bases because national agendas addressed by former commanders do not necessarily take into account the local concerns of rank-and-file militants. Hence it is important to bring potential "spoilers", such as hardline militants and marginalised segments of the group on board the transition journey.

- It could be argued, for example, that the internal split within the CPN-M in **Nepal**, which occurred several years after the party signed a peace accord and entered the conventional political arena, may have been prevented if international donors and NGOs had directed their diplomatic engagement and technical support beyond the party chairman and his colleagues in the 'moderate' faction that led the party's participation in successive power-sharing or majoritarian governments.

Former female combatants are also at risk of becoming marginalised during political transformation processes. While armed groups are often composed of a large percentage of women – with some occupying positions at mid-level commander positions at least – post-agreement leadership roles are (almost) exclusively given to male counterparts. In order to remediate to this imbalance, a substantive part of the political capacity-building support currently offered by foreign political foundations or NGOs towards former armed groups-turned political parties (such as FRELIMO in Mozambique or the ANC in South Africa) is specifically targeted towards female (and youth) party members. Discussions at the Naivasha workshop confirmed that female war veterans need specific forms of technical and financial support to enhance their political skills and their socio-economic resources to be able to run for office.

This latter issue points to the specific role that focused and modest financial contributions can play in assisting (former) armed/banned groups and their members to be able to compete fairly and effectively in the electoral arena with long-established ruling elites, for example by supporting the establishment of local party offices to start up political campaigning activities. However, whereas such direct forms of support were quite widespread during the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. the FMLN in **El Salvador**

9 In the United States for instance, the Foreign Terrorist Organization list makes it illegal for anyone residing in the US or subjected to US jurisdiction to offer listed organizations any service that can be construed as having tangible or intangible monetary value, including training, expert advice or assistance aimed at turning armed groups away from violence and advising them to join a negotiation process. The US Supreme Court ruling in the 'Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project' case in June 2010 confirmed that all forms of services (such as consulting or advising) to listed entities are punishable no matter whether support was directed towards the criminal or other activities of the designated group (Dudouet 2011).

received large subsidies by north European social-democrat parties and trade unions), the anti-terrorist measures put in place during the last decade have had a 'chilling effect' on monetary forms of assistance towards non-state armed actors.

Finally, technical and financial support for political transformation not only entails 'partisan' or one-sided assistance to specific groups and their members, but also encompasses broader multi-party assistance to enhance the rule of law and respect for democratic norms of good governance; it can also involve transforming "clientelistic" electoral practices established in contexts of protracted wars and state fragility.

"Technical and financial support for political transformation not only entails 'partisan' or one-sided assistance, but also encompasses broader multi-party assistance to enhance the rule of law and respect for democratic norms

- In **Burundi**, for example, programs that combine the depolarization of inter-party relations with the strengthening of political party capacities have been put in place through the Burundi Leadership Training Program (funded by the World Bank, DFID, EU and USAID).
- In **Nicaragua**, with the support of a coalition of bilateral and multilateral organizations, coordinated by UNDP and the Netherland Institute for Multi-party Democracy (NIMD), a similar programme has been put in place.

It can be argued, in fact, that the stability and effectiveness of a post-war democratic consolidation are not only determined by legal frameworks or general democratic practices, but also by the existence of mechanisms that enable all parties to engage in inter-party dialogue and cooperation (Hoove and Scholtbach 2008) – which brings us to the next area of external technical assistance.

Conflict prevention through inclusive dialogue and consultation mechanisms

External actors have also made use of their technical knowledge concerning participatory process tools and of their capacities as third-party conveners to encourage inter-party dialogue and consultation processes at various levels and phases of conflict that can be considered part of the wider infrastructures for peace (see Giessmann 2016).

Before (or in the absence of) negotiations, external actors can help foster a climate favourable for a peace process to begin by providing "good offices" or shuttle diplomacy between members (or proxies) of armed groups and the government; they can also support public education and trust-building measures to help forge a national consensus on the need for a political solution. Additionally, they can foster civil society's capacity to engage with armed groups at the local level.

- In **Sierra Leone**, UNDP supported civil society networks with access to local RUF groups in creating a platform to engage with and effectively transmit norms of protection, good conduct and responsibility to RUF militants (UNDP e-consultation).

During negotiations, external support can be directed both towards supporting internal consultation within the conflict parties (e.g. helping armed actors to improve their communication strategies with hardliner militants sceptical of peaceful transitions), and towards inter-party dialogue. Beyond third-party mediation and facilitation between the main stakeholders, consultation initiatives can help to gather and channel civil society inputs for the negotiation table, including on topics related to democratisation and political participation mechanisms, thus providing more legitimacy to the negotiated outcome.

- In **Colombia**, during the negotiation process between the Government and the FARC, UNDP co-organized national and regional civil society discussion forums in parallel to the talks in Cuba, including on the topic of political participation. One asset of UNDP in this case is its strong outreach to the various regions, and its technical and financial capacity to organize or support such events as an external actor, combined with its experience with community dialogues in various settings.

Attempt to break down the chains of command and release combatants from their organizations as a precondition for reintegration assistance need to be revised

- Likewise in **El Salvador**, UNDP facilitated consultations with a broad range of national sectors, including NGOs, universities, trade unions, private sector associations, the armed forces and churches in the framework of a project entitled "Support for the Formation and Implementation of National Reconstruction Plan" (UNDP e-consultation). It also participated in consensus roundtable meetings between the FMLN, Government representatives and ONUSAL to discuss the integration of ex-combatants into civilian life.
- In the **Philippines**, UNDP has supported the MILF leadership to develop an "action plan" for its political transition, including a systematic programme of multi-stakeholder dialogue with other critical actors in the affected parts of Mindanao.

Finally, in the wake of peace agreements, external actors can help ensure inclusive participation in their implementation by funding and offering technical support to multi-party dialogue forums such as national dialogues (as recently/currently undertaken in Yemen and Myanmar). Other means of enhancing trust-building amidst polarised post-agreement contexts consists of supporting informal dialogue platforms within official decision-making bodies, such as parliaments or constituent assemblies.

- In **Nepal**, many foreign and international agencies (including International IDEA, the Danish development agency, Switzerland and UNDP) have organized or supported thematic meetings and workshops between delegates from different parties to the 2008-12 Constituent Assembly (CA), in order to try and resolve the deadlock on key contentious issues. However, some observers argue that such forums have served to reinforce the secretive nature of bargaining by establishing various dialogue mechanisms outside the CA structures, thereby distracting legislators from reaching consensus within the formal setting of the CA committees and plenary sessions (Bendfeldt et al 2013).

Revising DDR assistance: Enhancing political participation from below

Research findings and practical experience have shown that DDR approaches that attempt to break down the chains of command and release combatants from their organizations as a precondition for reintegration assistance need to be revised. In the UNDP e-consultation, it is noted that such guidelines may in fact be both unrealistic and undesirable.

- In **Afghanistan** for example, strong ethnic ties have prevented militants from effectively dissociating themselves from their former leaders. It is also argued that the disbandment approach adopted by UNDP in Afghanistan contradicted the objective of politically engaging with some of the armed groups.
- Similarly, in **Nepal**, the approach to "discharge and rehabilitate" "disqualified" Maoist combatants adopted by the UN Interagency Rehabilitation Programme clashed with local realities. The fact that the vast majority of combatants (including minors) joined the rebellion out of political conviction, and are still close to Maoist Party structures several years after demobilisation, suggests that rather than managing and integrating individual ex-fighters, international assistance should rather focus on consolidating both Maoist parties as political, not military actors.

Such findings point to the need to revise the current DDR approach, which advocates for the dissolution of underground militant structures under all circumstances; a preferred approach, rather, recognises and harnesses the positive social and politically cohesive elements that exist within these groups.

- In **Tajikistan**, for example, following the 1997 peace agreement, the transformation of armed groups into legitimate political constituents was favoured over disarmament, demobilization, and disbandment approaches. More than 30% of opposition leaders were given top Government posts, while entire units of anti-Government forces were collectively integrated into the State military and police structures, where they remained under the command and control of their previous

commanders. Armed group transformation into the civilian and security sectors did not call for disruptions of former associations between commanders/leaders and 'rank and file'; instead, the preservation of this relationship strengthened peace dividends that have lasted until today. In this regard, the UN supported a multi-dimensional transformation approach to the armed group through various (re)integration modalities and 'accompaniment' interventions.

Other examples point to the importance of creating or maintaining interim support structures for combatants alongside longer-term self-help schemes and associations. In the short-term, given the crucial importance of internal cohesion for successful political transitions, it is essential to support sustained leadership control over (former) members in order to facilitate the formulation of a collective political identity on the one hand, and to maintain discipline and help prevent internal splits during the difficult reconversion from underground militant structures into democratic political entities on the other. Furthermore, over longer timeframes, self-help schemes managed by former combatants – in the form of veteran associations, communal projects or NGOs – can be effective at facilitating socio-economic reinsertion while also providing members with an outlet to peacefully voice their political demands and engage in societal debates.

- In **Aceh** a civilian Transition Committee was founded in the wake of the 2005 peace accord by former GAM leaders in order to oversee and facilitate combatants' transition to civilian life. It also served as an interim structure to maintain organizational cohesion during the organizational vacuum that came about after the dissolution of GAM's military structure, and before the establishment of a new political party.
- In **El Salvador** organizations founded by former mid-rank FMLN activists have been the protagonists of some of the most important contemporary mobilizations in the country, including against the free trade agreement with the USA and polluting mining enterprises, and in favour of a deeper democratization of society.
- Similarly, veteran organizations in Northern Ireland and women's organizations founded by former female combatants in Aceh (LINA) and El Salvador (Las Dignas) were set up thanks to international funding (e.g. EU in Northern Ireland, a German foundation in Aceh). They offered, among other activities, political training for their members, and fostered parallel socio-political spaces for former combatants' to become involved in political decision-making.

These examples also indicate that political transformation does not always lead to party formation. In cases where armed groups do not possess a solid social base or a sound political program, forums such as think-tanks or civil society organizations may be better equipped to channel the political grievances of former combatants.

- RUF ex-combatants in **Sierra Leone**, for example, found that they were able to pursue their concerns through established parties and civil society institutions without necessary being branded "RUF".

3.3.3 Guarantees and monitoring

Implementation guarantees in the military, political and territorial sectors are key elements of sustainable war-to-peace transitions. These guarantees play an important role in enhancing the political will and ability of armed groups to transform into post-war peaceful actors, by reassuring them that their wartime grievances will be effectively addressed. External actors, through UN or regional peacekeeping missions and oversight mechanisms, have played crucial roles in this domain, especially by providing security oversight for demobilising combatants, and monitoring the implementation of democratisation measures that enable a broadening of political participation.

- In **El Salvador**, the UN gradually moved from an observer role to that of an active mediator, and later a guarantor of compliance with the peace process. UN pressure on the Government to live up to its commitments, and mediation efforts in times of renewed crises, were instrumental in enabling FMLN political participation (Söderberg Kovacs 2007). Furthermore, security guarantees were provided by the "Friends of the UN Secretary-General for El Salvador" during the peace implementation stage, protecting political candidates from targeted assassinations.
- For its part, the UN Mission in **Nepal** (UNMIN) played a fundamental role in monitoring the arms and armies of both the Nepalese Government and the Maoists, enhancing security in Maoist cantonments, and fostering a climate of confidence amongst combatants while their political leaders were negotiating the nature of State reform in the Constituent Assembly.

While international monitoring is no guarantee of success, our previous research suggests that such support was positively received by former combatants, who even criticised instances of premature pull-out or overly restricted mandates by international missions. For example, Nepali Maoists were strongly in favour of maintaining the UN mission until the process of army integration and State restructuring was completed because they perceived international presence as a guarantee against the intervention of "'expansionist" foreign forces such as India and the US.

- Another notable example comes from **Aceh**, where the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) established a civilian Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) in September 2005. AMM had a broad mandate to monitor the implementation of security transitions, including: DDR; the withdrawal of State forces; human rights mechanisms; and, political reforms, such as legislative change. However, the AMM ended its mandate in December 2006 after announcing that it had successfully assisted the decommissioning and demobilisation processes, but without clear assurance that the other agreement provisions would be implemented.

This section of the paper has demonstrated that international actors are key players in supporting (or impeding) the successful transformation of armed groups to peaceful political participation. The assistance of international actors can either directly target the actors in question, or help enable broader societal transformation processes. Based on the entry-points for third-party intervention identified here (and summarised in annex I), the concluding section will reflect on a number of general implications for UNDP engagement in this area and provide six key recommendations.

4. Implications for UNDP

As the peace framework moves into its implementation phase, UNDP can benefit from continued cross-sectorial engagements in the areas of livelihoods, SSR and accompaniment

This final section provides a number of general reflections and lessons learnt on UNDP's future engagement in supporting processes of political transformation. After briefly outlining the assets that development actors have at their disposal to provide constructive assistance to these processes, a number of challenges that UNDP needs to address will then be outlined. Finally, five key recommendations will be outlined to orientate further efforts in this area.

4.1 UNDP's assets and "added-value"

What assets do international development actors such as UNDP have to support political transformation processes, and why is their engagement in this area needed? Besides a vast thematic expertise in areas relevant to supporting transformative agendas such as institution-building, good governance, rule of law, etc., such actors offer and bring to bear a range of methodological skills and instruments, such as capacity-building, dialogue, facilitation, participatory planning methods, conflict analysis, evaluation and monitoring tools, to support such transitions. In conflict settings, UNDP often has an unrivalled historical track record and is well-placed to remain a stable partner for future engagements.

The long-term experience of development assistance brings with it well-established, trusted relationships with all relevant stakeholders, often at local, regional and national levels. The presence of development actors on the ground also helps them to develop a deep understanding of local realities, traditions and cultures.

- UNDP's role in the recent peace process between MILF and the Government of the **Philippines** is a case in point. UNDP's conflict prevention and peacebuilding engagements and livelihood and economic recovery teams were able to provide political accompaniment and support "insider mediation" efforts. These engagements were combined with political and technical analysis on reintegration issues in the security and livelihoods sectors. As the peace framework moves into its implementation phase, UNDP can benefit from continued cross-sectorial engagements in the areas of livelihoods, SSR and accompaniment (UNDP e-consultation).

Finally, development actors operating globally are well-placed to combine and learn from both context-specific knowledge and experience as well as comparative lessons learned. Together, these features serve as valuable, unique assets of international development actors, such as UNDP, that should be further nurtured; they provide a solid argument in favour of the notion that development actors that are responsible for long-term (post-agreement) assistance should be actively involved in support structures for peace negotiations and post-war decision-making arenas. However, there are also a number of caveats for UNDP's engagement in supporting political transformation.

4.2 Challenges of engagement

Technical vs. political engagement?

Currently, development assistance, and particularly development assistance in conflict situations, is increasingly recognised as being "political" – and not purely technical – in nature. As a result, UNDP and other development actors are moving from work "in" conflict context to working "on" conflict. This increasing awareness of the political nature of "technical" assistance has fostered an understanding of

The negotiation of complex structural reforms is often postponed to the post-agreement phase, and, as a result, risks not happening at all

the necessity for readjustments and re-structuring of work divisions and areas to ensure this recognition is reflected in programming.

- In **El Salvador**, for example, UNDP mobilized international resources and technical assistance for the implementation of the peace accords, and served as a platform to support longer-term development programmes and projects linked to the peace accords. It therefore complemented the work of the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) which, as a peacekeeping mission, did not have the capacity to provide such long-term technical support. However, while ONUSAL had an explicit political mandate, UNDP's mandate was far more ambiguous, creating tensions between both institutions and requiring a re-engineering of the UNDP El Salvador Country Office.

The above example demonstrates another challenge UNDP faces: the contested territories between political divisions (the UN Department of Political Affairs, Department for Peacekeeping Operations) and (primarily technical) development assistance (provided by UNDP), or between Missions and Country Offices. This creates a situation in which UNDP has little means to influence the scope and timing of previously made decisions that it is later responsible for implementing. To strengthen ties between UNDP and DPA a new Partnership Note was approved in 2015, setting-out five strategic areas for cooperation in the context of complex political situations and conflict prevention in Mission and non-Mission settings, namely: the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention; integrated mission planning; the Human Rights-Up Front action plan; inclusive political processes; and mediation and support to national capacities for mediation.

Implementing what others have negotiated?

As outlined in the literature, "development practitioners are left with the daunting task of delivering the peace dividend that has many times been brokered on the basis of unrealistic expectations by both the parties in conflict and the mediators" (Vimalarajah 2012: 7). This quote summarises a challenge that was repeatedly highlighted during the Naivasha workshop.

Since UNDP has no access to the formal negotiation table, it has no direct influence to push for broader transformative agenda items to be dealt with, agreed upon and budgeted for during peace negotiations. As actors at the table, including international and insider mediators, are often concerned with finding a "quick fix" political settlement to re-establish a minimum of stability and put a (possibly short-lived) end to direct violence, the negotiation (and the funding) of complex structural reforms and long-term planning is often postponed to the post-agreement phase, and, as a result, risks not happening at all.

However, a number of ways to address this situation were suggested during the workshop. The need for UNDP to lobby more consistently for a seat at the negotiation table or, if that is not possible, to enhance its intra-agency collaboration with those actors directly involved (e.g. DPA) through more systematic information exchanges, joint analyses and/or the establishment of common focal points was underscored by several participants at the workshop. However, Peace and Development Advisors deployed through the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention make a significant contribution to reducing the fragmentation between political and development imperatives. Additional ways of influencing the course and contents of political negotiations include: strengthening civil society actors' capacity (i.e. at the Track II level) to lobby for a broader transformative agenda; sensitising international mediators to the need for comprehensive negotiation 'packages'; and/or supporting more inclusive frameworks (such as national dialogues) where a more transformative agenda can be negotiated in a more participatory fashion.

UNDP's Mandate and the issues of neutrality

Another challenge relates to UNDP's mandate and character as a multilateral development agency that faces constant tensions between what the UN as an Organization seeks to achieve, and the interests of individual donors or host states. Given that UNDP's primary partners are governments, it is bound to operate within the parameters negotiated with them. Discussions at the Naivasha workshop highlighted the risk for UNDP of losing its in-country leverage as a consequence of governmental disagreement with its targeted support towards specific political actors. This risk is made particularly acute in situations in which opposition groups are proscribed by national terrorist lists. While legally non-binding for UNDP (which is only bound by UN lists and Security Council Resolutions), a proper risk assessment is required before engaging with nationally listed groups. On the other hand, UNDP might also face the challenge of being perceived as biased and/or too close to the government by non-state actors.

- In **Colombia** for example, recommendations related to the various agenda items of the peace negotiations between the Government and the FARC generated through public forums co-organized by the National University and UNDP were carefully checked for "manipulations" by the FARC negotiation delegation. UNDP may, therefore come to the conclusion that in some contexts it is best equipped to support the political transformation of armed and banned groups through even-handed multi-party support for a broader structural reform agenda, while leaving actor-focused interventions to NGOs and other support agencies which are not bound by its restrictive mandate.

4.3 Key recommendations

Taking into account these reflections, this paper therefore recommends UNDP to develop more articulate normative frameworks and knowledge products on options for the political transformation of armed and banned groups, including through policy guidance on best practices for UNDP Country Offices. This should go hand-in-hand with efforts within Country Offices for capacity-building and improved South-South peer learning and exchange practices in order to better understand and make use of innovative approaches. The following six key recommendations for developing such guidance and further strategizing are offered:

- **Enhance both intra- and inter-institutional collaboration and partnerships.**
  More effective intra- and inter-institutional collaboration and coordination in support of peace(building) processes and the political transformation of conflict actors is a priority. This includes improving working relations within the UN system as outlined in the recent peace operations and peacebuilding reviews, particularly with DPA and DKPO, as well as building stronger partnerships with actors outside the UN system such as regional organizations, think-tanks and NGOs, and working more closely with local allies or brokers such as community leaders, the business sector or religious entities.

- **Adopt actor-specific analytical tools and mitigate risks.**
  Pre-intervention and continuous efforts at analysing the nature and dynamics of conflict actors should be geared towards both moving away from simplistic "labelling" of heterogeneous groups and contexts, and helping to design differentiated approaches to intervention. Better risk assessment tools are also required – including for organizational (reputation, access, staff security) and operational risks ("do no harm") – which help UNDP to design participatory risk prevention and mitigation strategies.

Any intervention should acknowledge that international support should only accompany, not patronize, local agents' own transition processes

- **Use complementary, mutually-reinforcing approaches.**
  To ensure that political transformation successfully contributes to sustainable peace, tailor-made support targeting single actors on the grounds of their specific capacity-building needs should be complementary to broader efforts undertaken to strengthen the peace process and/or the societal transformative agenda (good governance, the social contract, development goals, security transitions, transitional justice, etc.). Both approaches should ideally take place in parallel, since they are – or should be – mutually supportive. While the transformation of armed groups cannot occur if the environment is too contentious, broader societal transformation also cannot occur if armed groups transform into "spoilers" because of their failed transition to peaceful politics.

- **Review current DDR approach towards political reintegration.**
  Examples from several countries have demonstrated the potentially constructive role that former combatants' networks and associations can play in terms of socio-economic and political reintegration. Current DDR guidelines recommending early disbandment should therefore be reviewed, as well as approaches that lead to a segregation of male and female ex-combatants under the guise of gender-specific approaches. Furthermore, the political (vs. socio-economic) dimensions of reintegration assistance should be given more prominence in DDR programming; such considerations should go beyond the leadership level, seeking to open up avenues for participation for (former) rank-and-file members, including women and youth segments. Finally, DDR approaches must be embedded in processes geared towards reforming the entire security sector in light of the necessity of basing the monopoly on the use of force firmly in a rule of law framework.

- **Right-timing assistance: Starting earlier, staying longer.**
  Political transformation is a long-term, even multi-generational process. UNDP needs to adapt project timeframes to long-term engagement needs in order to make an effective and sustainable contribution. Given the importance of pre-existing political experience for armed groups to effectively transform into peaceful political actors, UNDP should intervene as early as possible to support capacity-building for dialogue and democratic politics (including during active conflict stages, if the legal environment allows it).

- **Enhancing ownership.**
  Any intervention should acknowledge that international support should only accompany, not patronize, local agents' own transition processes. UNDP should, therefore, strive to include ex-combatants and other societal actors in program planning and implementation, support self-managed transition support schemes, and adopt meaningful and acceptable terminology, timing and approaches to political transformation. Engagement efforts which recognize conflict actors as the primary drivers of their own transition help ensure higher degrees of political will for change, which is the best recipe for a resilient and sustainable, and – consequently – effective, political transformation.

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6. Annexes

Annex I: Possible entry-points for UNDP intervention according to areas of support and timing

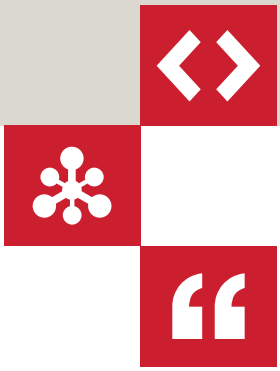
	Actor-focused approach		Supporting a broader transformative agenda	
Political/ institutional capacity-building	*Before and during a peace process:*	Tailor-made negotiation skills training/negotiation support, including capacity-building and awareness-raising with regards to the transformative agenda; tailor-made political party development support (familiarising legal framework, internal democratisation, developing youth or women entities, peer-to-peer exchange). Capacity-building for ministerial, parliamentarian, administrative, governance skills (for potential future ministers, MPs, civil servants) and collaborative leadership training targeting both movement members and sympathisers. Capacity-building for public dialogue and liaison with (potential) constituencies.	*During a peace process:*	Ensure that peace negotiations include and allocate resources to transformative agendas (e.g. institutional reform, democratic opening, access to livelihood, development agenda, etc.), through: - Direct participation in negotiations or coordination with UN agencies directly involved in talks; - Capacity-building/awareness-raising of negotiation parties (including the mediator) with regards to the transformative agenda; - Enhancing capacities of CSOs to lobby for a transformative agenda. Serve as witness to agreements.
	After a peace agreement:	Financial support to establish local offices and start-up political activities. Capacity-building for ministerial, parliamentarian, administrative, governance skills (for potential future ministers, MPs, civil servants) and collaborative leadership training targeting both movement members and sympathisers.	*After a peace agreement:*	Electoral support (set-up of electoral bodies, conduct training for civil society organizations in monitoring democratic elections, advice on right-timing of elections). Multi-party political capacity-building (ministerial, administrative, governance and parliamentarian skills) and leadership training. Accompany implementation period through: - Awareness-raising and technical support for drafting policies and legislation (in areas such as institutional reform, democratic opening, access to livelihoods, development agendas etc.); - Monitoring of agreement implementation; - Strengthening or creating democratic institutions, such as Human Rights Ombudsman, civilian police forces, supreme electoral tribunals, etc.

	Actor-focused approach		Supporting a broader transformative agenda	
Conflict prevention through inclusive participation: **Strengthening dialogue and consultation processes**	*Before and during a peace process:*	Confidence-building and education about the peace process and the terms/content of agreement provisions.	*Before and during a peace process:*	Strengthen national consensus for a peace process, enhance public/ government trust in the process. Open space for participation beyond (armed) conflict stakeholders, i.e. by civil society, political parties, women and youth organizations; help set up public dialogue forums on negotiation agenda items.
	After a peace agreement:	Capacity-building in advocacy and lobbying for organizations voicing the collective grievances of ex-combatants (through veteran associations or through other civil society entities). Facilitation of political participation through pre-existing societal fora (social movements, civil society entities, etc.)	*After a peace agreement:*	Strengthen civil society capacities for dialogue on public policy, support national dialogues or other inclusive fora for discussion and participatory decision-making. Enhance and strengthen dialogue and transitional justice initiatives between different conflict actors on various levels (local, regional, national). Help set up infrastructures for peace at various levels such as (local) peace committees and national secretariats/ ministries, but also international support mechanisms ("Groups of Friends").
Security transition support	*After a peace agreement:*	Support context-sensitive approaches for the transformation or dissolution of combatant structures, and for collective or individual reintegration support (on the basis of revised criteria and policies)	*After a peace agreement:*	Monitor and verify the implementation of SSR provisions. Accompany and provide technical support to violence reduction programs such as small arms control or community safety programs.
Basis for engagement: ongoing joint conflict analysis for evidence-based programming, including a deep understanding of actors and root causes of the conflict.				

Annex II: Examples of trajectories of armed groups towards peaceful political participation

Country/region	Armed or banned group	Start of armed conflict	Peace accord	Political party	Status after the first post-war elections	Current status
Colombia	M-19	1973	1990	ADM-19 (built in alliance with other left-wing group)	Second largest party in Constituent Assembly	Marginal (dissolved party, individuals in local politics with other parties)
Namibia	SWAPO	1966	None (UN resolution in 1988, independence in 1990)	SWAPO	Headed Government	Heads Government
South Africa	ANC	1961	1991	ANC	Headed Government	Heads Government
El Salvador	FMLN	1981	1992	FMLN	Opposition party in Parliament	Heads Government
Mozambique	RENAMO	1976	1992	RENAMO	Main opposition party	Main opposition party
Guatemala	URNG	1960	1996	URNG	Opposition party (in coalition with other party)	Small opposition party
Tajikistan	UTO	1992	1997	Opposition coalition (including IRP, MIRT, DPT parties)	Minor opposition parties; individuals given high-level ministry positions	Non-existent party; some individuals still in leading political positions
Northern Ireland	Sinn Fein	1969	1998	Sinn Fein	Participation in (local) power-sharing Government	In (local) government
Sierra Leone	RUF	1991	1999	RUFP	No parliamentary seats	Non-existent
Kosovo	KLA	1994	1999	Split into PDK and AAK	Both parties participated in an all-party unity coalition Government	Heads Government (PDK)
Angola	UNITA	1975	2002	UNITA	Opposition party	Main opposition party

Country/region	Armed or banned group	Start of armed conflict	Peace accord	Political party	Status after the first post-war elections	Current status
Burundi	CNDD-FDD	1994	2003	CNDD-FDD	Headed Government	Heads Government
Aceh	GAM	1976	2005	Partai Aceh (Aceh Party)	Headed Province and local assembly/ municipalities	Heads Province and local institutions
South Sudan	SPLM/A	1983	2005	SPLM (currently split into two parties)	Governed semi-autonomous Southern Sudan	Ruling Party of independent South Sudan
Nepal	CPN-M	1996	2006	CPN-M (currently split into two parties)	Largest party in Constituent Assembly; in power-sharing Government	Third largest party in Constituent Assembly II
Burundi	Palipehutu-FNL	1994	2006	FNL (currently split into two factions)	Second force in local elections; boycotted national elections	Opposition party (not in Parliament)



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