RECONCILIATION IN PRACTICE

Selected observations about the assumptions informing practices of reconciliation

Authors: Fanie du Toit and Angelina Mendes

Think Peace LEARNING AND SUPPORT HUB
United States Institute of Peace Making Peace Possible
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Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution George Mason University

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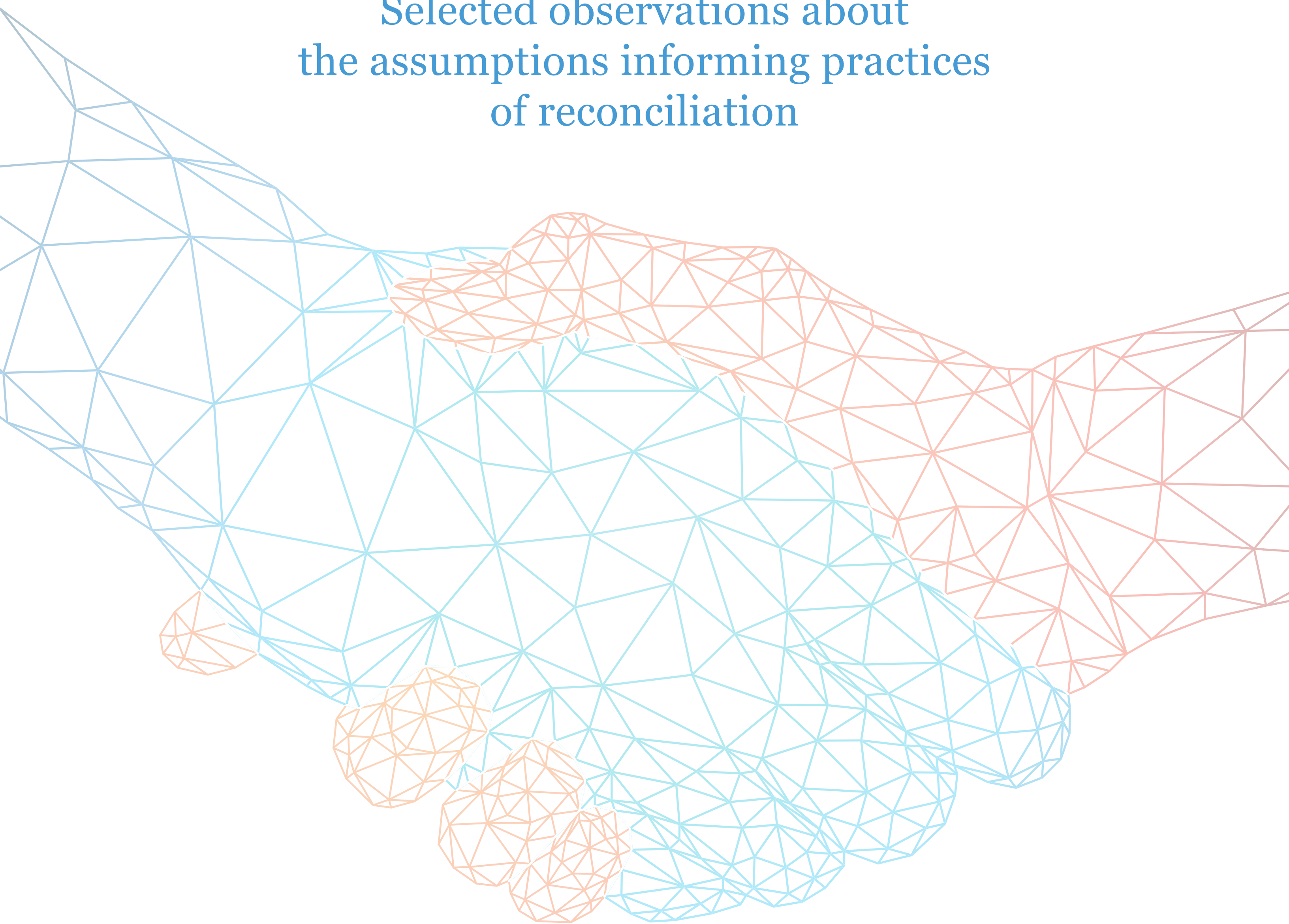

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About Reconciler

Reconciler is a publication series by the Mary Hoch Foundation, Think Peace Learning and Support Hub, and Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation.

This issue of Reconciler was made in collaboration with the United States Institute of Peace. It examines reconciliation practice through interviews with seasoned practitioners and outlines recommendations to improve the reconciliation field as a whole.

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Foreword

We need to improve reconciliation practice to sustain peace

United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation (MHCR) have been collaborating for over two years in collecting lessons learned from past and current reconciliation processes and convening leading practitioners to help develop recommendations. As part of these efforts USIP and MHCR have commissioned several research studies and we are delighted to now publish the first volume of the Reconciler Series: *Reconciliation in Practice — Selected observations about the assumptions informing practices of reconciliation*. Fanie du Toit and Angelina Mendes have done wonderful work in reviewing 20 processes and summarizing the findings into this discussion paper. We are thankful for them as well as to the distinguished practitioners and scholars that have been willing to provide their insights. USIP and Think Peace Hub are establishing a Reconciliation Community of Practice to continue sharing lessons learned and to help design and implement impactful reconciliation processes.

Reconciliation has traditionally been viewed as part of post conflict reconstruction. While conflicts are re-emerging with increased pace and the whole global peace architecture is in crisis, we need to explore how reconciliation practice can help to prevent conflicts but also build trust during hot conflicts and help parties create transformative peace and reconciliation processes. We believe future peace mediation teams will need trauma and psychosocial support experts that help also redesign peace processes to incorporate opportunities for healing. Neuroscience is helping practitioners to better understand not only how trauma affects conflicts and relationships but also how leaders need to commit to personal healing to be able to advance social healing and create transformative peace and reconciliation processes in the public sphere.

Reconciliation can help to relate to the ancient paths of many Indigenous cultures who understand that to be human we must be connected to other human beings; what in South Africa is called "ubuntu". The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu summarized this concept well when he exclaimed: "My humanity is all tied up with your humanity". Reconciliation needs to incorporate better trauma awareness and recovery together with resilience practices to enable a shift in socio-political narratives at a collective level and to help rebuild systems of inclusion, justice, and fairness in society and governance. Very likely in the future we will view these processes more as incremental steps in which the parties need to define what inclusion, justice, and fairness means for them instead of focusing so much on the role of

third-party mediators. To this end, USIP and MHCR are also working on research about the roles and functions of Insider Reconcilers that will be published later in this series.

We are thanful for those partners that have made this reserach and publication possible, including #reconciliation hosted by Helsinki Deaconess Institute and funded by Finnish Minnistry for Foreign Affairs and Humanity United that supports Think Peace Hub.

We look forward to continuing this important conversation on reconciliation!

With much appreciation,

Antti Pentikäinen
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Convener, Think Peace Hub

Carl Stauffer
Senior Reconciliation Expert United States Institute of Peace (USIP)

Acknowledgements

The authors[1] express their sincere thanks to the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation (MHCR) at George Mason University's Carter School for supporting the development of this discussion paper. The process began in conversations between MHCR, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), and the authors on what was agreed to be an urgent need: what current, concrete reconciliation practices and processes could teach us about macro-level policies, deliberative programming and iterative social change, and how these findings could best be fed back to both policy and practice.

By doing so, this paper also addresses a worrying, persistent gap between, on the one hand, those who are directly involved with reconciliation processes, and on the other hand, those who formulate critical national and multi-national policy frameworks, provide top-level political leadership, and develop funding directives for these processes.

Assuming that perspectives across the spectrum have much to offer, this paper explores how the world of funded projects, large-scale policies and formal institutions interact with the world of informal social processes full of ambiguity and paradox, where vocational commitments become life-long journeys, and in which deep creativity is often found.

The authors wish to thank USIP for funding towards this research. And gratitude is also extended to colleagues who have provided thoughtful feedback and comments that helped to inform this discussion paper, including, John Paul Lederach, Brandon Hamber, Grainne Kelly, Tecla Namachanja, Antti Pentikainen, Mulanda Juma, Melanie Greenberg, Carl Stauffer, Danneile Davis, John Caulker, and Simon Keyes. Most of all, their gratitude goes to the courageous individual experts who so generously offered their time and wisdom to help make this study possible.

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1 Fanie du Toit is the former Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, South Africa and has subsequently advised reconciliation processes in post-ISIS Iraq for the UNDP and Rakhine State in Myanmar for In *Transformation Initiative* based out of Pretoria, South Africa. He is author of, amongst other publications, *When Political Transitions Work—Reconciliation as Interdependence*, Oxford University Press, 2018. Angelina Mendes is a doctoral candidate in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. She currently supports programming and research for the development of strategic approaches, policies, tools, and practices of reconciliation at the Unites States Institute of Peace (USIP) and is a research fellow at the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation.

Summary

To reach its recommendations, this study draws on the insights of twenty seasoned reconciliation practitioners across six continents and explores the veracity and reliability of a selection of widespread assumptions, held by sections of the policy as well as practitioner communities about how reconciliation best works in practice.

Apart from identifying and briefly discussing both "reliable" and "unreliable" assumptions, listed below in summary form, this paper also identifies stubborn challenges and related recommendations that are relevant for advancing reconciliation practice.

Reliable assumptions

1. Concrete interests shared between hostile groups, often deeply symbiotic and interdependent, can provide an effective entry point for reconciliation during any phase of the conflict.
2. Informal processes can, and often do, provide the kind of trusted, resonant leadership without which reconciliation is unable to proceed, whereas formal processes often lack this precise quality.
3. Formal acknowledgement of harm inflicted, followed by rapid and concrete policy change and sustained dialogue, can restore some measure of trust, and open pathways for reworking damaged relationships.
4. Acknowledging personal trauma, and learning to live with this woundedness while gaining better understanding and deeper empathy of others, are important requirements for leaders of reconciliation.
5. Women offer innovative, critically important support to sustainable reconciliation. Significantly, this often happens in situations where women are excluded from sufficiently meaningful participation in mainstream reconciliation processes, either structurally or culturally.
6. Replacing unrealistic expectations with pragmatic, incremental gains towards a desired future has the potential to contribute to reconciliation, even where inter-group trust is at a historic low.
7. Multi-identity groups working together on urgent communal priorities, such as local resource-sharing agreements, conflict mitigation, and basic security, including, food, shelter, livelihoods, and health provision for all, can improve reconciliation between deeply distrustful and hostile groups.
8. Truth-telling can counter denialism and revisionism, thereby making a recurrence of violence less likely.

9. Local initiatives can help to reconcile divided communities, even when national reconciliation is at a dead-end.
10. Community-level reconciliation is able to provide creative impetus to frameworks and policies aimed at promoting national reconciliation.

Unreliable Assumptions

1. The assumption that reaching an agreement about cessation of violence is sufficient for sustainable reconciliation was shown to be potentially misleading.
2. The assumption that agreements between adversaries that do not comply with international standards of justice or the full expectations of all sides are doomed to fail, was shown to be incorrect at least in some cases.
3. The assumption that transitional justice mechanisms, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), trials, reparations, and redress contribute to reconciliation as free-standing initiatives, was shown to be potentially misleading.
4. Assuming that public truth-recovery inevitably leads to personal contrition, forgiveness, and discernable levels of individual victim/perpetrator reconciliation, was found to be misleading.
5. Assuming that TRC recommendations will inevitably be implemented by governments who commission these instruments, was found to be misleading.
6. The assumption that public truth-recovery alone would generate public support and political will for redress (including amongst beneficiary groups of past injustice), was found to be misleading.
7. Assuming that it is always advantageous to facilitate face-to-face dialogue is incorrect.
8. Assuming that reconciliation should always be achieved through talking is misleading.
9. Assuming that national reconciliation is sustainable without engaging foreign stakeholders, such as funders, occupiers, spoilers, proxy forces, and regional and international powers is often incorrect.

Recommendations

1. Develop communities of practice and policy-making that analyze reconciliation practices globally and feed findings into relevant policy and programming processes, and into reconciliation practice. This should crucially include interrogations of the assumptions that underpin reconciliation policies, programming, and practice across contexts.
2. Integrate contextually competent and culturally informed psychosocial trauma and healing support at all levels of reconciliation programming where at all possible.
3. Gender justice within reconciliation should go beyond “affirmative mainstreaming” to ensure that women are key, strategic partners from the onset and that reconciliation processes initiated by women are adequately supported.
4. Explore potential entry points for reconciliation with key stakeholders at any time during a conflict spiral.
5. Link processes and create synergies across societal levels and sectoral interests.
6. Strengthen trust in reconciliation processes through meeting realistic, step-by-step short-term commitments.

7. Identify and monitor mutually accepted signs of progress to mark medium-term goals such as increased inclusivity, deepening fairness, and improving trust.
8. As part of a delicate balancing act, keep a focus on the longer-term goals of addressing the root causes of the conflict—while promising (and delivering) more modest, incremental changes towards the larger goals.
9. Make provision to address past violence publicly, even if in a compromised form, provided it is acceptable to a majority of victims and does not run an undue risk of reigniting the violence or re-traumatizing victims.
10. Facilitate understanding and empathy in culturally, politically, and gender sensitive ways and with adequate preparation.

Aim and Method

This discussion paper set out to learn from a variety of cases where reconciliation processes appear to have had a positive impact. Ultimately, it is our hope that the findings and recommendations presented here will assist efforts to improve alignment between policy frameworks, programmatic interventions, and social processes related to reconciliation.

A group of twenty individuals were interviewed on their personal experiences of "reconciliation in practice" in more than twenty cases worldwide. These individuals all have in-depth experience and unquestionable integrity in pursuit of reconciliation, both personally and professionally.

An important part of our method was to select individuals who have spent the better part of their professional careers as practitioners, academics and/or professionals engaged with reconciliation in some of the most challenging contexts and who have produced influential leadership, insights, and reflections on these journeys. Understandably, not everyone who has gained prominence in this manner is covered here, but those included are individuals with experiences and insights worth listening to. Additionally, and importantly, sixteen of our twenty interviewees are from the countries where the cases they described, occurred. Four are outsiders, but outsiders with a long history of intimate and ongoing involvement with the cases they describe.

Drawn from different spheres of influence, they include socially engaged intellectuals and leaders from some of the most influential movements, institutions, and organizations within the field of reconciliation, former national diplomats and United Nations officials, heads of national ministries of reconciliation and grassroots representatives, and prominent thought-leaders. Discussions ranged from memorialization from a feminist perspective in South/Southeast Asia, restorative justice from a gender-sensitive African American perspective, trauma healing and indigenous wisdom from a variety of African perspectives, to ethnic coexistence and practitioner and policy-related perspectives on community cohesion from societies across six continents.

At our request, each case centered on an example of reconciliation that had, in the view of the interviewees, "worked". These examples were then explored in terms of questions kept fairly consistent across all interviews. Questions included a focus, for example, on how those involved succeeded in fostering the beginning of a reconciliation process in midst of entrenched hostility and violence. They also included questioning on the nature of the promises, progress, outcomes, and impact of reconciliation processes, which were deemed to have made a difference.

As the analysis of the data progressed, it soon became clear that one of the threads running through the material was a reflective conversation on the assumptions that informed reconciliation processes, their inception, their progress, and what would be considered their "deliverables", that against which they would be held accountable at the end of the day. This angle soon became an important guide for our subsequent analysis and ultimately gave shape to this paper.

The specific cases have proven to be both efficacious and limited in varying ways. They offer interesting, sometimes counter-intuitive insights into the ways these processes unfolded or stalled, or sometimes surprised or disappointed. This inductive approach aimed at understanding what reconciliation looks like through the eyes of these experts who are not only at the forefront of the analysis of these cases, but also immersed in their realities. That said, our findings highlight specific aspects and perspectives which our interviewees as seasoned intellectuals, professionals, and practitioners, have thought relevant and important. It is important to also highlight that the findings and insights offered in this paper reflect our analysis, which was derived from the observations made by our interviewees.

This study, therefore, could be described as a form of qualitative inquiry that draws upon the value and strength embedded in practical knowledge, rather than as a "conceptual" or "in-depth case" study, or indeed "survey". That said, we also recognize that every approach brings with it both learnings and limitations. As authors and participant observers ourselves in the field of reconciliation, we recognize the importance of a reflexive approach. While our analysis is therefore first and foremost derived from the cases, it is also reflective of our respective wider experience.

While our analysis is therefore first and foremost derived from the cases, it is also reflective of our respective wider experience.

An additional part of the method was to invite international and distinguished scholars and practitioners to be part of an ongoing advisory group or "community of practice". This advisory group read the first draft and provided comprehensive feedback that then informed the final paper. Finally, in accordance with ethical research principles and given the sensitivities of some of the processes our interviewees are embedded in, we safeguard their integrity by respecting their privacy in this study.

It is our hope that this discussion paper will add something distinctive, however modest, to the growing impetus in reconciliation research, policy, and practice. Most importantly, we hope it strengthens the hand of those tasked to initiate, lead, or support reconciliation, and who are often confronted with the many conflicting approaches, assumptions, and goals projected on reconciliation, depending on whether they deal with funders, international agencies, civil society organizations, local leaders, or others.

This discussion paper will also serve to help facilitate efforts led by USIP and MHCR to convene reconciliation practitioners and policymakers to develop recommendations on how to improve the impact of these processes. More work, well worth undertaking, awaits on these fronts.

Starting Point

Most analysts, practitioners and observers, agree: reconciliation remains contested. After all, it is shaped by practices and approaches from across the globe, some personal, others communal, yet others institutional, and some even with national goals—and all informed by quite specific, if often unspoken, assumptions.

Moreover, reconciliation is influenced by different, intersecting intellectual traditions often discreetly or inadvertently (e.g., Marxist, international liberalist, critical, conservatist, religious or agonist), with each operating from its own assumptions and toward its favored goals.

It is also shaped by highly-context-specific power relations, as well as by cultural specificities and convictions.

We should therefore not be surprised that reconciliation remains hotly disputed between scholars, and between any set of opposing stakeholders setting out to "reconcile". And yet, arguing over what reconciliation may mean, often constitutes the first faltering step towards it, not only amongst researchers, but also in conflict theatres across the world.

Whilst recognizing all this ambiguity, we departed from our own assumption that reconciliation involves *relation-building and renewal towards a shared, just, and non-violent future during and after extreme violence, oppression, and enmity*.

Framing the Questions

A **first area** of reflection in our study involved the question of how reconciliation processes typically create momentum when odds seem to be stacked against them. Classically, it is assumed that conflict fatigue, a mutually hurting stalemate, overwhelming one-sided dominance, or elite pacts, variously bring conflicts to an end. It is not our intention to raise these longstanding debates in any systematic way, suffice to say that we do not view reconciliation as exclusively "post-conflict" or even "post-violence". Reconciliation refers to a process of relational transformation that very often starts within the heart of an ongoing conflict.

This raises the question of how then it would be possible to do the seemingly "impossible", that is, to cross boundaries and to initiate processes of relational healing that would have been viewed before, and perhaps even continues to be viewed, as at best an unachievable ideal, or at worst, an irresponsible breach of security with potentially lethal consequences down the line.

The question of inception, of how to initiate reconciliation and build on this, is intimately tied up with the question of assumptions underlying those so-called "first steps". What do we hope to achieve, and how, when embarking on reconciliation? Which assumptions, therefore, are reliable, and which are unreliable?

It is fairly widely accepted that we do not yet have theories of change for reconciliation that differentiate clearly erroneous and accurate assumptions about reconciliation, and that are verified across contexts and situations.[2] In the absence of such causal frameworks, we simply asked our interviewees to identify and discuss the assumptions, which in their view, shaped the reconciliation success stories they opted to share with us. As a result, we found a diverse set of (largely) untested assumptions informing the ways that individuals, governments, communities, and institutions, stuck in cycles of violence, seek to initiate reconciliation. In retrospect, some of these assumptions proved reliable whilst clearly others did not. We unpack these findings in what follows.

A second area of inquiry concerned the question of how to know whether unfolding events, initiated in the name of reconciliation, are contributing or irrelevant to, or in

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2 Keyes, S. (2021). *Theory of Change and Reconciliation*. Discussion Document. Prepared for MHCR/USIP; Firchow, P. & Mac Ginty, R. (2017) Measuring Peace: Comparability, Commensurability, and Complementarity Using Bottom-Up Indicators. *International Studies Review*, 19 (1), 6-27; Cole, E., & Firchow, P. (2019). Reconciliation Barometers: Tools for Postconflict Policy Design. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 13 (3), 546–569.

fact obstructing reconciliation. We departed from the "starting point" that reconciliation relates to a highly complicated and unlikely renewal of relationships amidst often unbearable harm, amidst a realization that ongoing cycles of violence would continue to inflict harm and eventually affect all those involved in the conflict. This starting point, therefore, requires us not only to consider questions of inception, but also the question of causality, relating the various elements of "effective" reconciliation processes in provisional "proposals for change".

The short answer to the question of causality is of course that absolute certainty about whether and how reconciliation is progressing is seldom possible. History remains unpredictable, and the complexity of reconciliation processes tend to obscure clear-cut analysis.

Take, for example, the de-escalation of violent conflict as a sign of progress for reconciliation. At face value, it stands to reason that lowering levels of violence is a sign of progress of reconciliation, but does increasing violence necessarily mean the opposite, that is, the worsening of reconciliation? What does one conclude, for example, about the not infrequent phenomenon that the first, critical moves towards reconciliation coincide with dramatic spikes in violence when spoilers actively try to derail initial contact? In South Africa, levels of violence spiked to all-time highs from 1990 to 1994 precisely when political negotiators were reaching historic breakthroughs culminating in a constitutional settlement and a manifestly more unified and fair society than at any time previously in its history. Was reconciliation in the ascendency here, or on the retreat, or was it perhaps in the ascendency at one level and in retreat at another?

To take another example on a different societal level, could one say that reconciliation was making progress in the Rakhine province of Myanmar when community relations were visibly improving between formerly hostile Muslim and Buddhist communities, at the very same time that a civil war, the outbreak of COVID, and a military coup broke over the heads of these communities desperately trying to hold on to one another? Again, not a simple determination to make.

As the study progressed, we found a close link, not only between assumptions and questions of inception, but also between these assumptions and how progress is viewed, monitored, and ultimately evaluated. Presumably, further study on this topic would involve a nuanced discussion on assumptions about the nature of signs or markers that would indicate, with reasonable accuracy, some progress in restoring relationships across conflict lines—and these would probably have to be differentiated according to societal levels (national, regional, communal, institutional, personal), but also, intricately, in terms of the push and pull factors *between* different levels, as illustrated in both examples above.

Consideration ought also to be given to the different macro-frameworks or approaches to reconciliation that assume radically different goals—and the accompanying expectations these approaches raise.

For example, advocates of restorative justice may assume that signs of progress would involve deeply emotional, interpersonal turning points between perpetrators and victims, as well as between pivotal leaders. Such signs of progress may include, public acknowledgement of specific crimes committed, remorse and repentance of these crimes by both the direct perpetrators and the more indirect beneficiaries of the crimes, followed by acceptance and forgiveness by victims, and finally, munificent reparations to victims as compensation for material, emotional, and other forms of loss, culminating ultimately in community reconciliation between historically hostile groups.

Although this classic sequence (originally derived from theological insights into the restoration of the divine/human relationship) is reflected to some extent in liberally-minded approaches as well, progress here is associated more with “improvements” in state-civil and military relations than with individual personal victim/perpetrator relations. Consequently, rather than interpersonal turning points, institutional reform, the implementation of mechanisms with mandates such as truth-recovery, reparations, and accountability for those “most responsible” for past crimes and so on, are seen as signs that reconciliation is advancing. Ultimately, the hope would be that this would culminate in a greater respect for, and adherence to, the rule of law.

For a more structural (or perhaps critical) approach, visible signs of progress would again differ. Here the emphasis would be on uncovering ongoing structural and cultural oppression of ethnic, gender and other minorities, as well as economically excluded and most vulnerable. This approach would look for public acknowledgement of ongoing and historic harm, the active empowerment of voices protesting exploitation, and concrete forms of redress and compensation as signs of reconciliation, with the ultimate aim of a manifestly freer and more equal society.

This question of what is assumed to constitute progress for reconciliation, remains therefore, one of the most challenging questions in reconciliation studies, and receives some tentative attention later. It also involves the realization that reconciliation processes often require regeneration. John Paul Lederach, in his commentary on this paper, called reconciliation “deeply ambiguous” and full of paradox. Reconciliation processes do not follow a clear, linear pathway, but require us to adapt and hold seemingly contradictory perspectives at the same time. In Lederach’s view, it is not about what we do not (yet) know, but about learning to live with multiple perspectives.

Cases in the Spotlight

The twenty cases at the center of this discussion emphasize reconciliation's diversity as well as its context-specificity, but also some interesting cross-cutting realities. They confirm that reconciliation processes are not "stand-alone" interventions, but that any single process functions as part of a larger collection of initiatives within a particular context. Rather than offering ready-made templates or best-practice models, these cases tell stories of ongoing, open-ended learning, experimentation, and adaptation, often with astonishing results, despite setbacks and disappointments.

Drawn from six continents, these cases include countries plagued by protracted violence and others who are so-called post-civil war nations, but also some established democracies and conflict-affected societies. The twenty cases are listed in the table below with a brief description corresponding to the examples of reconciliation examined in each of the cases.

CASES	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Australia	Political and civic initiatives for public acknowledgement of colonial dispossession between the Australian government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Burundi	Individual women's actions and grassroots initiatives that led to improved relationships between deeply divided Hutu and Tutsi ethnic communities during Burundi's civil war.
Cambodia	Transformative symbolic interventions to overcome the Khmer Rouge era and reunite society at community and national levels.
Colombia	Institutional policy changes towards comprehensive reparations based on the 2011 Victims Law introduced by then President Juan Manuel Santos and his administration.
Finland	A pilot project launched by the Prime Minister's office to prepare for a truth and reconciliation commission exploring truth-telling, indigenous ownership, healing, and psychosocial support, to establish and reform relations between the state, the Sami people, and other communities.
Germany	Public acknowledgement and the art of memorialization and healing through community-driven theatre after the Second World War to improve Franco-German relations.
Iraq	Post-conflict stabilization and ethnic re-integration on the Nineveh Plains through civic and religious dialogue at the state level.

Kenya	Women's groups that promote trauma healing, ethnic re-integration, and co-existence in lieu of the ostensible failure of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC).
Myanmar	Inter-communal dialogues to encourage coexistence between different ethnic and religious groups in Rakhine state, following the state-driven violence of 2012 and 2017.
Nepal	Locally driven communal dialogue processes to manage natural resource conflict between different groups in the wake of Nepal's Maoist struggle against the government.
Northern Ireland	Civic dialogue processes during the early 2000's to explore ways of examining the past and remembering, to move toward a better future in lieu of any formal provision for such processes.
Peru	Transitional Justice (TJ) mechanisms implemented after 2000 following decades of mass human rights violations and former President Alberto Fujimori's authoritarian rule.
Sierra Leone	Hybridized community healing and restoration in the aftermath of war based on *Fambul Tok* traditional practice.
Somalia	Localized faith-inspired interpersonal conflict resolution and peace-making processes in the Sanaa region.
South Africa	National political negotiations, following a civic-driven National Peace Accord and resulting in a constitutional democracy, some (albeit insufficient) measure of material redress, and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).
Sri Lanka	Oral history and ethnic exchange initiatives to foster memorialization, recognition of women's war stories, and ethnic co-existence.
Sudan/ South Sudan	Negotiated settlement as a way to combat the manipulation of religious and ethnic identity in a war over resources and political control.
Timor-Leste	International multi-level intervention led by the United Nations that began in 2001 shortly after the East Timorese crisis of 1999 with Indonesia that involved national, regional, and communal interventions, but excluded Indonesia as a prominent role-player in the conflict.
Uganda	Breakthroughs in negotiations with the Lord's Resistance Army through the interventions of strategically-placed women.
USA	Institutional police policy and practice change in the police's handling of racial minorities in Birmingham with a special emphasis on the repair of discriminatory practices in relation to sexual and gender-based violence.

Selected Assumptions Shaping Reconciliation Practices

The conversations with our interviewees examined the key assumptions operative in the reconciliation cases, evaluating retrospectively, whether these had been proven correct or erroneous, misleading, or unrealistic.

Interestingly, it became clear that despite sociopolitical, historical, economic, and cultural differences and nuances, it was possible to identify fairly similar assumptions operating across geographic cases, across conflicts, and even across societal levels.

At a basic, immediate level, one could detect straightaway that false assumptions were most often linked to the rise of unrealistic expectations and subsequent disillusionment for stakeholders, whereas more accurate assumptions tended to be more attuned to local realities. This underscores the necessity of preparation, ownership of concerned communities, and co-design of a process that is realistic and practical in addressing the key issues identified by these communities. Organizing support for such planning phases could be a high priority in future efforts.

In what follows, a list of "reliable assumptions" (those assumptions deemed to have been largely accurate) are presented, followed by "unreliable assumptions" (those deemed to have been largely erroneous or misleading). Important to note is that we favored those insights that, in our view, appeared more counter-intuitive rather than those about which we judged there to be relatively broad consensus already, e.g., that reconciliation should be "context-specific", "locally-owned", "non-linear" or conducted at "multiple levels". These sorts of assumptions we have taken as widely accepted and opted rather to emphasize those that appeared somewhat counter-intuitive and novel.

Reliable assumptions

1. **Concrete interests shared between hostile groups, often deeply symbiotic and interdependent, can provide an effective entry point for reconciliation during any phase of the conflict.**

Reconciliatory leadership is often associated with inspiring moral vision, and this is not incorrect. But we have found that amongst our cases, several reconciliation processes with real traction on the ground began the process of trust-building amidst hostilities not by "selling" lofty visions of peace, but more modestly by highlighting and supporting a variety

of context-specific ways in which hostile communities need one another for basic survival as well as for longer-term aspirations.

According to John Paul Lederach (in his peer review of this paper), the challenge of reconciliation is to explore ways to "be alongside that which is not likely to go away", including lasting harm from past violence, as well as those who inflicted this harm, while at the same time "finding ways to connect to our humanity and be whole". Damage and harm do not ever go away completely, nor does all violent conflict. Trust is never completely restored, and relationships are never fully healed, but there are multiple small and larger ways, so our cases confirm, to live more humanely, non-violently, and productively with one another towards a manifestly better future for all—even if the guns have not yet fallen silent.

In Nepal for example, facilitators emphasized that conflict communities had no option but to succeed in brokering agreements on natural resource management, that there was "no option, really, of divorce" if their mutual aspirations were to become reality. Likewise, the importance of "seeing the realities that can be for the common good" was crucial for Sudan's successful end to the north/south civil war.

Equally, the women who led a community-based reconciliation process in Burundi were motivated by wanting to "avoid the suffering" along with the understanding that "if we unite, we will be less vulnerable". They did not aspire to become "friends", but rather simply to "learn to live together".

Individuals felt they "had no choice but to make it (reconciliation) work" and "the alternative would have been too ghastly to contemplate".

Similarly, the Rohingya/Rakhine process in Myanmar was motivated in large part by the sentiment: "We are in this together. We will be lucky together. We will be unlucky together". And, during South Africa's ten-year transition that culminated in a peaceful handover of political power to the majority of South Africans, a sustainable constitutional democracy and an influential TRC, the initial, difficult talks were largely carried by a mutual conviction, where individuals felt they "had no choice but to make it (reconciliation) work" and "the alternative would have been too ghastly to contemplate".

2. Informal processes can, and often do, provide the kind of trusted, resonant leadership without which reconciliation is unable to reach its goals, whereas formal processes often lack this precise quality.

Political leaders may initiate symbolic acts to signal the willingness to engage conflicting parties, and by doing so, can pave the way for reconciliation. Often classified as "confidence building measures", such symbolic acts have the power either to initiate or strengthen reconciliation. Likewise, grassroots leaders can disrupt local conflict dynamics, and are able to create pathways that help to foster reconciliation through imaginative initiatives that garner support from across the conflict lines.

Sierra Leone's deeply traumatic and violent civil war ended in 1999 with the Lomé Peace Agreement, which was then followed by an international hybrid tribunal and a TRC that began in 2002. However, by 2007/8, the recommendations of the TRC had yet to be implemented leading to a sense of deep disappointment amongst victims' groups. This, amongst other failures in the official transitional justice mechanisms, led a charismatic local leader to launch a community-based reconciliation initiative called *Fambul Tok*, involving carefully facilitated first intra-community meetings and, when successful, inter-community engagements where remorse and acknowledgement of harm was formally exchanged during ritual gatherings. "Credible, informal leadership" sat at the heart of this process. In these particular processes, acknowledgement, reparation, and (possible) prevention of future harm were all present, but not in a form readily recognizable within the prevailing "transitional justice fraternity".

In Finland, a national truth and reconciliation process was launched by first identifying "insider reconcilers" from various fault lines to explore together what reconciliation could become and to help design the national process. The Finnish case, however, revealed deep distrust even among the affected communities, demonstrating the need for personal healing and trust building as pretext for designing and launching a reconciliation process.

Additional cases that showcase credible, and often spontaneous civic leadership in the wake of institutional failure include Burundi, Cambodia, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, among others.

3. **Formal acknowledgement by top leaders of harm inflicted, followed by rapid and concrete policy change and sustained dialogue, can restore a measure of trust between institutions and previously marginalized groups and open substantive ways to rework damaged relationships.**

The case on police reform and racial justice in Birmingham, USA emphasized the transformative potential of public, top-level acknowledgement—in this case by Police Chiefs in certain areas with a history of racial violence and oppression, followed by fact-finding to understand the harm caused and being caused, and listening sessions to bring an element of personal empathy and understanding. Once the institution and the victim community had established sufficient trust to proceed, the table was set for policy and practice discussions, both externally with the community and internally within the organization, along with mobilizing sufficient resources to fund the changes. This was followed by regular feedback sessions to the community where practical, incremental concrete changes were monitored for their contribution to the improvement of communities' lived experiences. It was critical, in the places where this approach improved trust between the police and African American communities, that the acknowledgement of harms was perceived as sincere, specific, and from the very top of the organization. Where this happened, it was found that more intimate conversations could be initiated, including about ongoing racial profiling, historical abuse, and intimate partner violence–conversations that could be taken as an indication of improved levels of trust.

4. Acknowledging personal trauma, and learning to live with this woundedness while gaining better understanding and deeper empathy of others, are important requirements for leaders of reconciliation.

Nelson Mandela used to encourage his team during the negotiations for a democratic South Africa where emotions were running high at times, to not allow their personal pain to dominate their decision-making. Having to negotiate with those who have oppressed and killed your people for so long, brings with it very difficult emotions, suffering, and intense introspection. Mandela's guidance gestured toward the importance for leaders to crucially recognize and acknowledge their own woundedness (as opposed to denial or dismissal of their pain), while simultaneously learning to live from a place of greater self-reflection, self-worth, integrity, dignity, and empathetic understanding. In this context, Mandela's encouragement towards his colleagues meant they must learn to live with the ambiguity of their own personal suffering and what it means to be a more fully-connected human at the same time, even with those who caused the suffering in the first place, provided the process would have larger social benefits for all.

Implicit here is the acknowledgement that top leaders also suffer, that they too have experienced pain and may continue to suffer in various ways, but also the need for them to embrace self-reflection, healing, personal growth, and civility for the sake of the larger community, and not to allow personal pain to determine fundamental political choices. Mandela's example highlights several things, but especially the significance of leadership and the need to recognize and process personal trauma as an important foundation for being able to initiate and lead reconciliation processes. Additionally, the dominant sociocultural and political systems within which leaders operate must also be taken into consideration.

Importantly, this draws attention also to the crucial need to acknowledge upfront, the fundamental interdependence between the "political" and the "personal". Denying such a link will not eradicate it, but behind the scenes it will simply allow the personal and political to operate powerfully at cross purposes.

In fact, it is evident from the cases examined that individual reconciliation processes, both between individuals and as a form of personal healing, are impacted by the larger context in which they occur (for example in gender reconciliation efforts amidst persisting patriarchal conditions), but inversely also, political reconciliation processes are determined in decisive ways by personal relationships between key interlocutors and stakeholders. Thus, it is not possible to neatly separate from one another–the personal and the political–in fact, we argue that reconciliation is precisely the concept that reminds us of the fundamental interconnectedness between the personal and the political.

Based on this assumption, it is worth paying special attention to personal relationships within political negotiations. Verbal and non-verbal communication can be a decisive part of peace talks. "Don't point your spear at the lion", is how Sudanese put it, emphasizing the importance of showing respect and not appearing overly aggressive when encountering

dangerous rivals. Rather, the recognition that all people have a sense of self-respect and national leaders are no different, played a key part in ensuring the relative success of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between south and north Sudan, ending what was at the time the world's longest-running civil war.

Ignoring this is to ignore the possibility that what leaders have been through and experienced in war can make them act in deeply self-defeating, and even violent ways when unhealed trauma and personal wellbeing are left unattended under the relentless strain of leading their communities from violence to peace whilst engaging the "enemy" directly in dialogue. And when such dialogues result in perceived disrespect and dishonor, leaders who are already stretched to the limit, may find themselves caught in cycles of violent behavior through actions, language, or tactics that are destructive and bear the mark of revenge in ways that not even they themselves would have been able to foresee.

However, if a political settlement does not enable the leaders to recognize their own need for personal healing and connect that to renewal of relationships, can we expect political or military leaders often involved in atrocities—also deeply wounded themselves—to be able to implement something so complex and ethically demanding as peace and reconciliation?

5. **Women offer innovative, critically important support to sustainable reconciliation. Significantly, this often happens in situations where women are excluded from sufficiently meaningful participation in mainstream reconciliation processes, either structurally or culturally.**

This study suggests a link between the initiation of reconciliation processes and gendered grassroots and representative leadership. The evidence indicates that reconciliation processes are noticeably more effective when gender is taken into account from the start.

While a comprehensive analysis of the gender power relations representative of the systems of patriarchy and cultures of masculinity that dominate and extend across societies is beyond the scope of this study, our findings do indicate that women who bear the brunt of violent conflict and are often excluded from the formal spaces where reconciliation and peace building occur, are the first to initiate reconciliatory acts in their villages, towns, and communities.

In an earlier section, we referred to the example of Burundian women who brought peace to a suburb in Bujumbura. Similarly, in the aftermath of the devastating Sri Lankan civil war a women's oral history initiative with survivors of the civil war played a critical role in documenting the voices of women that were missing from the dominant post-war narratives. As a result of this initiative, women's autoethnographic stories can now be found in the Sri Lankan national archives. This initiative further developed into a national reconciliation process focused on behavioral and mindset change aimed at compassionate co-existence between different ethnic groups within conflict-affected communities.

And, during the negotiations between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army, when mediators were struggling to persuade specific high-ranking commanders in the rebel group to put down their guns, women within proximity to these commanders were strategically engaged to draw upon their unique positions and skillsets and proved successful to great effect.

Also, in the hybridized *Fambul Tok* process implemented in Sierra Leone, women's participation and leadership roles were strategically incorporated into the design of the process. Evidence points to the same process in Myanmar's Rakhine province, and in the Finnish consultations with the Sami community, where women played leading roles on behalf of the community. These examples attend to the importance of recognizing and supporting the direct participation and contributions of women in initiating and leading reconciliation processes. They underscore the importance of recognizing women's leadership and context-specific contributions, which is crucial for informing broader initiatives and policies aimed at advancing gender-rights across societies.

6. Replacing unrealistic expectations with pragmatic, incremental gains towards a desired future have the potential to contribute to reconciliation, even where inter-group trust is at a historic low.

Reconciliation efforts, at whatever level, should avoid over-promising and under-delivering. Instead, starting modestly, they are able to create new possibilities that were previously thought impossible, thereby under-promising and over-delivering.

A focus, therefore, on realistic, pragmatic, and mutual gains, produced incrementally and revised regularly, often create more satisfactory outcomes for stakeholders and outsider-facilitators alike than processes which take on that which is unattainable, however desirable. Processes that acknowledge the limits and possibilities on the ground, are more likely to prove sustainable than overly idealistic processes. Such processes are more likely to take root and develop over time where conditions are created for greater inclusivity, diversity, adaptation, fairness, open communication, durability, and agency within contextually-competent processes.

Precisely these assumptions have shaped, for example, efforts aimed at resolving localized resource conflict in Nepal, encouraging ethnic co-existence in Kenya and Sri Lanka, and restoration and rebuilding of the social fabric in Sierra Leone and Burundi. Following careful analysis of ongoing community conflict in Nepal, a combination of international and national experts concluded that competition for natural resources lay at the heart of many, if not most, of these fights.

The Nepal case shows how managing expectations of stakeholders regarding achievable, concrete outcomes as opposed to outcomes only achievable at national level, shaped an iterative, adaptive, and long-term process of conflict resolution that saw communities take charge in negotiating agreements over resource-sharing with an astonishing success rate. In this case, the "tyranny of unrealistic expectations" was replaced with more

realistic goals that involved transforming relations from hostile to productive ones, not relationships of "love", but spaces where each side could be honest and could trust the other side sufficiently to take the next step along the road.

7. Multi-identity groups working together on urgent communal priorities, such as local resource-sharing agreements, conflict mitigation, and basic security, including, food, shelter, livelihoods, and health provision for all, can improve reconciliation between deeply distrustful and hostile groups.

The cases of Kenya, Nepal, Myanmar, Somalia, South Africa, and Timor-Leste, all illustrated the powerfully positive impact that practical cooperation between divided communities can have on reconciliation even when the macro-conflict shows no signs of abating, as in the cases of Myanmar and Somalia.

In Myanmar, for example, Muslim and Buddhist communities have faced extremely harsh conditions over the past four years. There was, to begin with, a long history of inter-community rivalries and violence between Rakhine and Rohingya villagers. To this was added the massive, criminal crackdown of the Tatmadaw (military) on the Rohingya in 2017, a subsequent civil war between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw, the impact of COVID lockdowns that decimated livelihoods in Rakhine State, a military coup, subsequent violence, and instability since February 2021. And yet, despite all this, community leaders have succeeded in working together across the state in multi-ethnic teams to provide their constituencies with basic necessities, including food, COVID-prevention, treatment information and materials, and even shared online educational forums. Therefore, despite the immense macro-level challenges and a multiplicity of spoilers, community-level reconciliation seems to be making progress.

8. Truth-telling can counter denialism and revisionism, thereby making a recurrence of violence less likely.

Despite the frequent lack of public and political support for reparations across so many post-TRC societies, there is strong evidence that TRCs and other forms of truth recovery do help to counter revisionism, making it harder to deny past crimes, and therefore harder too for these crimes to reoccur. At the same time, it offers a measure of emotional satisfaction to victims who are thus publicly (and officially) recognized, provided that victims' security and wellbeing are protected and swift, munificent reparations follow.

In South Africa for example, a 2001 public opinion survey from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation found that around 73% of white South Africans then acknowledged that apartheid had been a crime against humanity, a surprisingly high figure given the extent of white support for apartheid only a few years previously. Observers and analysts have credited the work of the TRC with fostering this awareness amongst the beneficiaries of apartheid and important milestone for reconciliation in that country.

However, the same figure in 2019 read very differently. Now only about 50% of white respondents agreed that apartheid had been a crime against humanity, and black respondents shifted their “definition” of reconciliation from forgiveness as the majority understanding in 2001 to social justice and economic equality in 2019. These dispiriting changes emerged on the back of the well-publicized failure of both the government and the private sector to implement TRC-recommended reparations, launch any meaningful prosecution of apartheid criminals, and implement the effective redistribution of wealth.

The cases of Colombia, Peru, and Timor-Leste also revealed similar tendencies.

9. Local initiatives can help to reconcile divided communities, even when national reconciliation is at a dead-end.

Although there is a risk that community reconciliation efforts can act as legitimization of illegitimate or unrepentant regimes, this outcome is not inevitable and should not deter efforts to build more resilient, stable communities, even during times where there is no real prospect of a national settlement. In fact, our study includes several cases where, despite a dead-end in national politics, community reconciliation processes ended up being beneficial, resulting in more resilient and stable communities because of the action taken by determined local leadership.

As the examples of Burundi, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka demonstrate, entry points for reconciliation can occur in the absence of (national) political support. Such entry points for relational transformation often take the form of grassroots initiatives and play a significant role in fostering more cohesive communities.

South Africa was classically a “top-down” process, led by political leaders but with inadequate synergy with community initiatives, whereas examples from Australia, Cambodia, Kenya, and Sierra Leone, illustrated the power of grassroots initiatives, yet without the requisite impact in the corridors of power. Timor-Leste is probably best described as a comprehensive combination of the above, together with considerable middle-out influencing, and was largely successful with the exception of securing positive participation of Indonesia.

In Nepal, communal issues were often issues “at the core of the political and social system” in the country. Nepal illustrates how when the issues communities can address remain within their local and political reach there is greater likelihood that reconciliation may be sustained. However, in many cases, communities simply do not have the capacity, resources, and/or political power to address the structural root causes of violence. In such instances, issues that lay at the heart of reconciliation processes that require formal government support, such as infrastructure development or policy interventions can lead to the recurrence of violence when left unaddressed, as the Kenya case shows.

When two women, one Hutu and one Tutsi asked the question, “why should we continue to suffer like this?”, they articulated the experience of absurdity shared by many Burundians

after the 1993 violence that erupted after the assassination of their President. They did not believe this was their fight and set out to normalize relations between their respective communities. Departing from the assumption, in their view, that no one's hands were clean, they began talking about what had happened since ethnic conflict engulfed their respective neighborhoods in Bujumbura. They soon accepted that locals suffer the most when political behemoths tackle one another and decided that if they were united, they would be less vulnerable.

Their "women's movement" became so strong, that soon the local market reopened, and trading resumed. The movement started "when these women began to visit each other's homes to discuss what had gone wrong". Not only did they discover that they did not hate each other, but as they re-opened the market, "life re-started". A similar situation cited above unfolded in Myanmar where extensive community-based trust-building and reconciliation initiatives have led to concrete improvements in community resilience and cooperation.

10. Community-level reconciliation is able to provide creative impetus to frameworks and policies aimed at promoting national reconciliation

National reconciliation processes are often too broad and too removed from communal realities to be "felt" at that level. They are, of course, crucial in removing structural and macro-level obstacles to reconciliation and implementing structural and cultural redress at scale, but notwithstanding this, national efforts often lack local "buy-in". Imaginative initiatives at the community level, therefore, have the ability to fill this gap and in fact work from the "bottom upwards" towards a more meaningful appreciation of what national reconciliation means.

An example of this kind of reconciliation occurred as part of the Franco-German reconciliation process after the Second World War. Two towns, Oradour-sur-Glane near Bordeaux in France where the German military had committed a massacre, and Nuremberg in Germany where the Nazi leadership had been put on trial after the war, embarked on a remarkable process of reconciliation that ultimately had national repercussions. It started when the community from Nuremberg developed a musical about the war and post-war reconstruction in Oradour-sur-Glane. When the play was then invited to be performed in Oradour-sur-Glane, it was after some hesitation met with a warm reception. A visit from a high-ranking German politician was then arranged (the French town was reluctant to accept visits of German officials prior to the play). He used this moment to issue a formal, public acknowledgement to the French town.

In this way, grassroots, arts-based initiative provided direct, meaningful embodiment of the national reconciliation efforts and resulted in a bottom-up political development in the form of public acknowledgement by a high-ranking political leader. Importantly, the relationship between such local and national efforts requires further study.

Unreliable Assumptions

1. The assumption that reaching an agreement about cessation of violence was sufficient for sustainable reconciliation was shown to be potentially misleading.

Without clear provisions for dealing with the past in an inclusive, fair manner, ceasefires and other forms of negotiated settlements are at best a tentative step towards peace. Over time such agreements need to include provision for the demands of all participating parties, including those who have suffered gross violations of their human rights.

The Good Friday agreement that brought to a formal end the bloody conflict between Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland, contained no overt provision to deal with the crimes of the past. The requisite political will to confront past political crimes was lacking, both on the side of the Republicans as well as the Unionists, and, perhaps most importantly, on the part of the United Kingdom. Dealing with the past was "a gaping hole" in the agreement. Despite de-escalating levels of political violence, some police reforms, institutional changes brought about by an "Equality Commission", and sporadic civic initiatives to "deal with the past", past crimes remain officially unacknowledged.

Accordingly, communities remain segregated (with separate education and residential areas still largely intact), deep wounds remain unattended, and reconciliation thus remains largely incomplete and the peace fragile.

2. The assumption that agreements between adversaries that do not comply with international standards of justice or the full expectations of all sides, are doomed to fail, was shown to be incorrect at least in some cases.

When studying cases of reconciliation, it appears that early, informal, and often secret talks, the so-called "talks about talks", may produce tentative agreements between stakeholders, but also between stakeholders and potential spoilers. These agreements most often set out a process rather than substantive agreements. In a best-case scenario, this glimpse of where the process is headed may generate sufficient trust to take the next step. For others, with the ability and motive to disrupt reconciliation, these agreements may contain early assurances about the implications of peace for them and may prevent them from spoiling the very first attempts to engage across enemy lines.

Especially in the latter case, such agreements may contain painful but necessary compromises between elite (often criminal) interests and public interest, but that over time will advance public interest, but perhaps not immediately. This may involve special pay-offs, for example, to domestic spoilers who have a vested interest in the war economy or who are powerful and able to continue fighting without direct consequences to them personally. In some cases, it may also involve diplomatic measures affecting foreign agents who fight either directly or through proxy forces.

3. The assumption that transitional justice mechanisms, such as TRCs, trials, reparations, and redress contribute to reconciliation as free-standing initiatives, was shown to be potentially misleading.

The assumption that instituting transitional justice mechanisms will lead to reconciliation, even as once-off events, is misleading—unless transitional justice measures (including reparations) are accompanied both by relational transformation and in-depth structural, social, or redistributive change guided by a vision of a shared future, it will remain incomplete and fragile.

A series of well-crafted Transitional Justice institutions were implemented in Peru following the conclusion of a twenty-year-long conflict where at least seventy thousand individuals had been killed. These included a truth commission, reparations programs, trials of political criminals, as well as some institutional reforms aimed at, amongst others, strengthening the rule of law. These processes and mechanisms have had a tangible, positive impact of respect for the rule of law, leading to the successful prosecution of several high-ranking individuals, including former Heads of State.

Understood as a form of national reconciliation in which the relationship between the state and the citizens were "normalized", it led to a more responsive and fair state and a strong repudiation of political violence, but it failed to have an impact on the economic structures and its concomitant inequality which continues to leave the country's progress towards reconciliation fragile. Establishing less violent ways to manage societal conflict is an important step forward, but as with Colombia and Peru, amongst others, unless it is accompanied by greater economic inclusion and basic opportunities for all, hopefully leading to improved social integration and cultural accommodation, progress towards reconciliation remains fragile.

> *The healing of relationships is not possible without profound shifts in power relations, not by simply reversing roles.*

Far from being a "soft" option, reconciliation's focus on relationships, therefore, must have profound and radical consequences for a potential new society. The healing of relationships is not possible without profound shifts in power relations, not by simply reversing roles with the previously oppressed taking power at the expense of the oppressor, but by creating more equity and inclusion across the board.

In the medium to longer-term, reconciliation is not deemed successful unless it results in radical, visible change in the political, institutional, economic, and cultural landscape of a society, removes root causes of a conflict, restructures power-relations, prevents future violence, and enables a process of learning to live together peacefully.

The assumption that when victims' rights are realized and perpetrators have faced justice, then healing somehow happens, is clearly potentially misleading, as the examples of Colombia and Peru both show.

Reconciliation is rarely brought about in dramatic, once-off events, but rather demands longer-term engagement and processes that should also importantly be viewed from an

inter-generational perspective. Not only does reconciliation successfully replace violence with non-violent ways of engagement and problem-solving, but the "solutions" themselves become ways of preventing the recurrence of violence down the line.

4. Assuming that public truth recovery inevitably leads to personal contrition, forgiveness, and discernable levels of individual victim/ perpetrator reconciliation, was found to be misleading.

This assumption is not borne out by the evidence in our study. Rather than reconciliation between victims and perpetrators directly, truth recovery may bring other goods to victims, such as satisfaction derived from a sense of public recognition if their stories are publicly recorded and when new, salient facts about the crimes they had suffered are revealed. These positive outcomes of truth-recovery and truth-telling appear not to demand interpersonal reconciliation between victims or perpetrators, something that, despite its obvious moral appeal, remains the exception rather than the rule.

The expectation of genuine contrition amongst perpetrators, based on the assumption that individuals would "see the light" once confronted with their evil deeds in public, proved largely inaccurate.

As many of our cases showed, the expectation of genuine contrition amongst perpetrators, based on the assumption that individuals would "see the light" once confronted with their evil deeds in public, proved largely inaccurate. Not only was the assumption visibly inaccurate in the face of the open recalcitrance, or even bemusement of many perpetrators at many of the TRCs under examination, but it also created expectations amongst victims that perpetrators would act in genuine and affirming ways together with victims. This led to the profound disappointment of many victims with TRC processes, and flows from, in our view, misleading assumptions about what formally-instituted reconciliation can and cannot achieve.

Equally, there were victims who came forward to tell their stories, and who themselves remained resistant to the idea of forgiving perpetrators, especially those perpetrators who had not "come clean" or even seen the need for asking for forgiveness. As FW De Klerk, the last Apartheid President said at the South African TRC: "My hands are clean!"

Instead of reconciliation with perpetrators, truth-recovery processes instead tend to provide victims with emotional relief and a sense of closure. In South Africa's TRC for example, for those who received the physical remains of their loved one, it meant that they could have a funeral and some measure of closure. And for many entering their stories into the public record, this meant a form of public recognition that restored some of the lost dignity under apartheid.

5. Assuming that TRC recommendations will inevitably be implemented by governments who commission these instruments, was found to be misleading.

The failure to gain public traction, despite truth-recovery efforts across the country, has led to major disappointment amongst Colombian communities as in so many, if not most, post-TRC societies where recommendations for reparations are shelved and largely forgotten by the public as well as political leadership. These include cases like Burundi, Kenya, South Africa, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste. Too often, these exercises in truth-recovery fail to garner public and political support for large-scale reparations, which leads to governments largely ignoring TRC recommendations.

In Kenya's Transitional Justice, and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) the very politicians who were in power were implicated in the Commission's report, which to this day presents impediments for the report's implementation, and reconciliation remains contested. This raises the concern that reconciliation is vitally in need of public truth-recovery processes that can ensure greater government accountability for the implementation of TRC recommendations, which is a perennial problem across cases. Likewise, Cambodia's Tribunal model cost over three hundred million dollars, trialed four people, and after its initial year some of the local population "lost interest in it", because it was no longer felt to be effective or meaningful for some Cambodians.

Similarly, the Special Court that was set up in Freetown, Sierra Leone had "very little connection to the people". This "fortress compound" up on the hill in the capital city was viewed by locals as offering little change for their "quality of life, traumatized neighbors, or strained relationships" after the war.

In another example, an imaginative effort initiated by the Finnish Prime Minister to improve relations with the Sami people ran into trouble when it could not deliver on concrete requests for improvements of livelihood conditions by the communities involved. The assumption had been that a community-and-university-based program involving the training of "insider reconcilers" public education about Sami culture, indigenous knowledge, and history, would assist in improving livelihoods, but importantly, also psychosocial healing for these indigenous peoples of Arctic Europe.

However, the process ran into difficulty as a result of insufficient support, both from the Sami human rights activists calling for the restoration of traditional fishing and land rights as a first step towards reconciliation thereby focusing exclusively on state violations, as well as the political right-wing that was opposed to the acknowledgement of Sami rights other than those enjoyed by ordinary Finnish citizens.

Although this highly publicized plan included visionary measures, a lack of concrete progress "on the ground" at community level, but also within the body politic of Finland, prevented sufficiently concrete improvements to be implemented, thus creating further disappointment and divisions within victim communities.

6. The assumption that public truth-recovery alone would generate public support for redress (including amongst beneficiary groups of past injustice), was found to be misleading in some cases.

There is no convincing evidence in our study to support this assumption, but it does appear that public truth-recovery is able to counter revisionism and the denial of violent crime and strengthen the hand of those seeking to prevent a recurrence of similar violence in the future.

The 2011 Victims Law launched by the Santos administration in Colombia was based on the conviction that once the truth about past violence would be made public, most citizens and successive administrations would continue to support the ongoing reparations and reconciliation efforts. But the political reality turned out different. The Santos Administration lost major public support, a referendum on a subsequent peace agreement, and ultimately its grip on power, precisely because of its pro-reconciliation stance, and this meant that Colombia never succeeded to develop a universal, equally accessible reparations administration across all its regions.

In Australia too, during the mid to late 1990's, the assumption had been that "education" of the white majority on Aboriginal issues would lead to constitutional recognition, some clarity on Aboriginal land claims, and concrete redress measures. However, the subsequent public debate turned out very different. Following the publication of the 1997 report "Bringing Them Home", which focused on the "Stolen Generations"–that is, the separation of generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their parents, families, and communities–public discussion degenerated into a "distressing public debate about the veracity of some of the findings", rather than a more profound and humble recognition of the "horrific, genocidal" impact of these policies in Australia. And successive Australian administrations have lacked the political will or means to prioritize reconciliation linked to meaningful change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—despite the centrality of these issues in Australian politics for some time.

7. Assuming that it is always advantageous to facilitate face-to-face dialogue can be misleading.

This assumption can be misleading. Direct contact is central to most reconciliation processes, but it can also do more harm than good if not conducted on the back of careful planning and preparation. In several of our cases, successful reconciliation processes began with intra-group discussions and engagements, preparing prospective dialogue partners in isolation from one another for subsequent face-to-face encounters that happened much later in the process.

In Sri Lanka, for example, civil society prepared Tamil and Singhalese communities intensively before any direct exchanges were even contemplated. This included information sharing and training to counteract stereotypes and ideologies which vilified

the other, and intra-community story-telling sessions to empower individuals to express themselves effectively, and to begin to come to terms with some of their hurt, betrayal, and pain. This all happened before communities were introduced to one another across traditional lines.

In Myanmar's Rakhine province too, community reconciliation efforts between the Rohingya and Buddhist/Rakhine communities were preceded by intense intra-community discussions where groups were prepared for eventual direct contact.

8. Assuming that reconciliation should always be achieved through talking is misleading.

Dialogue is central to many instances of reconciliation, but this does not hold true in all situations. Dialogue can also underscore those stereotypical perceptions that parties have of the other and deepen polarization or even trigger violence. In some cases, culturally appropriate symbolic communication through carefully chosen actions can send a stronger message than words.

In a Cambodian village, just after the Khmer Rouge (KR) came to power, two young children were playing, one the daughter of a KR officer. At one point, the young girl started to cry because there was sand in her eye. Her father became angry and put the young, 12-year-old boy who had been playing with his daughter "on trial". The villagers prevented the boy from being killed (which had been the intention of the KR officer). However, the compromise entailed that he was to be sent off to a hard labor camp, which was almost as good as a death sentence.

Against the odds, he was able to escape, make his way to safety and gain an education. After many years, when the KR had lost power, the boy, now an adult, decided to return to his ancestral village with the aim of setting up a development project.

Upon his arrival, it was evident that the village remained divided over this incident. Nobody even talked to the family of the former KR officer. As a result, they remained totally isolated and deeply impoverished. In a deliberate move, he then invited a child of the family that had sent him into exile to join his development project as the first recipient. This changed the dynamics in the village. Not only did his success and actions inspire many, but the status of the ostracized family changed. Henceforth, they were accepted and reintegrated into the larger community.

This story is emblematic of how through simple, but highly significant public gestures Cambodian people find ways to act to show that the conflict is now in the past and that it is time for people to move forward—without ever resorting to formal "dialogue".

9. Assuming that national reconciliation is sustainable without engaging foreign stakeholders, such as funders, occupiers, spoilers, proxy forces, and regional and international powers is quite often incorrect.

As one of the case studies shows, Timor-Leste's imaginative, multi-level reconciliation process remains incomplete due to the refusal of Indonesia to participate in meaningful ways.

Iraq remains an emblematic case of a conflict theatre dominated by foreign powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, it suffers from internal polarization with deep historical roots between various ethno-religious groups with competing claims to power. The UN-initiated dialogue forum for the Ninewa Plains following the successful war against ISIS, involving religious, political, cultural, and economic leaders from the Kurdish community, but also the Christians, Yazidi, Turkman, Shabak, Suni, and Shia communities provides a poignant example of this. Although the forum has proven a sustainable and productive addition to efforts to bring stability in a region that had been virtually destroyed by the ISIS occupation and subsequent "war of liberation", it has remained hamstrung and incomplete due to its inability to engage, in any serious way, the international forces who enjoy a crucial presence in the region.

This impotence is extended to the UNDP as well, as the major outside facilitator to the process, and becomes evident when one considers that many perpetrators of gross human rights violations, in the form of militia groups, remain firmly in power due to their support from abroad. In such a setting, one "cannot talk about transitional justice in a meaningful way".

Abiding Challenges and Recommendations

This is perhaps the most appropriate moment to make an important observation on the nature of what is recommended below. Reconciliation faces abiding challenges and persistent hurdles to overcome should relationships be fostered, allowed to recover or strengthened in the context of major conflict.

These challenges, recurring throughout the twenty cases examined, require thoughtful responses, responses that are steeped in realism, but that also do not give up on the radical aspirations of justice for all within a stable and peaceful society.

One perennial challenge that underlies many of those listed below, is developing funding streams that are adaptable and dynamic, yet sustainable over several typical project cycles (illustrated in very nearly every case we examined, but most notably in Myanmar, Nepal, South Africa, and Sri Lanka). This remains a major obstacle, since funders understandably require accountability within certain timeframes, often coinciding with the parliamentary rhythms of donor countries.

Developing funding streams that are adaptable and dynamic, yet sustainable, remains a major obstacle.

At the same time, reconciliation simply does not and cannot develop in linear, progressive ways, and especially not over a period of three to four years. This does not mean that important, concrete steps cannot and should not be taken towards larger goals, but even determining what these interim steps or goals ought to be, require extensive work with all stakeholders. It is therefore of paramount importance, as illustrated through several of our cases, that reconciliation programming needs to find donors with the right balance of flexibility and outcome-orientated planning—and most importantly, who are willing to adapt or even redirect the program content as needed.

Further challenges emphasized in this study, include:

1. Developing cross-cutting learning experiences for communities of practitioners that are both comparative and context-specific;
2. Empowering stakeholders at all levels and across gender orientations, with relevant personal transformation, psychosocial support, and skillsets;
3. Mainstreaming gender in the processes of identifying and supporting those leaders that lead reconciliation processes effectively;
4. Finding promising openings for reconciliation at levels across society;

5. Aligning formal, often national interventions with more intimate, personal, and communal healing and closure or vice versa, for example, by ensuring that TRC recommendations are implemented in ways that bring some measure of satisfaction to victims;
6. Managing and reframing unrealistic expectations inherent in reconciliation discourses and practices into realistic, achievable goals;
7. Developing mutually acceptable markers of progress for each specific context where reconciliation would be facilitated;
8. Ensuring that even as reconciliation proceeds incrementally, larger goals related to the root causes of the conflict, goals such as truth, social and other forms of justice, forgiveness, and non-recurrence of political violence, are not forgotten or ignored;
9. Developing mutually acceptable ways to deal with the past;
10. Finding appropriate and safe ways for enemies to learn to know one another.

In what follows, a set of recommendations are offered on various themes and insights derived from this study.

Recommendations

The recommendations set forth below are formulated against a series of polarities that have emerged throughout the cases we have analyzed in this study. These recommendations should be read against the backdrop of the abiding challenges facing reconciliation practitioners, some of which are listed above. However, importantly, these recommendations are also located within a framework of choices having to negotiate deep tensions between conflicting realities. Viewed within this framework, they straddle and confront, on the one hand, the normative statements and abundance of truisms that have come to define reconciliation, and on the other hand, the nuanced aspects of "reconciliation in practice" that have proven to be efficacious, in ways that may otherwise have been viewed as practically unattainable.

Firstly, we have interrogated the tension that lies between the visionary, lofty ideals of reconciliation that have come to define the field against a more nuanced, practical reality that reveals the realistic possibilities of reconciliation on the ground based on a more incremental, attainable approach.

Secondly, while cultural norms and political systems often determine the possibilities and limits of reconciliation, the examples of reconciliation we interrogated also point to individual agency and leadership in shaping reconciliation in emergent moments, a tension that is consistent across cases.

A third tension against which these recommendations should be read has to do with the context specificity of the examples of reconciliation highlighted by our seasoned interviewees and the cross-cutting analysis that has emerged from investigation of their in-depth narratives. While we do not claim that these cases are representative of reconciliation writ large, the depth and nuance of the examples of reconciliation interrogated allowed for analytic possibilities where cross-cutting features emerged across the twenty cases.

Fourthly, the twenty cases investigated point to the tension between reconciliation viewed as a process that requires creative vision–one that requires stepping out of the ordinary and into the extraordinary–and the requirement for reconciliation to also be participatory, inclusive, attainable, and reflective of and attuned to peoples hopes, visions, and realities.

Viewed within the framework of these four underlying tensions, and read against this backdrop, the ten recommendations discussed below offer practical insights for improving the impact of reconciliation. Finally, as participant observers in the field of reconciliation, these recommendations should also be read as carefully thought-out observations and practical proposals derived in the first place from the cases, but also from our respective wider experience, and which are calling for further investigation.

1. **Develop communities of practice and policy-making that analyze reconciliation practices globally and feed findings into relevant policy and programming processes, but also into reconciliation practice. This should crucially include interrogations of the assumptions that underpin reconciliation policies, programming, and practice across contexts.**

This is not a new insight, but it is our view that collaborative processes between "policy and practice" need more focused attention than what it enjoys currently. The gaps between assumptions contained in policy documents on reconciliation, and those that shaped what our interviewees identified as "successful practices of reconciliation" remain large, leading to frustrations and diminished impact in many cases.

This kind of study therefore ought to be prioritized and extended, not only to improve conceptual clarity on what we mean by "reconciliation in practice", but also so that facilitators of these kinds of processes and major donors and other stakeholders may be better informed about what they can expect to work or not work in a given situation. Efforts should crucially include further interrogations of the assumptions that underpin reconciliation programming and practice across contexts.

Given that they are a *de facto*, widespread reality, and appear to contribute to peacebuilding in many ways, practices of reconciliation ought to be compared for cross-cutting insights, but always whilst keeping context-specific differences and nuances in mind. These kinds of insights should help to cast light on:

- the forms of harm that reconciliation seeks to undo, and conditions under which it would avoid repeating or worsening such harm as well as the forms of harm reconciliation cannot address;
- obstacles to, and opportunities for, reconciliation processes, as well as their limits and possibilities;
- clearer theories of change linking institutional and social/communal/personal processes with one another, but also with incremental, progressive, and concrete steps toward desired outcomes;

- better understanding of existing modes of social cohesion in particular societies, both traditionally and as responses to the conflict, as well as those efforts which would effectively contribute to furthering existing modes of cohesion.

It would, therefore, be beneficial to develop groups of practitioners and policymakers in "communities of practice" to test various approaches, review findings, and help contextual processes to benefit from these findings on an ongoing basis. In this way, the views on reconciliation held by those who hold political power, offer financial support or shape governmental and inter-governmental approaches, and by those who are embedded within such processes trying to make them work, could become better aligned. Unreliable assumptions could then be debunked and reliable ones asserted.

This work would crucially involve developing a common language, not only at a technical level, but as a form of non-violent dialogue that can enable societies to extricate themselves from the quagmire of revenge, suspicion, trauma, and grievance.

2. Integrate psychosocial trauma and healing support at all levels of reconciliation programming where at all possible.

Steering away from assumptions that "complete healing" is possible, and towards the notion that productive reconciliation processes require learning to acknowledge and live with pain, especially of those (and also by those) who have suffered the most, we recommend the integration of a nuanced approach to psychosocial support. Such an approach would not depend exclusively on more traditional models of counselling, but importantly also on generating in-depth insights into the cultural and systemic origins of trauma. Put differently, we recommend an approach that promotes mental health through a balanced awareness, both of possibilities for improving personal mental health (including at top level) as well as identifying and addressing more collective origins of trauma. This may be done:

- by encouraging dignified and safe practices of story-telling, inclusive memorialization, and shared conflict analysis which would include an analysis of personal, systemic, and cultural dimensions of violence. At personal level, this could include victim testimonies for example. At a systemic level, highlighting the impact of discrimination, and unequal access to services and opportunities could be considered. And at cultural level, the impact of cultures of masculinity, homophobia, xenophobia, and racism, to name a few, ought to be included;
- by promoting basic understanding of trauma awareness, wellbeing, and resilience as part of the knowledge base for reconciliation facilitators;
- by providing appropriate support to political and community leaders to enable them to learn to live with the ambiguity of their own woundedness while at the same time striving toward a deeper empathetic understanding in their efforts to facilitate reconciliation;
- by supporting victim groups and other vulnerable groups (e.g., IDPs, LGBTQI+, Youth, PWDs) directly engaged in, or affected by conflict;

- by ensuring that in the spirit of "do no harm" all processes are attuned to the multi-dimensional nature of healing and contextual-cultural sensitivities.

The cases in this study demonstrate a need to better integrate psychosocial trauma awareness, healing, and wellbeing support for individuals as well as communities engaged in various dimensions of reconciliation processes. Debates on collective and individual healing and reconciliation are well documented[3], but more needs to be done.

Cases such as Burundi, Cambodia, Kenya, Myanmar, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, to name a few, emphasized the need for, and the challenges inherent in, designing and implementing processes that contribute to personal and social healing, and easing the global-local and local-global tensions that underlie such processes.

Leaders involved in reconciliation need to be supported to crucially recognize and acknowledge their own woundedness, while also learning to live more fully at the same time, that is, striving towards personal growth and empathetic understanding. This dimension was clear in the Sudan case, but also in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and elsewhere. This recommendation is not based on the simplistic idea of "fixing the leaders", but on offering the kind of support that would help to prevent key leaders from replicating certain forms of abuse and violence that they may have suffered at an institutional and/or political level.

Those who are leading processes need to be better supported in learning to live with experiences of personal, systemic, and culturally-induced trauma, while promoting healing, trust-building, shared understandings of violence, and collaboration in relationships. At a personal level too, findings from neuroscience and trauma awareness indicate the potential to contribute to understanding why cycles of conflict repeat and how trauma affects relationships. Reconciliation can become one field where such findings can inform practice.

Additionally, victims of gross human rights violations related to conflict as well as other vulnerable groups, need to be assisted so that re-traumatization and even fresh victimization are avoided when victims are required to make public statements, for example in TRCs, or await reparations, or when other vulnerable groups face unique challenges during conflict periods. Fostering this personal resilience is crucially interwoven not only with competent interventions, but also with the nature of the political processes underlying transitional justice efforts[4].

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3 Bar-Tal, D. (2000). *Shared Beliefs in Society. Social Psychological Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Hamber, B. (2009). *Transforming Societies after Political Violence*. London: Springer. Hamber, B. & Wilson, R., A. (2002). Symbolic Closure Through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-conflict Societies, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1 (1), 35-53; Puljek-Shank, A. & Puljek-Shank, R. (2008). The Contribution of Trauma Healing to Peace-building in Southeast Europe. In Hart, B. (ed.), *Peacebuilding in Traumatized Societies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America; Galtung, J. (2001). After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence. In Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 3-25; Hutchison, E. & Bleiker, R. 2008. Emotional Reconciliation: Reconstituting Identity and Community after Trauma. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11 (3), 385-403.

4 Bar-Tal, D. (2000). *Shared Beliefs in Society. Social Psychological Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Hamber, B. (2009). *Transforming Societies after Political Violence*. London: Springer. Hamber, B. & Wilson, R., A. (2002). Symbolic Closure Through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-conflict Societies, *Journal of Human Rights*, 1 (1), 35-53.

It is often claimed that processes that emphasize victim/perpetrator dichotomies can inflame tensions, re-traumatize individuals, and lead to the recurrence of violence. At the same time, carefully designed trauma healing and resilience processes, for example as in the work of Father Michael Lapsley of South Africa[5], can offer potentially non-threatening processes that both perpetrators and survivors can participate in, and by so doing, can increase empathy and collaboration.

However, it is important, as per our cases, not to impose face-to-face "restorative" meetings between victims and perpetrators, especially not on victims. Perpetrators may in fact request such meetings purely for the benefit of being seen to collaborate, whereas victims may not be ready or inclined towards such a meeting. This needs to be respected at all times.

In this vein, it is also important to avoid the expectation that perpetrators will, by and large, show genuine remorse and that victims will be willing to forgive. Perpetrators, certainly across a broad section of the cases, seldom expressed remorse in ways that victims felt was genuine. In such an event, it is important that reconciliation processes are able to move ahead, even if perpetrators are not able or willing to muster the decency required to show remorse, or when victims are simply not ready, for whatever personal reasons, to forgive.

It is furthermore recommended that community processes, movement-based storytelling, and formal state interventions such as TRCs consider widening the lens of looking at past violence, not only focusing on individual human rights violations, but also including structural and cultural victimization. Numbers of victims would dramatically rise if this is approach is followed, and thus careful design, planning, budgeting, and communication of reparation programs would be needed as well as sufficiently-capacitated oversight mechanisms to ensure effective implementation so as to avoid unrealistic assumptions and the resulting disappointment so often experienced by victims after "dealing with the past" interventions.

3. Gender justice within reconciliation should go beyond "affirmative mainstreaming" to ensure that women are key, strategic partners from the onset and that reconciliation processes initiated by women are adequately supported.

The transformation of gender relations is a critical enabler of sustainable reconciliation at all levels. Too often this goal, which ought to go well beyond "gender mainstreaming", is seen as an after-thought to reconciliation, instead of part of its core strategy. In fact, several of our cases highlight that "bringing women into reconciliation processes" in itself is insufficient, as women are often already busy with reconciliation processes in ways that men are not able or not willing to do. Reconciliation facilitators and leaders would be

5 Father Michael Lapsley was mentioned in the case study on Finland. More information on his work is available at https://www.healingofmemories.co.za/about/staff.html/fr-michael-lapsley-ssm.html.

well-advised to keep up with what women reconcilers might already be doing and finding effective ways to support these initiatives. The precise fact that women are so often excluded from formal spaces and processes, means that these initiatives are often found in informal, community-based or social situations.

Numerous studies have shown that women are often disproportionately affected by conflict, and they are the ones who bear the brunt of communal and political violence. Such studies often point to the gender power relations representative of the systems of patriarchy and cultures of masculinity that dominate and extend across societies, where women are often excluded from the formal spaces in which reconciliation and peace building occur. Several of our cases demonstrate that it is these very women who bear the brunt of conflict and face systemic societal barriers, who are the first to initiate reconciliatory acts in their villages, towns, and communities.

This is often due in part to the realization that they have no other choice despite the unrelenting and gendered obstacles that confront them, and that the continuation of cycles of violence and conflict are associated with a heavy personal and communal price. Not only, therefore, should gender justice and gender rights form a central focus of reconciliation at societal levels, but women leaders should play a leading role. Recognizing and supporting the direct contributions of women in planning, initiating, and leading reconciliation processes adds to the growing evidence that underscores the importance of recognizing women's leadership and context-specific contributions across societies[6].

4. Explore potential entry points for reconciliation with key stakeholders at any time during a conflict spiral.

Our cases suggest that there are moments across all the traditional "phases" of conflict cycles where, for whatever reason, parties realize that the annihilation of the other party or parties is not, or never had been, realistic, and indeed, that their own future aspirations are fundamentally tied up with those of "the enemy". As explained in the previous section, this realization has manifested in several of our cases, prompting a willingness to explore potential non-violent alternatives to the conflict.

Such potentially transformative moments, when hostile groups pause for reflection, call for the exploration of the manifold "entry points" at facilitators' disposal, even at the height of conflict. These "entry points" offer the opportunity for what is often called "confidence or trust building measures", typically modest agreements of mutual accommodation that stipulate concrete, incremental steps towards more comprehensive peace and justice. When the late Ebrahim Ebrahim, ANC delegate at the South African negotiations was asked how the negotiators initially managed to build trust from a very low base indeed, he answered that they "made good agreements and kept (these) good agreements".

6 Acknowledgement and support of women's reconciliation efforts will also contribute to the broader United Nations Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda that aims to advance gender rights in conflict-affected societies globally.

We, therefore, recommend that facilitation teams explore multiple entry points at any given time, seeing that it appears there is deep interconnectivity between such entry points operating in different ways with different stakeholders and at different levels, and yet end up reinforcing one another.

Accordingly, our cases included "entry points" for reconciliation such as the following:

- "Talks about talks", informal dialogue processes designed to de-escalate political violence, offer a possible entry point for reconciliation, e.g., in low-key, confidential meetings between leaders from opposing sides, during humanitarian relief to assist war-affected populations, during peace and constitutional negotiations, and in the development of horizontally and vertically integrated dialogue processes at different levels of society, to name a few.
- Formal acknowledgement by heads of institutions or governments accused of historic or recent abuse of vulnerable groups have the potential to act as a powerful reset in relations, provided these acknowledgements are preceded by adequate consultations and truth-telling, concrete commitments, policy reform, and ongoing engagements to monitor implementation with these groups. The case of institutional police policy and practice change in Birmingham, USA, for example, revealed that when institutional leadership is committed and has a very clear vision on why it is important to pursue reconciliation, acknowledgement of harm at institutional levels is also able to affect policy change, change institutional practice, and repair harm.
- Formal transitional justice or reconciliation mechanisms can help to shape a common future and deal with a violent past—e.g., in Commissions of Inquiry, Indemnity and Amnesty programs, TRCs, reparations, courts dedicated to political crime, governments of national unity, constitutional assemblies, lustration, and disarmament and reintegration programs for former combatants, etc., all offer possible entry points, but *no more than that*, for sustainable reconciliation. It is important to note that these mechanisms are only as good as the broader social and political processes they are embedded in, and when left incomplete or unattended, their impact will be short-lived and possibly counter-productive, as was the case purportedly in Kenya and Sierra Leone, amongst many others.
- Civic activism often fosters more cohesive societies—e.g., in supporting effective future protection of basic rights such as equal access to justice, social services, economic opportunities, and livelihoods, as well as by promoting inclusive forms of peace education, memorialization, and other efforts to build more integrated, tolerant, and prosperous societies. The German case revealed the potential of local, community-driven reconciliation initiatives to give meaning and local depth to an international effort of reconciliation between France and Germany after World War II. Conversely, Myanmar's case illustrated how community reconciliation could be deeply meaningful and beneficial to local communities, even when the national process seems to be at a dead-end.
- Locally-facilitated social cohesion activities and collaborative action that bring large numbers of opposing groups together to perform tasks in service of the common good (e.g., health campaigns including anti-COVID measures, basic conflict-prevention measures, social media management capacities to counter malicious

rumors, clearing litter, playing sport, attending performative art performances, planting trees, or providing training to unemployed youth), have all emerged as potential entry points for reconciliation processes.

- Humanitarian interventions, in aid of those most vulnerable in war zones and other emergencies, offer potential entry points for reconciliation programs as was seen in Iraq and Myanmar, but one that remains understudied and neglected. These efforts may, however, require consolidated support from international actors to become recognized by political or military actors shaping the overall peace process. This can be achieved by e.g., establishing early on a reconciliation track besides political and military tracks.

5. Link processes and create synergies across societal levels and sectoral interests.

Linking initiatives at different levels in society (e.g., institutional, communal, political, civic, trans-national), as well as across sectoral interests, remains a key challenge for reconciliation initiatives. It is often referred to in terms of so-called "top-down", "bottom-up" or "middle-out" approaches. But very seldom does one actually see the required influencing happening "up" or "down" the societal ladder.

Our cases also demonstrated the inverse tendency, namely to work on reconciliation at one level, but being unable to do so at another. We attended to the examples of Australia, Colombia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste. What these cases demonstrated was a compelling story of reconciliation, but one that remained incomplete because key political stakeholders were reluctant to engage in repairing harms. Similarly, at an international level, one of the key impediments to the Timor-Leste process was the "non-cooperation of Indonesia", and one would assume in Northern Ireland, that of the United Kingdom who would block effective inquiries into possible past abuse by the military.

In such cases, informal strategies and grassroots leadership can help to revitalize national reconciliation. This requires in the first place designing clearly thought-out processes that can accommodate and recognize the diversity of experiences, stories, and perceptions of reconciliation that may exist within society, and identification of credible, courageous, creative, and determined leaders who can steward such processes.

Secondly, it requires equally careful outreach strategies to those in power, both publicly and privately to begin to work together on matters relevant to reconciliation. After all, while community initiatives can be credited for making in-roads into repairing harm and building community resilience, the structural reforms that are necessary to promote a more equitable society remain a challenge in the absence of national political support. In this way, when deliberately linked to existing national efforts, reconciliation at the personal and relational levels can advance inclusion, justice, and fairness at a broader level.

Thirdly, we also observed that deeply imaginative and transformative processes at local level can support progress, even if national/political will or any formal mechanisms are

absent. In such cases, grassroots programming that acknowledges limits and possibilities on the ground and is led by credible and determined representatives can enable reconciliation to take root, disrupt conflict dynamics, and create conditions for greater inclusivity, adaptation, open communication, community resilience, and agency within contextually competent processes during all phases of conflict. The challenge is that without "upward" synergy, these initiatives would have minimal to no impact in broader society.

Conversely, although formal mechanisms have in some cases made significant contributions to national reconciliation (e.g., in South Africa, Timor-Leste, and Colombia), and community initiatives were able to function on their own, our cases illustrated the benefits when informal and formal mechanisms work in a more integrated way.

Left to their own devices and bereft of political will or community support, formal mechanisms often suffer from "minimal political will", they quickly become "more complicated" than previously imagined, they can be costly and underfunded, and they can "lose the interest" of the local population over time. Institutions and formal mechanisms in and of themselves are (often) necessary, but not adequate signs of reconciliation.

Formal mechanisms are only as good as the political and social processes in which they are embedded.

Formal mechanisms are only as good as the political and social processes in which they are embedded. Appropriate formal mechanisms based on shared policy to achieve pragmatic, incremental gains, should therefore be accompanied by parallel efforts aimed at providing communities with a more in-depth connection, local relevance, and a deeper appreciation of national reconciliation.

Our cases did however provide several snapshots into processes, discussed earlier, that succeeded to influence "down" and/or "up" or indeed "sideways". In Sierra Leone, Germany, Kenya, and several others, informal dialogue processes did provide the kind of trusted leadership without which formal transitional justice institutions are unable to reach their goals, whereas formal, state-backed institutions often have a reach and capacity not matched by local groups. It would be prudent therefore, that formal and informal institutions alike, recognize their respective limits and seek to work together.

6. Strengthen trust in reconciliation processes through meeting realistic, step-by-step, short-term commitments.

In cases where institutions or governments have caused extensive and ongoing harm, reconciliation is often perceived as requiring "large-scale change" that is accompanied by "major promises". More reserved approaches towards reconciliation however recognize that reconciliation is fostered through incremental change, which paves the way for lasting change, and for this to succeed all parties need to stay the course.

Such incremental, but ultimately transformative approaches weave a strong fabric for sustained peace by enabling creative spaces for the restoration of civility, dignity, confidence building, healing, equality, and trust. As demonstrated in several of the examples

highlighted in the preceding sections, reconciliation is most often the result of local initiatives, offering and delivering concrete "smaller", but important gains to communities, often supported by international actors.

Reconciliation is most often the result of local initiatives, offering and delivering concrete "smaller", but important gains to communities.

For example, when an institution, such as a governmental institution, "takes responsibility for the harm that they have caused", acknowledge its impact on communities, and "communicate their commitment to change into reparative actions," relationships between institutions and communities can be repaired through "small, tangible, practical changes that ensure follow-through."

With this possibility in mind, international actors need to recognize locally-led processes and endeavor to support their efforts, whilst keeping a firm eye on the ultimate goals. This means too, that a special focus on the efforts of insider-mediators is hugely beneficial.

7. Identify and monitor mutually accepted signs of progress to mark medium-term goals such as increased inclusivity, deepening fairness, and improving trust.

Future efforts at developing "theories of change" for reconciliation should seek a better understanding of types of "signs of progress" acceptable in different societies through developing participatory indicator systems.[7] While striving for conceptual clarity and consistency, these efforts should not stifle diversity or deny context-specificity.

Perceptions and expectations of reconciliation varied between the cases, both across and within different levels of society. Often people in a single community may have different experiences, stories, and perceptions of reconciliation. Formal mechanisms grounded in universal assumptions are usually less able to adequately recognize and address the variations in experiences, perceptions, and differential needs of individuals and groups across a given society.

In this investigation, trust as a marker of reconciliation is demonstrated by the willingness to enter and stay in reconciliation processes with another, formerly hostile, party. Trust, in this context, depends crucially on demonstrable commitment to a mutually agreed process and the concomitant rise in understanding of perspectives, motives, and behavior of the other, and closely linked to this, increased empathy, where previously no such understanding or empathy existed.

7 For an exemplary example of such work, see the "Everyday Peace Indicator Project" run by Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty. For more information, visit https://www.everydaypeaceindicators.org/.

Moreover, inclusivity and fairness act as reliable, flexible, and evolving markers for sustainable reconciliation. The evidence borne out in this study reveals the subtleties of relational transformation that may become evident in local markets, community centers, houses of worship, community gatherings that are representative of different groups within society, and interdependent initiatives that include the participation of former conflicting groups working together towards a mutual goal. More formal signs that reconciliation is present in society would necessarily involve concrete steps towards a shared future that all parties recognize.

8. As part of a delicate balancing act, keep a focus on the longer-term goals of addressing the root causes of the conflict—even if promising (and delivering) more modest, incremental change towards those larger objectives

In South Africa, activists used to say, "justice keeps reconciliation honest, but reconciliation keeps justice inclusive". Reconciliation processes need to maintain a delicate balance between incremental progress and managing expectations on the one hand, and ensuring that it does not lose its way by somehow forgetting or ignoring its ultimate goals, such as agreeing on a shared future, and achieving social and other forms of justice, reparations and the full restoration of relationships harmed or prevented by conflict—all without raising unrealistic expectations, or getting ahead of itself.

For reconciliation to remain on track towards justice, individuals and organizations facilitating or accompanying reconciliation processes need to constantly review the power-balance of actors to ensure that power is transferred to affected communities and is not mainly driven by donor, project or supportive entities' timelines or interests. This may require deliberately stepping away from traditional donor roles into accompaniment and support roles that have to exceed traditional project funding cycles and entail qualitative support mechanisms that don't take away the local ownership and leadership but rather support them.

9. Make provision to address past violence publicly, even if in a compromised form, provided it is acceptable to a majority of victims and does not run an undue risk of reigniting the violence or re-traumatizing victims.

Demands to "deal with the past" is often a deal-breaker to those who stand to lose power, resources, and freedom. In Northern Ireland, this demand fell largely by the wayside, despite many other impressive reforms. But as a result, our case made it clear that the process there, as in many other cases, remains dangerously incomplete. We therefore propose that reconciliation processes insist on making some provision to address past violence, even if in a compromised form—that is a form that may not initially include classic judicial elements such as punishment or incarceration. At the same time, it must not be permitted to allow impunity and with that the perception that "they got away with it". A

reckoning with past harm, where victims are properly recognized and reparations are paid, seems essential to most if not all the cases we examined. Without this acknowledgement of harm, victims and other vulnerable groups would not be convinced of the authenticity of any reconciliation process.

On the flip side, if "dealing with the past" becomes so menacing to those who inflicted past harm, and if they remain powerful and representative of significant portions of the population, some painful compromises with what may be considered as "justice" may become essential.

Critical here, it seems, like in the case of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan, the negotiated settlement in South Africa, the peace agreement in Colombia, and the Franco/German process after World War II, is that these agreements pave the way for sustained and equal inclusion of all groups, as well as a firm commitment to avoid future violence. And to this end, it has to overcome a remarkably complex dilemma, namely how to satisfy those who suffered most whilst pacifying those who inflicted the most harm in the past.

10. Facilitate understanding and empathy in culturally, politically, and gender sensitive ways and with adequate preparation.

In communities of deep distrust and long histories of violence, "bringing groups together" is not a simple undertaking.

The cases at hand offered several interesting strategies to consider when seeking to establish some cohesion between groups where the trust is particularly low. In the cases of Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, amongst others, deeply divided communities were successfully brought together through using what has been called "insider mediators", that is, mediators whose strength does not lie in their neutrality, but their deep connectivity to, and respect in, one or more of the conflicted groups. Through using them to launch extensive conversations, dialogues, and engagements within their communities, sometimes called "single-constituency engagements", these leaders were able to safely discuss the idea of interdependence with the other groups and the benefits of non-violent engagements. They allayed fears, consulted fringe groups and powerful individuals, and gradually prepared their group for their first, sometimes hesitant forays, into direct contact. They also listened deeply and recorded the needs and managed expectations on the process ahead, and pre-empted potential spoiler groups and obstructionist authorities.

Another strategy, mentioned in the context of Cambodia, was the use of non-verbal, symbolic actions. Culturally appropriate in that context, Cambodians sometimes seem to prefer symbolism above dialogue, choosing reflective silence over wordy exchanges. This kind of intervention, our case reveals, has at crucial moments in the country's peace process, played a decisive role.

Finally, in a variety of cases, collaborative action, rather than dialogue, was used to foster some semblance of cohesion and resilience, by assisting divided communities to act together for the common good. In some cases, like in Northern Rakhine state (Myanmar), these interventions changed the atmosphere in the local areas, at least for a while, before subsequent external events again clouded the horizon.

It is therefore recommended, as crucial as dialogue is for reconciliation, that it is not implemented without adequate forethought and preparation, and that in cases of extremely low trust and ongoing hostilities, the above strategies (amongst many others) be duly considered.

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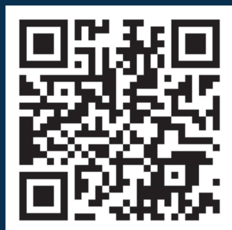

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