Assessing Context-Specific Peacebuilding Approaches in Contemporary Armed Conflicts: From High-Level Mediation to Middle-Out Linkage in Syria and from Adaptive Mediation to Nationally-Owned Peacebuilding in Mozambique

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As contemporary armed conflicts become increasingly complex, peacebuilding actors have been unable to prevent or respond effectively to related crises. Considering the policy trends evoked by the United Nations sustaining peace agenda and context-specific peacebuilding theories, this article examines peacebuilding initiatives amid complex contexts in Syria and Mozambique. It argues that the adaptive approaches of the National Agenda for the Future of Syria and the architecture of the negotiations surrounding the new peace process in Mozambique represent examples of context-specific, innovative, and non-linear peacebuilding methods that foster the self-organization capabilities of the respective conflict-affected societies. It concludes by asserting that through pragmatism, local and national ownership, and process facilitation, there is an increased potential for the effectiveness of peacebuilding interventions in complex conflict-affect situations.

Keywords complexity, context, peacebuilding, Syria, Mozambique

Introduction

As violent, protracted, and recurring armed conflicts are increasing in number and complexity, shedding light on contemporary forms of international peacebuilding while examining its respective challenges and limitations is a pressing issue. In this context, the United Nations (UN) launched the sustaining peace agenda, presenting a new policy narrative and approach focused on a long-term comprehensive vision to development, humanitarian, and inclusive peacebuilding activities. Sustaining peace, as a concept, is defined in twin

resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2016 (UNGA 2016; UNSC 2016). In UNSC resolution 2282, sustaining peace is presented both as "a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account" (UNSC 2016, 1). Sustaining peace emerged as an umbrella concept that encompasses all activities aimed at "preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict" (ibid., 2) and incorporates peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and political mediation, as well as humanitarian and development assistance, in a whole-of-system approach. However, sustaining peace remains a new narrative that echoes mainly within the UN headquarters in New York. At the same time, its operationalization on the ground is still mostly untried, and the full variety of approaches to peacebuilding assistance in complex conflict situations remains unrevealed.

In addition to the sustaining peace agenda, both at the policy-level and in academia, various understandings of peacebuilding are emerging beyond the views of traditional Western approaches. This results from the perceived ineffectiveness of liberal peacebuilding projects in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa. Even "successful" cases of peacebuilding in the Balkans and Western and Southern Africa have been affected by resurging violence, endemic corruption, or continued instability. As liberal peacebuilding approaches are top-down by nature, they are less inclusive of local priorities, local perspectives, and local actors in the peacebuilding process (Roberts 2016).

Along with the efforts to reform the practice of peacebuilding by multilateral agencies, such as the UN and the African Union (AU), non-Western donors have also been contributing to pragmatic and effective responses to armed conflict, in harmony with the expectations of the leaders in the Global South. Emerging peace and development narratives and assistance from China, Russia, Brazil, India, and South Africa, as well as other non-traditional peacebuilding actors, are contributing to the reformulation of the practice and understanding of peacebuilding in an increasingly complex system of global governance (Call and de Coning 2017).

Since the 1992 UN Agenda of Peace, "peacebuilding" has been presented as a kaleidoscopic concept reflecting various understandings and perspectives in media and civil society organizations, public policy, and academic discourses. A substantial body of critical peacebuilding scholarship has demonstrated that liberal peace principles and practices do not necessarily resonate among non-Western donors as well as non-Western conflict-affected societies. Moreover, liberal peacebuilding and its deterministic approach have been increasingly ineffective in complex, protracted, and recurring conflict-affected situations.

Although exploratory in nature, this article attempts to shed light on the added validity of context-specific peacebuilding approaches in contemporary armed conflicts by contrasting a protracted civil war with a high degree of

external intervention with a recurring small-scale intra-state conflict coexisting with an emerging Islamic insurgency. These are examples of armed conflicts that demand innovative responses from peacebuilding organizations today. In Syria, the situation evolved from the Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011 into a complex multi-layered armed conflict. In Mozambique, after more than twenty years of sustained peace, in 2012, a small-scale recurrence of armed conflict reemerged, while since 2017, an Islamic insurgency has been active in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Although different in nature and geographical location, or even in terms of media attention, both cases represent complex conflict-affected situations that have the conditions to benefit from context-specific, pragmatic, and locally grounded peacebuilding initiatives. The rationale for comparing these two cases derives first from the data collected by the authors in each context and, second, from the ability to observe theoretical replications in both cases. The fieldwork and theory confirm that by moving away from determined-designed programs and refocusing on context-specific interventions, i.e., enhanced flexibility in the process and continuous evaluation and change at all peacebuilding stages, peacebuilders will find alternative ways to influence complex social systems affected by conflict.

From Determined-Designed to Context-Specific Peacebuilding Approaches

The term "peacebuilding" emerged in the academic literature with Johan Galtung (1976), and it was initially linked to the root causes of violent conflict, the support for local peacekeeping capacities, and conflict resolution. Later, Galtung (2007, 29) characterized peacebuilding as a depolarization process that moves people into new action, new narratives, and new perceptions concerning the perceived "enemy." According to this definition, peacebuilding responds against mental and behavioral polarization in conflict-affected societies. It goes beyond the concept of negative peace—the mere absence of violence—and focuses on positive peace—the attitudes, institutions, and structures that create peaceful societies (Galtung and Fischer 2013).

The concept of peacebuilding not only became central in peace-related studies but also gained prominence in the policy realm after its inclusion in the 1992 UN Agenda for Peace, which introduced a sectorial approach to conflict resolution based on four types of interventions: "preventive diplomacy," "peacemaking," "peacekeeping," and "post-conflict peacebuilding" (UNSG 1992, 5-6). Despite the changes introduced by the 2000 Brahimi Report, the establishment of the 2005 peacebuilding architecture, and the development of the 2008 Capstone Doctrine, it was only with the 2016 resolutions on sustaining peace, adopted by the UNSC (2016) and UNGA (2016), that the UN attempted to move away

from linear and sectorial responses to armed conflicts. "Sustaining peace" emerged as an umbrella concept and a policy framework that encompasses all activities aimed at "preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation, and recurrence of conflict" (UNSC 2016, 2), i.e., it incorporates, in a "whole-of-system" approach, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, mediation, peacebuilding, and development assistance. The sustaining peace agenda confirms that peacebuilding is going through a transformation period both at the policy and conceptual levels. At the time of writing, the dominant view among policy actors is that peacebuilding remains a post-conflict tool, often focused on disarmament and demobilization, state-building, and reconstruction in post-conflict societies. However, emerging policy and scholarly trends attempt to holistically link peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding tools together to address today's complex and interconnected crises.

Despite the proliferation of policy reforms and emerging discourses that dilute sectorial divisions between peace-related interventions, peacebuilding has been primarily dominated, both in practice and in theory, by determined-designed liberal approaches, i.e., peace is often designed outside conflict-affected situations and implemented by external actors limited by "common values." Alternatively, a variety of context-specific approaches, such as bottom-up, hybrid, and adaptive peacebuilding, form the liberal peacebuilding critique, emphasizing the importance of national and local ownership, pragmatism, and contextualized interventions facilitated by international donors.

The basic assumption behind liberal peacebuilding is that liberal democratic institutions and global market-oriented policies can effectively contribute to sustainable peace. Therefore, liberal peacebuilding has its fundamental goal in building a liberal democratic state after a conflict has ceased (Newman, Paris, and Richmond 2009). As Roland Paris (1997, 56) underlines, liberal peacebuilding is an experiment that involves transplanting Western models of social, political, and economic organization to non-Western regions in order to achieve peace. This approach has been the compass guiding Western governments in their responses to conflict-affected situations happening more often than not in non-Western regions. This results from the assumption that liberalism is universally attractive and it offers a linear path to peace and development. Ideas that are intimately linked with the debate related to Kantian perpetual peace, Wilsonian idealism, and Michael Doyle's democratic peace theory (Doyle 1983, 2005). The claim is that by promoting liberalism globally, a conflict between or within states will cease, as sustainable peace would mainly depend on economic development and political democracy. As Sorpong Peou (2014, 54) summarizes it, disarmament, democracy, and development (DDD) as a joint project would offer the best recipe for liberal peacebuilding.

Several avenues of research critical of liberal peacebuilding have underlined issues related to the inclusion of local actors and the local legitimacy of the

peacebuilding process. John Paul Lederach (1997) transfers the focus of peacebuilding from liberal approaches to cultural and societal factors as vectors of sustainable peace, while arguing for the importance of local contexts and local needs. Lederach's conceptual model is based on the view that in people resides the potential for peace, i.e., an approach based on conflict transformation theory (Lederach 2003). Lederach's peacebuilding framework places a great deal of attention on indigenous resources and represented a substantial shift from state-centric to multi-track approaches to peacebuilding, emerging from Lederach's pyramidal conceptual model (Lederach 1997, 39). The logic behind bottom-up peacebuilding is that peace should reflect the interests, identities, and the needs of all actors affected by conflict, particularly those that are not at the top of the pyramid—the middle and the grassroots (Lederach 1997; Paffenholz 2014). Leonardsson and Rudd (2015) underline the importance and benefits of decentralization and of including local capacity and ownership as essential parts of peacebuilding policies to increase peacebuilding effectiveness. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2005) further develop Lederach's pyramid, identifying top leaders, the UN, international and regional organizations, governments, and international financial institutions at the top of the pyramid as track-one actors; middle-level leaders, international NGOs, churches, academics, and private businesses as track-two actors; and indigenous resources and local actors as track-three actors, while pointing out the importance of addressing armed conflicts through vertical and horizontal relationships between tracks toward sustaining peace.

McCandless, Abitbol, and Donais (2015) emphasize that peacebuilding processes focused on the elite-level are too narrow to shift societies from war to peace, while grassroots-focused peacebuilding efforts disconnected from broader political dynamics are likely to be palliative, not transformative. Alternatively, "vertical integration" affirmed the need for peacebuilding to be negotiated both within and between many levels along the pyramid and beyond, linking the local, national, and international with the state and society. In this context, Ishikawa (2014, 92) described the case of Japanese International Cooperation Agency's assistance to conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, the Philippines. When the peace process reached a stalemate, it was necessary to connect a bottom-up approach with a top-down approach by mobilizing the middle-range actors as connectors.

The next debate underlined the concept of "hybrid peace" and hybrid political orders, describing the coexistence and interplay between international and local actors in the field of peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2010; Richmond and Mitchell 2011). Hybrid peace involves both determined-designed and contextual practices, while external and domestic norms and actors exist alongside each other and interact (Belloni 2012). Millar (2014) further suggests a disaggregated hybrid theory divided into four levels—institutional, practical, ritual, and conceptual—with each level open to different degrees of determinism and

different levels of local resistance, adding pragmatism to hybrid endeavors. The transition from liberal to hybrid peacebuilding reflected an increased policy consensus around the importance of local ownership and local agency, and bottom-up methods coexisting with top-down methods (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Mac Ginty 2011). Hybrid peace also represents a shift away from linear understandings of peacebuilding towards non-linear approaches, stressing that peace is subjective and dependent on local and societal agents (Chandler 2013). However, Dahlia Simangan (2017) also points out that hybrid forms of peacebuilding do not always produce peaceful outcomes, causing instead a negative hybrid peace, where local actors might be fragmented or local involvement might be exclusive or superficial.

In line with current challenges and contemporary armed conflict trends, Cedric de Coning (2018) develops the adaptive peacebuilding approach, informed by concepts deriving from complexity theory, resilience, and local ownership. Adaptive peacebuilding is a pragmatic and complexity-informed approach where peacebuilders and communities affected by conflict actively engage in a structured process to sustain peace. This framework relies on an iterative peacebuilding process of experimentation, learning, and adaptation. As external peacebuilders often tend to impose liberal peacebuilding projects planned according to their norms and beliefs, with adaptive peacebuilding, local societies will have an opportunity to develop their own institutions, political and judicial systems, aligned with their own history, culture, and context. Therefore, adaptive peacebuilding approaches highlight context-specific local solutions, although international actors will remain key for process facilitation (de Coning 2013, 2018, 2019a, 2020).

Adaptiveness implies a change in the peacebuilders' mindset, particularly when it comes to dealing with evidence of failure in program delivery. It requires a change in the culture of organizations, partners, and funders. It facilitates horizontal and vertical participation in the peacebuilding process and focuses on results and allocation of resources to where it is more effective on the ground. In order to attain objectives more effectively, adaptive peacebuilding relies not only on an adaptive organizational culture but also on continuous conflict analysis, and evaluation and monitoring, as it recognizes the changing nature of complex situations affected by conflict (de Coning 2019c). While determined-designed peacebuilding attempts to avoid duplication and reduce excess capacity, adaptive peacebuilding focuses instead on variation for evolution and adaptation, encouraging robustness and resilience in conflict-affected systems. While in determined-designed approaches, cost-effectiveness is assessed by what was not needed in the past, in the context of adaptive approaches, cost-effectiveness is measured by the cost of adapting to possible futures (de Coning 2019b). In sum, the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs is measured by the ability to adapt to a complex environment (organizational learning) and the ability to sustain

peace gains, rather than checking results against pre-determined objectives and specifications.

Adaptive approaches are also reflected in peacebuilding tools, such as political mediation. Adaptive mediation reflects a set of strategies and practices to deal with mediation processes in complex environments. The focus is again on resilience, self-organization capacities of all parties to the conflict, and pragmatism, i.e., the process matters more than pre-existing international standards and mediators will act as process facilitators instead of full-fledged stakeholders (Coleman, Kugler, and Chatman 2017; de Coning and Gray 2018). In order to achieve successful adaptive mediation, it is crucial to find a balance between external facilitation and self-organization. Adaptive mediation emerges then as an alternative to traditional determined-designed approaches to mediation, with the potential for effectiveness in complex conflict systems.

Determined-designed peacebuilding approaches are synonymous with linear peacebuilding models in which foreign experts analyze armed conflicts to diagnose its root causes and address them through prescriptive programmatic interventions undertaken by several international actors. Although it is important to note that determined-designed peacebuilding programs, including those that promote a liberal agenda, are often implemented through a collaboration between international experts and local actors, alternatively, context-specific peacebuilding approaches represent non-linear peacebuilding frameworks that underline the importance of local agency, resilience, and self-organization capabilities for a peace process to become sustainable. Within context-specific approaches, adaptive peacebuilding demonstrates that in today's complex conflict-affected situations, peace needs to emerge from within. From local agents, local cultures, and local socio-economic contexts, and with international peacebuilders still having the fundamental role of process facilitation. As highlighted by Cedric de Coning (2020, 5), "for any society to live sustainably in peace, it needs to generate its own capacity to self-organize. This is a process that can be facilitated and supported by external peacebuilders, but it ultimately has to be a bottom-up and home-grown process." For this article, we will consider the importance of context-specific approaches as an alternative to determined-designed interventions in two contemporary armed conflict contexts in Syria and Mozambique.

Finding the Context in the Syrian Conflict: From High-Level Mediation to Middle-Out Linkage

The issue of context recognition is particularly relevant when taking into consideration international cooperation for peace in Syria, a case that represents contemporary protracted and complex armed conflicts. The broader understanding of "peacebuilding," which includes peacemaking and political mediation,

humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and state-building, is partially applied to a conflict that has become one of the most severe political and humanitarian crises of recent history. International mediation in Syria has been described as "mission impossible" in which some of the world's most experienced mediators have failed to achieve any progress (Hinnebusch et al. 2016; Lundgren 2016). The internationalization of the Syrian conflict and the profusion of non-state actors added an unavoidable element of complexity that needs to be taken further into consideration by peacebuilders in the region. Interventions have been focused on high-level international mediation, humanitarian and stabilization assistance, and planning for the future reconstruction of the country. Peacebuilding interventions in Syria will benefit from focusing on context-specific approaches, improving their effectiveness in dealing with one of the most complex conflict-affected situations in the contemporary world.

During the early stage of the conflict, international responses occurred within a multi-layered framework in which the main intervening actors were the UN, the Arab League, and the Friends of Syria.[1] The UN, as in other conflict cases, took the lead in matters of international mediation; however, the mediation framework was ineffective as it reflected the contested interests of the permanent members of the UNSC. Russia and China from the early stages vetoed UNSC resolutions that could lead to a political solution, claiming that the resolutions would violate the sovereignty of the Syrian state (e.g., UNSC 2011; UNSC 2012b). After being appointed as special envoy to Syria from the UN and the Arab League in February 2012, Kofi Annan's mediation focused on reducing violence at first and then getting the contested UNSC permanent members to agree to support the peace process (Hinnebusch et al. 2016). This mediation, adaptive to external factors, led to the Geneva Communiqué during Annan's term (UNGA and UNSC 2012). It was the first document in which the permanent members of the UNSC agreed on a Syrian-led political process, and it remains the basis for further political negotiations today. On the other hand, the fact that the conflict has not ended since the countries involved agreed to the 2012 Geneva Communiqué speaks to the complexity of the Syrian conflict.

The Arab League held the Syrian regime responsible for the violence. It put pressure on the regime with the resolution in November 2011 to suspend Syria's membership and to impose sanctions.[2] After securing the regime's agreement and dispatching a mission to monitor progress toward ending the violence, the Arab League proposed a peace plan in January 2012 that included the establishment of a transitional government and the handover of power to the vice president by President Bashar al-Assad for that purpose (UNSC 2012a). With the rejection of the regime to this peace plan, the Arab League decided not to extend the dispatch period of the observers and entrusted the mediation process to the UN. After those determined-designed attempts of mediation by the Arab League failed, some Arab League members joined the Friends of Syria's efforts. The Friends of

Syria supported the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOC) as the representative of the Syrian people among the opposition groups, the number of which is estimated to be hundreds or more than a thousand, to transition to a democratic and pluralistic political system. On the other hand, they also maintained diplomatic relations with the regime (Talmon 2013). Further, while supporting the SOC, they also directly supported local councils (LCs) and other civil society organizations through humanitarian and stabilization assistance (e.g., DfID 2015; DAI 2013). The support of the Friends of Syria did not always strengthen the legitimacy of the SOC.

The context behind the juxtaposition of the political support for the SOC and direct support for the local organizations was the inability of the SOC to strengthen its roots inside Syria. The SOC was based in exile and did not have a strong connection with domestic opposition groups (Sayigh 2013). The SOC attempted to build its legitimacy by providing humanitarian and stabilization assistance to the LCs, although not all LCs relied on their support. Considering the complex local context and the vital role of the LCs in the community, it is possible to observe that some LCs had direct contacts with armed groups and even with the regime. Their emphasis was on pragmatism in order to maintain people's security, livelihood, and the basic needs of the community under the fluctuating situation of the conflict where the rulers can change overnight (Khalaf 2015). The reality of the local context shows that it is almost impossible to break up the network with the regime because of its advanced infrastructure and the vast presence of the state. Its ability to hold and organize the communities across many parts of Syria remains to some extent as it was before the conflict (Favier 2018; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2014).

The Friends of Syria approach, which mixed political interventions, based on the idea of liberal peace, with humanitarian and stabilization assistance responding to the local context, appeared to address the complexities of the Syrian conflict in a pragmatic way. However, its effectiveness was limited in terms of liberal peace because it did not adequately take into account the need for dialogue with the regime in control of the capital. It is possible to assume that such dialogue with the regime has been relegated to the role of the UN, while its framework reveals a lack of pragmatism, often becoming paralyzed due to the contested interests among UNSC permanent members over the sovereignty exercised by the regime.[3] In the insufficiency of high-level mediation derived from a liberal approach, combining such interventions with project-based responses, while effective in the short term, has not charted a step or pathway to sustaining peace.

It was only in the fifth year of the conflict that the International Syria Support Group (ISSG),[4] including all UNSC permanent members, was formed to conduct high-level mediation work. Subsequently, UNSC Resolution 2254 was adopted to boost the political process in Syria with the support of the ISSG. It committed

to "the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic" and encouraged the establishment of an inclusive transitional governing body with full executive powers, to be formed on the basis of mutual consent while ensuring the continuity of governmental institutions. This resolution was understood by both the regime and the opposition, including the SOC (UNSC 2015). It did not call for the resignation of the president and promoted a Syrian-led transition. It did not invite violent extremist groups, such as the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL), for political negotiations. The backdrop for the permanent members of the UNSC to avoid confrontation and adopt the resolution was the regime's dominance in the conflict after Russia, at the request of the regime, launched airstrikes in the name of the fight against terrorism (*Reuters* 2015). However, the dialogue between the parties following the resolution has been difficult, and neither the Astana Process led by Russia nor the Vienna Process initiated by the UN have reached any ceasefire agreement at the time of writing. The international mediation and related activities by the UN, the United States, Russia, and the ISSG may have contributed to temporary ceasefires but not to a stable peace agreement.

For high-level mediation and related activities to be fully functional, there is a need to add track-two peacebuilding activities to that of political and administrative actors, such as SOCs and LCs, to understand the situation and explore the capacity to analyze the needs on the ground from a technical perspective, and connect them to high-level mediation. In this line, the relevance and significance of the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) program could serve as an example of context-specific peacebuilding initiatives centered on a middle-out approach that involves collaboration between technical experts for the future reconstruction of Syria. According to Lederach (1997), middle-level leadership holds the most significant potential for establishing infrastructure that can sustain the peacebuilding process over the long term. Besides, collaboration occurring between middle-level leaders may spillover to top leadership or grassroots initiatives.

The NAFS underlines the need for an inclusive approach and a long-term strategy for state-building, and it constitutes a response by Syrians for Syrians (UNESCWA 2017, 6). It was first launched in 2012, when the direction of the ceasefire was not visible, by the former Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) and former Syrian Deputy Prime Minister, Abdallah Al-Dardari, together with several Syrians with technical expertise in a variety of fields. As a result, the NAFS was established inside the UNESCWA administrative office and functioned as the management and coordination hub of a program that often held technical expert meetings with 164 Syrian experts. Also, more than 1,400 Syrian stakeholders and 200 civil society organizations actively and anonymously joined and provided inputs to this program (Bymolt 2016, 3). Its initial aim was to establish

a framework for the preparation of a long-term post-conflict recovery plan (UNESCWA 2013).

Several points reflect the level of context-specificity of the NAFS peacebuilding initiative. First, the NAFS was Syrian driven. Syrian experts, with inputs from stakeholders, carried out a country-level analysis in fifty-three sectors, which was compiled into studies and reports as a basis for the future reconstruction process. NAFS also worked closely with the Special Envoy after Annan to provide technical input to the political process, "but without Syrian people's initiatives, there would be no progress" (National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 1 2020). Although NAFS invited all international stakeholders to seminars related to the dissemination of the program outputs, Syrian experts were leading the technical expert meetings. Only several foreign experts attended meetings related to water and other sectors (German Government Source 1 2019). Funders were involved not as implementers but as process facilitators of a program devised essentially by Syrians for Syrians (National Agenda for the Future of Syria source 1 2020; German Government Source 1 2019).

Second, NAFS provided a safe space for Syrian experts to gather and discuss in Arabic. Despite the wide range of backgrounds—some were supporters of the regime, others supporters of opposition groups, and others were neutral—the participants could have face-to-face discussions regarding policy alternatives for post-conflict reconstruction in Syria (Bymolt 2016, 3). UNESCWA, a neutral UN agency with no mandate to engage in political negotiations, has enabled Syrian experts from different perspectives to meet and debate each other's ideas and develop a better understanding of each other (National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 5 2020).

Third, as a result, this approach allowed Syrian people from several sectors of Syrian society to be continuously connected and engaged with the future of the country. Most of the interviewed Syrian technical experts emphasized this point as one of the main contributions of the NAFS program (e.g., National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 2 2020; National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 3 2020). "In the agriculture and irrigation sector, connections among engineers continued regardless of the dominant party controlling their area, because their common concern was about the quality of soil and the future of Syrian farmers. Each technical association in Syria had many hundreds of professional engineers, and most of them knew each other or at least had heard of each other. The strong bond among them continued" through these meetings (German Government Source 1 2019).

The points mentioned above reveal the pragmatic, apolitical, and technical approach of the NAFS peacebuilding initiative (Bymolt 2016, 3). The NAFS also served as a capacity-building hub. Through these discussions and networking, the capacity of the Syrian technical experts who participated in the NAFS meetings was further developed (National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 2 2020).

Besides, the outcomes of the NAFS program contributed to essential data sets for international stakeholders, as the program has effectively contributed to the preparation of post-crisis scenarios. The "NAFS has produced a wealth of data and research papers, supporting others working on Syrian issues, including the UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, the UN Syria Country Team, other UN and international organizations, as well as Track II negotiations" (Bymolt 2016, 5).

In 2017, the NAFS published the "Strategic Policy Alternatives Framework" (SPAF) as the culmination of its first phase four-year program. The SPAF document reviewed the root causes of the conflict from the perspective of governance, economy, and social sectors, not only pointing out the challenges and limitations of the regime but also analyzing its achievements before the conflict. It also considered policy alternatives for the peacebuilding and state-building phases (UNESCWA 2017, 29) based on possible scenarios of how the Syrian conflict could end (ibid., 25). Among five potential scenarios, the Syrian experts selected the second-best scenario to guide the development of policy alternatives: "a peaceful resolution for the conflict is reached with lingering hostility between parties, or new limited conflicts emerging over the division of power, influence, and resources" (ibid., 26). The track-two Syrian experts seemed to be ready to engage through their vertical and horizontal networks with track-one and track-three actors for the post-conflict peacebuilding phase. However, the Syrian conflict did not reach a final ceasefire, even four years after the NAFS began and entered its second phase. Until 2019, the NAFS reached out to over 228 Syrian technical experts and 3,259 Syrian stakeholders (civil society organizations and individuals) for continuous discussions and dialogue, gathering people from all over Syria and others living outside the country (National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 1 2020). All the policy alternatives need to be updated and reconsidered, taking the fluctuating conflict situation into account (National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 1 2020; National Agenda for the Future of Syria Source 4 2020).

The purpose of NAFS was to provide background data based on diversified sector analysis for post-conflict state-building; NAFS fulfilled this purpose and contributed to enhancing the capacity of track-two technical experts. Further, beyond the original purpose, it created a network of Syrian experts who were able to respond to the Syrian people in their quest for unity of the state even during the conflict. The international community needs to reframe all interventions and consider how to support non-linear, bottom-up, and middle-out approaches which are adaptive to the situation, taking into account the context of each case, rather than just exploring tangible results.

Finding the Context in Mozambique's Resurgence of Conflict: From Adaptive Mediation to Nationally-Owned Peacebuilding

Since the 1992 General Peace Agreement (GPA), the peacebuilding process in Mozambique has been hailed as a successful case of liberal peacebuilding. However, recent events are challenging more than twenty years of peace-related outcomes. In 2012, the country saw a small-scale resurgence of conflict emerging between the FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) Government and RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) as a result of tensions that have remained between both groups during peacetime (Vhumbunu 2017). RENAMO has been claiming for more decentralization, provincial autonomy, equal state resources allocation, and more opportunities to hold effective political power, while the objective of the Mozambican government has been the total disarmament of RENAMO's residual forces and the cessation of hostilities in order to sustain peace (Government Source 1 2020, Academia Source 1 2020).

The characteristics of the recent Mozambican armed conflict recurrence consisted of an accumulation of small-scale attacks mainly localized in the central and northern regions of Mozambique, comparable to other intrastate conflicts because of the logistics of the attacks and the number of victims (Regalia 2017, 10). Since 2015, due to escalating violence, traffic on Mozambican roads has become severely constrained, particularly outside Maputo. This contributed to the general perception among Mozambican people that the peace attained in 1992 had been suddenly lost (Civil Society Source 1 2020).

The impact of the small-scale civil war worsened over time. By March 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was reporting over 10,000 Mozambican refugees fleeing to Malawi and a considerable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Shimo 2016). In addition to the resurgent intra-state conflict, other events added an element of complexity to the Mozambican peace and development context. In 2016, Mozambique's public debt crisis prompted international partners, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and several bilateral development agencies, to suspend their assistance to the country (Cascais 2018). Since the suspension of foreign aid, which was directly supporting a considerable part of the national budget, a heavy negative impact was felt in the economy and in Mozambican taxpayers' pockets (Academia Source 2 2020). Mozambique has also been prone to natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, and cyclones, which only aggravated the economic, peace, and security crises contexts. In 2019 alone, Cyclone Idai and Kenneth affected more than 2.8 million people (IFRC 2019).

As if all these events were not enough, from 2017, an Islamic insurgency in Northern Mozambique emerged aiming to establish an Islamic state in Cabo Delgado province (Faleg 2019).[5] Violent extremism of this nature erupted for the first time in October 2017, in Mocímboa da Praia, when militants attacked a

police station and government buildings. The violence has been centered in the northeastern region of Mozambique, the least developed region in the country, bordering Tanzania. The involvement of external insurgents from Tanzania, Uganda, Congo (DRC), and Kenya, providing organizational resources and armament was also reported (Matsinhe and Valoi 2019, 8). At the time of writing, insurgent attacks in Cabo Delgado resulted in more than 1,854 fatalities and caused at least 250,000 people to flee their homes (Asala 2020). Consequently, there is a wide perception of instability and worsening of the insurgency-related crisis among Mozambican political elites and the population in general. Many consider the country to have not one but two simultaneous armed conflicts (Civil Society Source 2 2020).

In fact, Mozambique has been struggling with several conflict cycles, from the independence war against Portuguese rule (1964-1974), to the civil war (1977-1992), and the 2012 recurrence of conflict. Decades of peace negotiations and interventions attempted to address armed conflict in Mozambique, resulting in three main peace agreements: (1) the 1992 General Peace Agreement (GPA), (2) the 2014 Cessation of Military Hostilities Agreement, and (3) the 2019 Definitive Peace and National Reconciliation Agreement. The peacebuilding process started after the signature of the GPA in 1992, initially influenced by a determined-designed liberal peacebuilding approach, which was evident, e.g., with the UN mission in Mozambique that lead to the country's first multiparty elections in 1994 (Regalia 2017, 7-10).

Over the course of more than twenty years, numerous peacebuilding programs have been implemented in five key areas: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR); justice; economic and social development; decentralization; and natural resources investment. The full spectrum of peacebuilding actors in Mozambique ranged from traditional international donors such as the G19 group,[6] and other donors that have emerged in the last decade, such as China, Brazil, India, and the Gulf Countries. The abundant donor supply allowed the Mozambican government to diversify its peace and development partners over time, but it was not enough to avoid conflict recurrence and the emergence of violent extremism (de Carvalho, Rozen, and Reppell 2016, 4-11).

The immediate responses to an increasingly complex Mozambican environment were centered on new peace negotiations between the FRELIMO-led government and RENAMO. This allowed for the development of new DDR programs and the revision of the constitution on matters related to decentralization and provincial elections. In May 2016, the timing and conditions were met for a rapprochement between President Nyusi and the historical leader of the RENAMO Afonso Dlakhama. However, after more than forty-seven sessions of negotiation involving an international mediation team that included experienced negotiators from the European Union (EU), South Africa, InterMediate and the Global Leadership Foundation, representatives of the

Catholic Church, and the former presidents of Tanzania and Botswana, both Mozambican leaders decided to surprisingly engage in direct dialogue and abandon a fully-fledged international mediation structure (Vines 2019, 18-19).

This resulted from the increased perception among Mozambican political elites that the pathway for a successful agreement would arise through direct dialogue and a model of mediation that could be adaptive in nature rather than heavily influenced by pre-determined international standards or by the history and examples of past negotiations (Reis 2019; Civil Society Source 3 2020). Accordingly, the final round of negotiations led by the Swiss Ambassador to Mozambique, Mirko Manzoni, adopted a pragmatic and adaptive style, and privileged process facilitation of a nationally owned peace process (Civil Society Source 3 2020). The small mediation team focused thereafter on facilitating the direct dialogue between the Mozambican government and RENAMO, stimulating the self-organization capabilities of both parties, and focused on responding in adaptive ways to the challenges that have arisen along the way.

The new peace negotiations highlighted issues related to power-sharing and decentralization, as well as the demobilization and reintegration of RENAMO residual armed forces. Many RENAMO fighters and former combatants were demanding further integration into the armed and police forces, something that has been generating a continuous climate of tension between both parties. More recently, RENAMO also highlighted the need for reintegration in Mozambique's State Security and Intelligence Services (SISE or Serviços de Informação e Segurança do Estado), and the need for redistribution of natural resources revenues, as one of the world's largest gas reserves was discovered in Mozambique in 2012 (Academia Source 2 2020; Academia Source 3 2020).

The direct dialogue and adaptive mediation structure facilitated by Manzoni encountered several setbacks, such as the death of Dlakhama, the fragmentation of RENAMO into two groups—the political and military branches—and the need for frequent trips to challenging geographical locations. However, the adaptive nature of the mediation process and the focus on direct dialogue rather than imposing an external mediation structure, resulted in significant and concrete achievements when taking into account the complexity of the situation. This method led first to the cessation of military hostilities between both parties in December 2016. Second, it paved the way for the revision of the constitution on matters related to decentralization and the election of provincial governors. Third, it led to the signature of the 2018 Memorandum of Understanding on Military Matters, and, finally, to the signature of the 2019 peace agreement (Vines 2019, 20-21).

In other words, the architecture of the negotiations was nationally owned, with regular contact between the leaders of both parties, first through telephone, and later face-to-face meetings in the capital, Maputo, and in Gorongosa, the location of RENAMO's military headquarters. Two technical committees on

decentralization and military issues were also established, with two members of RENAMO and two members of FRELIMO on each of them. Two additional international advisors joined each committee, but the focus remained on process facilitation by a small mediation team chaired by Manzoni, who supervised the whole process. The Swiss ambassador also established a "Contact Group" with six other ambassadors from the United States (co-chair), Botswana, China, the EU, Norway, and the United Kingdom. The mediation process also foresaw information sessions with other political parties and the public (IMD 2019, 2; Reis 2019). Unlike the former mediation meetings, direct dialogue became a vital element of the process and enabled further reconciliation between FRELIMO and RENAMO leaders and the supporters of both parties.

The adaptive mediation strategy led to the signature of the definitive peace and national reconciliation agreement in August 2019. The agreement intended to end the political and military instability the country has experienced since 2012 and paved the way for the implementation of future peace and development programs. At the signing ceremony in Maputo, President Nyusi and the RENAMO leader, Ossufo Momade, highlighted the need for continuous direct dialogue and negotiations between both parties as a critical factor to sustain peace (Zacarias and Da Silva 2019). New peacebuilding programs in Mozambique are now set to follow the same trends of the mediation process with a particular focus on national ownership, as broadly shared between the Mozambican government and other national stakeholders, in particular with RENAMO.

New DDR programs were formally initiated in July 2019, with the aim of reintegrating 5,221 guerrilla fighters stationed in Sofala, Inhambane, Tete, Niassa, and Nampula provinces. At the time of writing, the current stage deals with combatants' registration in central Mozambique. This is a positive sign for peace in the country and an incentive for conflicting parties to remain on the road to dialogue and reconciliation. International donors announced generous support to coming peacebuilding programs, e.g., the EU will assist Mozambique with more than US$ 68 million to support DDR, local economic development, decentralization, and reconciliation programs (*Lusa* 2019; Aid Agency Source 1 2020).

The previous DDR programs implemented after 1992 in Mozambique demonstrated a high level of participation of both international, national, and local actors, such as civil society organizations, e.g., the Christian Council of Mozambique and FOMICRES (Mozambican Force for Crime Investigation and Social Insertion) (Schirch and Mancini-Griffoli 2017). However, ineffective coordination between these actors and the Mozambican government demanded contextualized approaches also at this level.

Although the result of the elections held in October 2019 may undermine recent peace achievements in Mozambique, the fact is that the recurrence of conflict and the rise of an Islamic insurgency proved that the previous

determined-designed liberal peacebuilding model lacked effectiveness in the current Mozambican context. Innovative methods, such as adaptive mediation focused on pragmatism, national ownership, and direct dialogue between both parties, led to an increase of effectiveness in responding to the recurrence of conflict and paved the ground for the implementation of new DDR and decentralization programs, as well as to address the issue of an Islamic insurgency in Mozambique. This evidence confirms that if context-specific approaches are applied in increasingly complex cases, this will ensure a more effective and inclusive peacebuilding process. In addition, this case also confirms that international peacebuilding actors will have a better chance of becoming effective partners if they are involved as process facilitators willing to adapt to a continuously changing environment, rather than being full-fledged stakeholders focused on implementing a pre-determined peacebuilding plan that does not take into account the complexity dimension of the conflict-affected situation.

Conclusion

Determined-designed approaches have been implemented as linear models of peacebuilding in which international experts address the root causes of armed conflict by designing interventions unable to adapt to complex and fast-changing environments. This is also the case of liberal peacebuilding and its top-down interventionism, which achieved successful results to a certain extent but has been failing to meet a pattern of effectiveness in addressing contemporary armed conflicts. Whether guided by liberal norms or other values, determined-designed and prescriptive peacebuilding interventions are guided by the theory of change, which describes the assumed or hoped causal relationship between an intervention and its intended peacebuilding result or impact. Progress is measured against the degree to which a society becomes peaceful and have adopted the theory.

Alternatively, context-specific peacebuilding approaches have been emerging as a viable alternative to determined-designed interventions. Context-specific approaches highlight the importance of local agency for peacebuilding to become more sustainable within the broader spectrum of the peace process. In particular, adaptive peacebuilding focuses on a pragmatic approach that encourages external actors to become process facilitators rather than fully-fledged stakeholders of the peace process. Optimal outcomes are context-specific, i.e., there is no prescriptive recipe for peace and results are assessed by taking into account the degree to which a society can self-sustain peace. Adaptive approaches are guided by complexity theory, which refers to the self-organization capabilities of systems affected by conflict, demonstrating that peace only truly emerges from within. In this context, peacebuilders will stimulate self-organization with the feedback

from local agents, local cultures, and local socio-economic contexts.

The exploration of context-specific peacebuilding initiatives in two cases, as exemplified by the National Agenda for the Future of Syria (NAFS) and Mozambique's adaptive mediation process focused on direct dialogue, confirm that the applicability of context-specific approaches holds the potential for greater effectiveness in contemporary armed conflicts. First, in both initiatives, planning and implementation was left mainly in the hands of national and local actors, guided by the principle of "peace emerging from within," while international actors were more effective assisting them through process facilitation. Second, depending on the context, fostering direct contact and exchanges between track-one, track-two, or track-three members of the "peacebuilding pyramid" holds the potential for spill over into new peacebuilding initiatives.

In the case of Syria, through NAFS, track-two experts developed the background data for future reconstruction while maintaining a fragmented network among Syrian people regardless of where they are based. The phase 1 program successfully achieved its aims and developed resources for pragmatic solutions to be used by all Syrian stakeholders on reconstruction and reconciliation issues in the post-conflict phase. Future research during this phase will allow us to confirm the impact of middle-out linkage on domestic and international stakeholders and clarify to what extent self-interest or collective identity building played a crucial role in persuading both parties to achieve peace. In the case of Mozambique, instead of a traditional international mediation structure, the process-facilitation of direct dialogue between track-one elites resulted in a new peace agreement and nationally-owned peacebuilding initiatives, e.g., a new DDR program and further support for decentralization. Third, as observed in both cases, the context of contemporary peace processes is often multi-layered and multidimensional. Therefore, the peacebuilding stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation benefit from being adaptive in nature and deriving fundamentally from each context. The focus on complexity and context-specificity will enable peacebuilders to not only recognize systemic constraints but also respond more effectively to the challenges presented by contemporary armed conflicts. As observed in the case of the Syrian civil war and Mozambique's recurrence of conflict, the deriving hypothesis is that context-specific approaches will hold the potential for the mitigation of conflict-affected situations and sustaining peace in an increasingly complex world.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1.   This is a reference to the approximately seventy countries which participated in the first Friends of Syria meeting in February 2012. The meeting has been held since then and the number of countries participating has changed. Therefore, it is not a strict designation. Since 2013, the number of countries participating in the meetings of Friends of Syria has been narrowed to eleven, which are called the Core Group: Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

2.   Under the Charter of the Arab League, suspension of membership requires unanimity of all but the party involved. The suspension of Syria's membership was opposed by Lebanon and Yemen, with Iraq abstaining.

3.   Both sides met for the first time at the Geneva II conference in the beginning of 2014, but it did not bring the civil war to an end.

4.   Core Group members, China, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Russia, the Arab League, the European Union, and the UN.

5.   Two active groups are Ansar-al-Sunna or Al-Shabab and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS).

6.   Traditional peace and development donors in Mozambique consist of the UN, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the European Union, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Portugal, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, the United States, the Netherlands, and Japan.

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