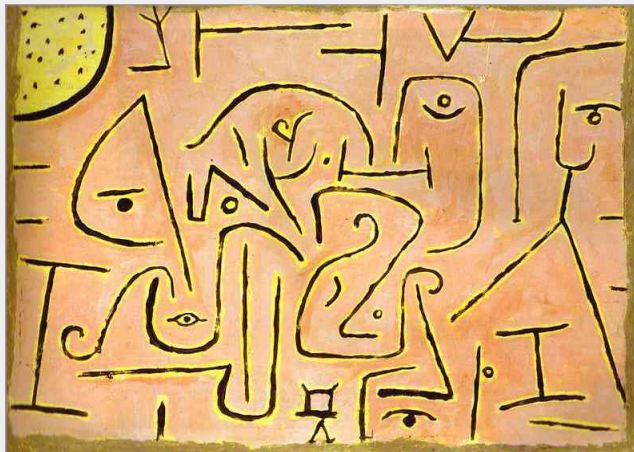# Intra-group Dialogue: Insights from Egypt and Thailand

Owen Frazer, Simon J. A. Mason, Hesham Gaafar, Ahmed Hamdon, Suphatmet Yunyasit and Duanghathai Buranajaroenkij

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Foreword by Ambassador Simon Geissbühler

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Foreword

To support or lead Track 1.0 peace processes is a key priority of the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss FDFA. This involves peace negotiations between governments, armed actors and key players and groups in society who provide input and legitimacy to a peace process, such as political parties, religious actors or women organizations.

Over the years we have seen that Track 1.0 processes do not start over night, they require intense preparation and outreach efforts months and even years before the formal Track 1.0 process begins. One important dimension of this negotiation preparation phase are intra-group dialogue processes, the focus of this publication. Such processes allow for internal reflection, clarification and preparation or adaptation of the negotiation strategy of one side before or in parallel to the formal negotiations with the other side. Even if outsider mediators may not be able to assist such internal processes directly, they should be aware of them so that they can support insider mediators who are the key actors facilitating such processes.

Intra-group dialogue is especially important if a group is rooted in a worldview and value-system that is different than that of the other side. Without such internal processes, there is a risk that negotiators will sign an agreement that is de-linked from their constituencies, and thus will be blocked or impossible to implement. Intra-group dialogue can thus increase negotiation flexibility with the other side, but in a way that is internally legitimatized and therefore sustainable. Furthermore, intra-group dialogue processes play a key role in the longer-term transition of armed actors into political parties that is necessary for functioning democracies to develop. This publication is therefore a must read for all mediators and peace promotion actors: It helps them to become aware of the importance of intra-group dialogues and support them in an appropriate way.

Ambassador Simon Geissbühler, Head Peace and Human Rights Division, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs until July 2024

Summary

Intra-group dialogue is often a key step towards inter-group dialogue, both of which are aimed at transforming conflict. Despite its importance for conflict transformation and peace promotion work, there have to date been few systematic studies of intra-group dialogue. This publication therefore seeks to address an apparent gap in the discourse, explaining what it is, why it is relevant, and how it works based on a review of the literature and two case studies from Egypt and Thailand. Intra-group dialogue refers to dialogue activities carried out within a group to which participants feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the group shapes or is shaped by a wider inter-group conflict, and the purpose of the dialogue relates to the group's relationship to the wider inter-group conflict. Intra-group dialogue therefore seeks to achieve a particular outcome within the group that will contribute to the transformation of the wider conflict. Intra-group dialogues can help groups prepare for, or support, ongoing dialogue with other groups by providing the space to craft a common vision, share a common understanding of the conflict, and develop a joint strategy. Doing this within the group might act as a steppingstone to engagement with other actors. Such intra-group processes can strengthen the coherence, legitimacy, and representation of a group, each of which are important ingredients to the ripening of a situation for consensus-oriented outcomes. At the same time, intra-group dialogues are not without potential pitfalls, such as a hardening of positions or creating intra-group support for violent action. To minimize these risks, knowledgeable third parties (often insiders) and clarity of the overall goal and red lines are vital.

The case study of Egypt focuses on an intra-group dialogue process that occurred in the polarized transition context of Egypt between late 2013 and late 2017. This was facilitated by The Regional Center for Mediation and Dialogue (RCMD) and involved a select group of political parties and movements. The aim of the process was to address endogenous determinants of polarization within groups, and thereby prepare for inter-group dialogue. It was based on a method of self-criticism where parties and movements came to consolidate their identities, increase their value consistency, rectify their mistaken perceptions of the other, and thereby learn to deal with fears resulting from the uncertainties of the political transition that Egypt was going through at the time.

The case study of Thailand describes the "Weaving Peace Together" process. This was an intra-group dialogue platform focused on the conflict in

the southern border provinces of Thailand. It was established in 2015 under the title 'Intra-Buddhist dialogue for Majority-Minority Coexistence in Thailand' and continued until 2022. The aim of the platform was that dialogue between representatives of different sectors of the Buddhist community could address some of the obstacles to conflict transformation in the South and support positive engagement by Buddhists in efforts to transform the conflict.

1. Intra-Group Dialogue: Conceptualization and Design

By Owen Frazer and Simon J. A. Mason

This publication is about the possibilities that intra-group dialogue offers for transforming social and political conflict. Inter-group activities have long been a mainstay of efforts to transform social and political conflict. While it is often acknowledged that intra-group work can contribute to the effectiveness of such activities, little is written that specifically focuses on intra-group dialogue as a mode of conflict transformation. This publication aims to fill that gap. Like other publications in the CSS Mediation Resources series, it offers methodological guidance and insights to practitioners working in the fields of mediation, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Consisting of an analytical framework and a series of case studies, it provides a systematic framework for thinking about how intra-group dialogue can be designed, as well as practical insights about implementing such activities.

The publication is organized into an analytical chapter followed by two case studies of intra-group dialogue. The cases from Egypt and Thailand were selected based on pre-existing relationships between the Center for Security Studies (CSS) and the case authors with the aim of sharing experiences that have not been extensively documented elsewhere. While the selection of cases was not done systematically according to a pre-defined typology, the differences between the contexts and the intervention methodologies employed still offer rich material for empirical analysis. As an analysis of the cases cannot claim to offer a comprehensive picture of intra-group dialogue, however, the analysis chapter also draws on a review of existing literature. The analytical chapter is structured into four sections:

1. **What is intra-group dialogue?** What is meant by intra-group? Specifically, what distinguishes intra-group dialogue from other forms of dialogue?

2. **The logic of intra-group dialogue:** The publication offers a typology of the different kinds of change that practitioners are aiming for when facilitating intra-group dialogue. Why is change at the intra-group level necessary for wider transformation of the conflict?

3. **How intra-group dialogue can help to transform a conflict:** What activities are carried out under the umbrella of intra-group dialogue and what theories of change link these activities to the different goals set?

4. **Factors shaping intra-group dialogue design:** What kind of considerations are relevant when deciding about participants, format, third party, etc., in intra-group dialogue. How does the design of intra-group dialogue differ from that of any other dialogue?

1.1   What is intra-group dialogue?

Intra-group dialogue refers to dialogue carried out within groups. For it to meet the definition of *intra-group,* the participants must understand themselves to share membership in the implied group, whilst the group itself must be involved in, or affected by a wider inter-group conflict. Meanwhile, the purpose of the dialogue must also relate to the group's relationship to the wider inter-group conflict. Intra-group dialogue that is aimed at supporting conflict transformation seeks a particular outcome within the group that will contribute to the transformation of the wider conflict.

Dialogue has been defined as "a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn".[1] Its aim is described as promoting mutual understanding and is often contrasted with other common approaches to conflict resolution such as negotiation (which aims at an agreement on an issue), deliberation (which aims at decision-making), and debate (in which participants aim to convince each other).[2] While these distinctions are helpful and important, spaces created for dialogue in practice may also become spaces where negotiation, deliberation and decision-making can occur. Beginning with dialogue is often helpful. However, a process is often not so linear and there will be switching between modes at different moments. The more that this can be a conscious switching the better. The term "dialogue" is therefore used in this publication with an awareness of the fluidity of processes and the recogni-

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1   Bettye Pruitt and Philip Thomas, *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners* (International IDEA Washington, DC, 2007), 20–21, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20 prevention/democratic%20_dialogue.pdf citing Saunders.

2   Pruitt and Thomas, 22.

tion that some of the things that happen within dialogue spaces may not fall under a narrow definition of dialogue.

1.2   The logic of intra-group dialogue

There are two basic reasons for working within groups. The first reason is that the group is doing, or has the potential to do, things that can positively contribute to the transformation of a societal conflict. The purpose of an intra-group dialogue process is to improve what a group is doing in this regard, or to unlock its potential. The second reason is the opposite. The group is doing, or has the potential to do, things that fuel the conflict. The purpose of an intra-group dialogue process is to try to reduce, or even prevent, such activities. Things are rarely black and white, however, and working within any group will often be motivated by both these concerns, i.e., to foster conflict-transforming behavior whilst also mitigating that which is conflict-fueling.

The underlying logic of all intra-group dialogue is that dialogue within a group can contribute to the transformation of the group's relationship to a wider conflict in which it is a stakeholder. Effective intra-group dialogue involves change at three levels and involves three corresponding theories of change linking these levels, as illustrated in Figure 1. The first level connects intra-group dialogue activities to an expected change within the group. The second level connects the change within the group to a change in the group's interaction with the wider conflict system. The third level connects the change in the group's relationship with the wider conflict system to a positive change in the system as a whole – (this is what has been called "Peace Writ Large").[3] Each level is underpinned by a series of assumptions that need to hold true for the expected change to occur. Dialogue facilitators who spell out the expected changes, the theories that link them, and the assumptions underlying said theories, help to clarify the link between intra-group dialogue and transformation of the wider conflict.

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3   Mary B. Anderson and Lara Olson, "Confronting War," *Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners. Cambridge MA,* 2003, http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/confronting-war-critical-lessons-for-peace-practitioners.pdf.

Figure 1: How intra-group dialogue relates to Peace Writ Large

Intra-group dialogue activities

Change at group level

Change in group's interaction with conflict

Peace Writ Large

Theory of change linking intra-group activity and intra-group transformation

Theory of change linking intra-group transformation with the transformation of inter-group relationships

Theory of change linking the transformation of inter-group relations and the transformation of the conflict system as a whole.

In designing an intra-dialogue process, it is important to think about the entire chain. However, the entry point for thinking about this may vary. In some instances, the group may be the entry point. A particular group, or a third-party with pre-existing connections to a group, may decide to initiate an intra-group dialogue process in order to contribute to conflict transformation. In other cases, a third party looking to contribute to conflict transformation may start by analyzing the conflict as a whole and conclude that one of the obstacles lies in the attitudes or behavior of a particular group. Regardless of the starting point, in all cases, designers of intra-group dialogue processes then need to fill in the theories and the expected changes all the way along the chain, linking their process to the wider transformation they hope to see. Furthermore, to be part of conflict transformation rather than conflict escalation, all work must be done with a view to creating long-term, mutually acceptable outcomes for all parties concerned (meanwhile, the same might be said of any work done with a single actor).

Spelling out the chain of desired changes is a reminder that the multi-level nature of conflicts makes transforming them complex and challenging. Taking a carefully considered perspective at the start of a chain is crucial in forming a basis for what inevitably involves several levels of theory, and several levels of assumption holding true, for intra-group activities to

have a macro-level impact. That a new perspective may emerge further along the chain highlights how dependent conflict transformation can be on successful intra-group work. Sometimes intra-group dynamics can explain changes in inter-group interactions and so transforming inter-group conflict requires working at the intra-group level.[4] Without the necessary preparatory work within groups, efforts further along the chain may become ineffective. It is this second insight that has led many practitioners to focus on intra-group dialogue.

> "Frequently it is the tensions within single identity groups that are the major problem in furthering peacebuilding. Without addressing these tensions, groups will often exaggerate their hostile attitudes towards each other if work is not first done on both developing their confidence to speak as a group and on providing them with the time to sort out their own internal differences." [5]
>
> "Effective inter-party dialogue goes hand in hand with effective intra-party dialogue."[6]

1.3 How intra-group dialogue can help to transform a conflict

The broader logic of intra-group dialogue discussed above leads to three complementary functions: ripening, promoting inclusivity and legitimacy, and enhancing effectiveness.

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4   Kenneth Bush, *The Intra-Group Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Learning to Read Between the Lines* (Springer, 2003), 17. See also Jr Gagnon, "Ethnic Conflict as an Intra-Group Phenomenon: A Preliminary Framework," *Revija Za Sociologiju* 26, no. 1–2 (June 30, 1995): 81–85.

5   Mari Fitzduff and Sue Williams, *Dialogue in Divided Societies: Skills for Working with Groups in Conflict* (Independently published, 2019), 11, https://www.amazon.com/Dialogue-divided-societies-working-conflict/dp/1794186476.

6   Brechtje Kemp, *Political Party Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide* (International IDEA, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, 2013), 104, https://nimd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Political-Party-Dialogue-English.pdf.

Ripening a conflict

Intra-group dialogue is used to develop the "readiness" of the group to engage in or support a negotiation/dialogue with other groups.[7] It may be undertaken in the case of a group which is facing negotiation or dialogue with another group – the success of which depends on the involvement, support and/or consent of internal group members – while the group itself is still divided, or lacking in clarity or agreement. There may not yet be an inter-group process to address the conflict, but there is already a perceived need for an intra-group process to prepare for this, in case it arises in the future.

One of the three criteria of "ripeness", according to Zartman, is the degree of coherence and representation within a group.[8] The less coherent and the less clear who represents the group, the less likely an actor is to engage in negotiations for the purpose of conflict resolution. A factionalized group's default position in a negotiation is "no" as that is the only safe statement to avoid further divisions within the group. Intra-group dialogue, therefore, can foster ripeness by facilitating coherence of the group and providing space for them to clarify who and how they want to be represented in a conflict transformation and negotiation process.

Furthermore, intra-group dialogue is a means to promote creative thinking about what the group, or its members, can do to contribute to conflict transformation. These ideas can be developed in the group and the group's resources and membership drawn on to implement them.

Promoting inclusivity and legitimacy

Intra-group dialogue is also used specifically to improve the inclusivity of a conflict transformation effort. Inclusivity is in turn a central principle to much conflict transformation work. The underlying assumption here is that a just and sustainable peace might only be possible when everyone has the potential to raise their voice and concerns. In some cases, there may be a negotiation or dialogue process taking place in which the group is not yet engaged but may be affected by the outcome. When individuals and groups feel

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7   Pruitt's readiness theory builds on Zartman's ripeness theory to identify the factors that make a group ready to engage in negotiation. He proposes the two key factors are "motivation" to engage and "optimism" about the outcome. Dean G. Pruitt, "The Evolution of Readiness Theory," in Handbook of International Negotiation, ed. Mauro Galluccio (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 123–38, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-10687-8_10; I. William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments," *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 1 (September 2001): 8–18.

8   Zartman calls this the presence of a "Valid Spokesman". Zartman, I.W. (2001) 'The timing of peace initiatives: hurting stalemates and ripe moments', *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics,* 1(1), p. 10.

that they have not been granted the recognition they deserve, this is a recipe for frustration, anger, and conflict. As such, intra-group dialogue can be one forum for consulting and informing wider constituencies before, during, and after more formal negotiation processes.

Intra-group dialogue can also be about building the legitimacy of group representatives engaged in inter-group dialogue and negotiations. Such inter-group processes and their outcomes will only be seen as legitimate if they have the backing of the wider group membership on both sides. Intra-group and inter-group therefore represent the two levels in Putnam's theory of "two-level games"; his theory more broadly posits that successful negotiation requires creating an alignment between what can be agreed between negotiating parties and what their constituencies will support.[9] Intra-group dialogue can enhance the representation of all important views within one group in order to increase the legitimacy of any actions or positions taken by the group and its representatives. The more legitimacy a group is perceived to have within its own wider constituency, the greater the credibility it will have when engaging with other conflict actors and thereby the greater possibility the outcome of any negotiation or dialogue with external actors will be supported by the group's constituency.

In conflicts where the value-systems and worldviews of the conflict parties shape their behavior and interaction with the other conflict parties, intra-group dialogue can take on a specific kind of legitimizing function. Any compromise that comes out of a negotiation with the other side is not likely to be recognized and accepted as legitimate by a constituency if it contradicts deeply held values and beliefs. In such cases, intra-group dialogue may create crucial space for actors to measure their own value-system against any negotiation decisions being taken with the other side. If in fact they are dissonant, intra-group work can be used to adapt the negotiation strategy or re-interpret extant value systems in light of the evolving inter-group negotiation. In such cases it is important that intra-group dialogue involves those actors who are seen as legitimate guardians and interpreters of the community's worldviews (e.g., jurists, scholars, women groups, religious leaders), even if they do not take part in the actual formal negotiation process with the other side.[10]

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9   Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427–60.

10   See Bitter, Mason, Schäublin, Ullmann "Mediation Space: Addressing Obstacles Stemming from Worldview Differences to Regain Negotiation Flexibility" CSS Mediation Resources, 2022.

Enhancing effectiveness

Intra-group dialogue is used to improve the effectiveness of a group's conflict transformation engagement. When the group is already part of a dialogue or negotiation process aimed at resolving or transforming a conflict, the intra-group dialogue supports the group to dialogue or negotiate effectively. As Kemp puts it: "too often parties come to the dialogue table unprepared, with the wrong assumptions or with diverging expectations. Being prepared means doing your homework with regard to the topics on the agenda and securing internal party support for the positions you aim to reach." [11]

Preparing for conflict transformation in intra-group dialogue can be a question of effectiveness, getting to know issues that may arise and preparing negotiation strategies. Visioning, conflict analysis, and negotiation design are some of the approaches that can help a group clarify where they want to be, what situation they are currently in, and how they wish to move forward.

Intra-group Dialogue Activities

In pursuit of the three broader objectives outlined above, an intra-group dialogue may involve the group in several of the following activities.

- **Agreeing on vision, goals:** if the aim of intra-group dialogue is for the group to engage in efforts to transform the wider conflict, including dialogue or negotiation with other groups, intra-group dialogue can be used to help the group to define a common vision and clarify goals for its engagement. Agreeing on a joint vision shared by the group is often the first step. It answers the question "where do we want to be?"
- **Conducting a joint analysis:** if the goal is for the group to act in a co-ordinated way, the second step is often to analyse the conflict together and work towards a developing a shared understanding of the current situation. Such analysis may involve tangible issues (e.g., the economic distribution of wealth and opportunities), as well as less tangible issues (e.g. the value-systems of different involved actors and how they shape economic priorities). This step answers the question: "Where do we currently stand?"
- **Identifying common concerns and interests, then building a strategy:** any group is made up of various sub-groups and individuals with varying interests and concerns. The group may need to spend time working out what are the concerns and interests that they have in common, and

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11 Kemp, *Political Party Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide,* 99.

prioritize them, in order to agree strategies for protecting and furthering those interests. Strategies involve the steps to get from the current situation (based on the analysis) to the future, aspired to situation (based on the visioning). It is therein often helpful to categorize steps into short-term, medium-term, and long-term.

- **Team building:** intra-group dialogue can strengthen internal group solidarity. This may serve several purposes. It may help, for example, the group to act together effectively in pursuing any goals it has set for itself. It may help individuals to feel empowered to take actions because of a reinforced sense of belonging.[12] It may also strengthen the emotional and practical support that group members can offer each other in dealing with the challenges of living with conflict. Group cohesion can be strengthened by creating a shared sense of purpose, shared values, and by strengthening the interpersonal relationships between members of the groups.

- **Building capacities and pooling resources:** by coming together as a group individuals can strengthen their practical capacities to take action. They can exchange know-how and experience to help build each other's skills and knowledge, as well as pooling their diverse resources. As a group they may also have more opportunity than they would as individuals to access resources and support from outside, whether that be material support or training opportunities. Intra-group dialogue can help groups to think creatively about what resources they have already at their disposal, how they can make the best use of them, and what additional efforts they may want to undertake together to strengthen their capacities.

- **Promoting self-reflection and critical thinking:** intra-group dialogue offers the possibility to create a space to explore sensitive subjects, including reflecting on the attitudes and behaviours of the group and its members in relation to the conflict. For this, the dialogue must include the range of voices that exist within the group so that participants' "habitual modes of thought" can be challenged.[13] Through creating a space for challenging conversations, group members can help each other to critically examine their own contribution to the conflict and prompt reflection on

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12   "Tajfel's (1974) identity theory posits that maintaining the identities of separate groups helps with the development of group solidarity as a basis for social change. Devalued or low-power group can reinterpret negative stereotypes as positives ("Black is beautiful". Can develop group consciousness and solidarity "that provide collective resources for collective action". MIGR, *Multi-University Intergroup Dialogue Research Project Guidebook,* 7, accessed September 3, 2020, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L5FBDyl4M2WROheED5NC7BXMAGAJws8V/view?usp=sharing&usp=embed_facebook.

13   Pruitt and Thomas, *Democratic Dialogue,* 40.

what kind of changes the group may need to make to contribute to transforming it. As Pruitt and Thomas put it: "The core dynamic of change in dialogue processes involves people acquiring some perspective on their own thoughts and thought processes".[14] Such self-reflection is often prompted by using techniques like "appreciative inquiry" or "action research".[15]

Many of the approaches employed in intra-group dialogue are similar to those in inter-group dialogue. The key difference, however, is that intra-group dialogue is not stand-alone. It needs to be seen as one step towards conflict transformation with the other side, rather than an end goal in itself. How intra-group work affects inter-group work needs to therefore be continually monitored and evaluated.

1.4 Factors shaping intra-group dialogue design

Like any dialogue process, the specific way in which any intra-group dialogue process seeks to contribute to wider conflict transformation will depend on the context in which it is taking place and the purpose of the conflict transformation effort. The design and purpose of an intra-group dialogue process will be largely determined by the nature of the group and its relationship to the wider conflict that the process is meant to help address. This section presents some factors for consideration that affect the design of an intra-group dialogue.

What types of group?

Figure 2 depicts a simple categorization of the types of groups involved in intra-group dialogue processes that can be helpful for a third party designing a conflict transformation effort. Groups can be broadly divided into three types: organizations, identity groups, and identity-based organizations. This categorization is based on how far a group is coherent in its interests and values and how far members have selected to join or not. The less coherent

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14   Pruitt and Thomas, 39.

15   Appreciative inquiry was originally developed by Cooperrider and Srivsastva, 1987 and Action Research by Lewin, 1946. For a summary see: Maxwell. A. Asumeng and Judith AnsaaOsae-Larbi, "Organization Development Models," *European Journal of Training and Development Studies* 2, no. 3 (September 2015): 29–43.

and the less voluntary the participation, the more such intra-group dialogue may be necessary for the group to become engaged in conflict transformation work in a clear and coherent manner.

Figure 2: Three kinds of group
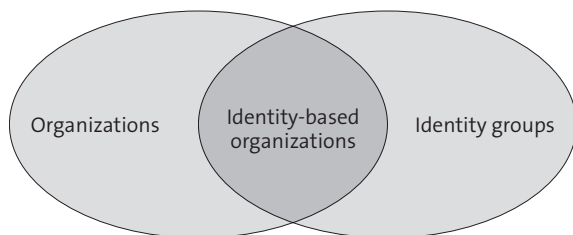
Organizations have a clear membership, a structure that defines the relationship between members, and a defined goal. Typically, members of organized groups elect to join based on an identification with the values and goals of the organization. Political parties, social movements, and civil society organizations are examples of such groups. Organizations become candidates to be involved in conflict transformation activities when the goals of the organizations make them an active stakeholder in the conflict. In some cases, if the goals they are pursuing are in contradiction with the goals of other social and political actors, this may put the organization at the heart of the wider conflict.

Identity groups are those where belonging is based on one or more common characteristics such as a shared ethnicity, language, or belief system. As Bush says, "although inter-group and intra-group boundaries may be permeable or 'fuzzy' at the edges, they nonetheless represent a core set of attributes which define and animate a sub-group at specific points in time".[16] Membership of the group may be one that individuals choose for themselves. This is the case when individuals actively choose to adopt a particular set of beliefs, a particular way of life, or to speak a particular language. In many cases, membership of the group may be less freely chosen when the characteristics are inherited, or if identity is ascribed to individuals based on how others perceive them. Membership of the group may therefore be fuzzy and not only self-selecting. These groups do not necessarily have a defined structure and there may not be a set of values and goals shared by their mem-

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16   Bush, *The Intra-Group Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka,* 15.

bers. Typically, identity groups will become candidates to involve in conflict transformation activities when the identity has become salient in the conflict. Often this is the case when there is a perception that activities by other groups are negatively affecting members of the identity group, or other groups perceive that the identity group is engaged in activities that negatively affect them.

Identity-based organizations are at the intersection of the above two types of groups. They are organizations whose members are drawn from a wider identity-group that exists beyond the organization. Typically, the goal, values and culture of the organization will be connected to this wider identity. Cultural associations that seek to promote and preserve the way of life of a particular community would be one example. Political parties and movements established to represent the interests of an identity group would be another. Faith-based organizations where people of a shared faith come together for a common purpose are yet another. Typically, identity-based organizations become candidates to be involved in conflict transformation activities when either the goals of the organizations make them an active stakeholder in the conflict, or the wider identity group to which they belong has become salient in the conflict.

What is the conflict and what is the relationship of the group to the conflict?

In any context, there may be several different overlapping conflicts and conflict levels. It is important to be clear which conflict(s) a process aims to address and how a group relates to this conflict, since this will greatly affect the design of any intra-group dialogue process. For example:

- A group may be directly in conflict with other groups (this is a frequent situation for an intra-group dialogue as preparation for inter-group work).
- A group may have influence over one of the main actors in a conflict, e.g., jurists and scholars who legitimize political or military actors of a community.
- A group's membership may span conflict divisions, giving the group links to different sides in a conflict (thus making them potentially an insider or local third party/mediator).

What is the level of escalation of the conflict?

The more escalated a conflict is and the longer it has been going on, the more rigid group identities tend to become. The borders between in-group and

out-group also become more clearly defined. As a society becomes polarized, it becomes more difficult for individuals to avoid being labelled as belonging to one side or another. Affiliations to multiple identities and groups tends to reduce to the main dominant group affiliation. Inter-group contact and dialogue is often used to try and counteract such polarizing dynamics and rigid group identities. However, the more escalated and entrenched the conflict, the more difficult it can be to create the right conditions for positive and transformative inter-group work. In such situations, the need for intra-group preparatory work will be greater.

What existing initiatives are underway to address the conflict and how is the group involved?
Any conflict transformation initiative must take into account how it fits into the wider landscape of initiatives to address the conflict. Often the purpose of intra-group dialogue is to support a group's engagement in some larger conflict transformation process. Therefore, an awareness of what those processes are and how an intra-group dialogue is linked, or could link, to them is essential.

1.5   Conclusions: Key insights on the design of intra-group dialogue

The central dilemma and challenge associated with intra-group dialogue relates to the question of how intra-group dialogue will affect inter-group relations. Specifically, how to discern when intra-group dialogue will lead to internal clarification and more group coherence, so as to foster mutually acceptable agreements on the inter-group level, and when it might lead to a hardening of positions, isolation from other perspectives, and thus escalation with the other group?

For third parties, being aware of this challenge is key to minimizing the probability of doing harm. Good process design can help to ensure that intra-group dialogue reaches its goals and avoids doing harm. Based on the framework that has been presented in this section and lessons from the two case studies that follow, this section concludes with a discussion of some key implications for intra-group dialogue process design. These are structured according to the key dimensions of dialogue process design: goal, participation, third party and format.

Goal and red lines

Clarity of goal(s) in intra-group dialogue is key to making sure that the intra-group effort is linked to a future or ongoing inter-group process aimed at establishing better relations with other groups, rather than as a form of preparation for escalation. If an intra-group dialogue is taking place in the context of negotiations to end a conflict, the intra-group goal formulation benefits from including a statement that it seeks to work towards mutually acceptable agreements with other groups on the inter-group level. This links two steps in the "theory of change" staircase mentioned above (see Figure 1). If the group then decides to do something that contradicts the original goal of the dialogue, the original goal can then be used by a third party as a reference point for adjusting or disengaging from the process. An important indicator of whether the dialogue risks deviating from its original goal is the type of language and actions that go hand in hand with intra-group work. Is less violent language and behavior on the increase, or on the decrease?

The option of adapting, handing over or disengaging from the process is key for a third party to maintain its integrity and minimize the risks of intra-group work leading to an escalation of conflict on the inter-group level. At the same time, an external third party should never force a group to enter into negotiations, as these need to be voluntary to be legitimate and sustainable. While intra-group dialogue may be a safe space for a group to think through different options: non-violent advocacy, peaceful non-cooperation, violent self-defence, or consensus-oriented approaches (dialogue, negotiation, mediation), most third parties will have their own red lines regarding when they would stop supporting intra-group dialogues that would usually include moves by the group towards violent forms of resolving the conflict.

An intra-group dialogue generally benefits by having a future orientation. This can help avoid self-flagellation and finger pointing, as shown in the Egypt case study. If the past is discussed, it is to learn and improve in the future, rather than judge and condemn what has been done. The past cannot be changed, the future can. The Egypt case study also shows that those parties that went through an intra-group process before engaging in the inter-group level were more constructive and open to exchange than if they had not.

Participation

The selection of participants for an intra-group dialogue will be shaped by the context and conflict analysis as well as the goals and objectives set for the

dialogue. In the case of organizations, given their pre-defined membership structure, the pool of potential participants will naturally be much smaller than for identity groups where there is not necessarily a pre-existing structure. Particular considerations regarding participant selection include:

- **Level:** participant selection will depend on the level of change and scope of effort the dialogue is aiming at. At which level of society is the wider conflict occurring? Is it a national level conflict, a community-level conflict, or an interpersonal conflict? Is the scale of effort of the dialogue focused on one community, multiple communities, a whole sub-region, or an entire country?[17]

- **Representativeness:** the broader the legitimacy the group wishes to have, the more important it is for different sub-groups to be represented within the dialogue. This implies that, other than the common identity characteristic that defines the group, there should be participant diversity in terms of characteristics like profession (business, government, religious, educational, third sector), gender, geography (i.e., such as the urban/rural divide), age, etc. Legitimacy of representatives does not just come from formal, institutional structures, but oftentimes, and perhaps more so, from informal, customary, and religious sources. There is a 'babushka' dynamic to defining the parameters of participation of intra-group dialogue. Within every group there are sub-groups, and even smaller sub-groups within those. At all levels one can use similar dialogue approaches. The question of where the parameters of a group are is, to some degree, arbitrary. Thus, it is crucial to reflect upon the links between these boundaries and the overall "theory of change" steps (see Figure 1 above).

- **Diversity:** Increasing the group's legitimacy in the eyes of others requires diverse participation. However, the more diversity there is, the greater number of divergent views there will be within the group. One big division will often be between "hawks" advocating for more confrontational approaches, and "moderates" advocating for more conciliatory approaches to the other side. The key here is to distinguish between ideas and value-systems vs. behaviours and actions. Intra-group dialogues often gain legitimacy by having actors involved who have radically different ideas and value-systems to the mainstream (so called "fundamentalists"), but

17 Peter Woodrow, Nick Oatley, and Michelle Garred, "A Guide for the Design, Monitoring and Evaluation of Inter-Religious Action for Peacebuilding" (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and Alliance for Peacebuilding, September 2017), 50, https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Faith-Matters-A-guide.pdf.

who are not pushing for violent behaviour to implement them. In order to maintain broad legitimacy, an intra-group dialogue needs to include a good balance of hawks and moderates. However, when there is a good balance of different viewpoints this makes agreement difficult. This can slow down decision making and may leave the more activist of members frustrated. Thus, there is a difficult balance between pursuing dialogue long enough to reach an acceptable consensus and moving from dialogue towards action so that participants feel there is enough momentum and forward progress to continue. The challenges of diversity in participation and how they might be handled are illustrated in the Thailand case study.

- **Change over time:** participation does not need to be static from A-Z of the intra-group dialogue. An incremental increase in participation allowing for a growth of diversity over time may help to solve some of the dilemmas outlined above.

- **Light dose of inter-group:** As was done in the Thailand case, selected input from representatives of other groups in an intra-group process can help to slowly prepare for linking intra-group work to inter-group work. As it is not the typical 50/50 type of interaction of inter-group dialogue, but more like a 95/5 balance, the 5% from the "other" group is likely to be seen as non-threatening, and can thereby more gently prepare the group for inter-group exchange. Thus, for example, an opposition group can be slowly prepared for constructive engagement with the government.[18]

Third Party

Any dialogue can benefit from the support of a skilled and experienced facilitator. Such third party support is also an important safeguard against the risk of intra-party dialogue doing harm, since said party may pull the brake or adjust the process design if things appear to be getting out of hand. Third parties may also be able to provide other kinds of support such as financial, knowledge, and advice on conflict analysis, process design and strategizing, inputs on substance being discussed in the group, or skill-building.

The identity of the third party often affects their acceptability to the group. In the case of intra-group dialogue, it is particularly important that any facilitator is highly familiar with the culture of the group. Insiders will often have the advantage of close familiarity with the group and its culture.

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18   Example of this was tried in Zimbabwe (forthcoming publication in "Mediation Resources" series).

Trusted insider mediators can often read the group better.[19] They are also less likely to be seen as meddling. Working with insider mediators also minimizes the risk of outside third parties imposing their value-systems. This is a greater challenge in intra-group work as opposed to inter-group work, as in inter-group work the different groups' value-systems can more easily counter-balance the third party's value-system.

The group may sometimes, however, prefer an outsider who is not perceived as having links or connections to any sub-group within the group and may be perceived as being able to be more objective and impartial during sensitive discussions.[20] As a general principle, the more sensitive a context and group, the more internal ownership will be needed. Changing formats (see below) can respond to this need, where outsiders leave the format for the more sensitive internal discussions before coming back once the group has come to a common view. What any third party must bear in mind is that engaging in intra-group work may rule them out as facilitators of inter-group work in the same context as they would then be perceived as partial.

Format

Dialogue often conjures the simple image of people sitting in a circle and talking. Yet a diversity of formats can be used. Thought should therefore be given to the balance between large and small-group formats. Building group cohesion and agreement will require a combination of both. In smaller, more intimate encounters people will have an opportunity to build personal connections and have deeper conversations. However, full group sessions will be important for creating awareness of the diversity of views in a group and for building consensus. Even in intra-group dialogues there will be sub-groups with differing concerns and interests. Time will need to be dedicated for these sub-groups to discuss amongst themselves. In the case of facilitated dialogues, facilitators may also need to spend time separately with these sub-groups.

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19   Simon A. Mason, "Insider Mediators: Exploring Their Key Role in Informal Peace Processes" (Berghof Foundation for Peace Support Berlin, 2009), http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Insider-Mediators.pdf; Mir Mubashir and Luxshi Vimalarajah, "Tradition- & Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) in Conflict Transformation (Baseline Study – Synopsis)" (Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2016), https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/TFIM_Synopsis_EN_web.pdf.

20   See, for example, this reflection on intra-faith dialogue in the UK: "Outsiders, including government, actually have a real role to play in supporting intra-faith dialogue. Outsiders can be "honest brokers" in facilitating dialogue; they can train participants; they can provide resources; they can publicise best practice. Support for intra-faith dialogue could make a real difference to inter-faith relations in this country. What is needed now is for someone within government to have the vision to promote it." https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jan/15/intrafaithtofaith

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2. Case Study: Depolarizing Through a Self-Criticism Process in Egypt 2013–2017

By Hesham Gaafar and Ahmed Hamdon, Regional Center for Mediation and Dialogue (RCMD)

This chapter reviews an extended intra-group dialogue process that occurred in the polarized transition context of Egypt after mid-2013. The Regional Center for Mediation and Dialogue (RCMD), an Egyptian non-profit organization, initiated and facilitated this dialogue within and among a selected set of political parties and movements between late 2013 and late 2017. This intra-group dialogue was based on self-criticism as a tool to deal with the endogenous reasons of polarization in the turbulent Egyptian transition, i.e. the deeply-rooted traits and constructs of the influential political parties and movements which impeded them from engaging in any inter-group dialogue to transform the wider political and societal conflict.

By engaging in such dialogue, different parties and movements come to consolidate their identities, sharpen the consistency of their values, rectify their mistaken perceptions of the other, and therefore become better equipped to deal with the fears and premonitions that result from the uncertainties of the political process in the context of transition. The self-criticism approach to dialogue makes sure to address endogenous determinants of polarization, and therefore provides a solid soil upon which any inter-group dialogue can be sustained.

The chapter starts by reviewing the different manifestations of aligned interests and polarization that unfolded in the following phases: 1) 2011 to June 2012, which involved a broad but turbulent alignment of Islamists and non-Islamists against military dominance in the government, 2) June 2012 to 3 July 2013, with the Muslim Brotherhood in power, in government, via democratic elections, 3) 3 July 2013 onwards, after the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood. The chapter goes on to explain why a self-criticism-based intra-group dialogue was considered a suitable tool to deal with the situation after July 2013. Afterwards, the third section reviews the goals and objectives of the intra-group dialogues that RCMD facilitated within a group of political parties and movements. The fourth section then delves into the methodology and design of the multi-circles dialogue process within, and among, polit-

ical parties and movements in terms of steps of the process, its participants, and agenda of topics, etc. The paper then concludes by presenting challenges and dilemmas that the process faced and what RCMD did to mitigate them.

2.1 Context: Post-2011 turbulent political transition

Transition contexts are often ripe with polarizations and changing pro-democratic alignments that were not apparent or suppressed in the pre-transition era. The Egyptian transition in the wake of the 2011 revolution was no exception. In fact, coordinated political opposition, such as the Kefaya movement and the National Association for Change, played an important role in democratization efforts before the revolution. The days of revolution themselves generated some form of coordinated youth opposition, i.e., the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution, which included youth members from the Muslim Brotherhood, and the April 6th Movement, among numerous other political affiliates. Until 11 February 2011, when President Hosni Mubarak was ousted, there was a common cause between most of the Islamist and non-Islamist or secular youth actors, as they did not want to see military dominance of the government. Nonetheless, over time, partners of the revolution turned into more rigid political opponents who quarreled over the direction of the transition process.

Just a few weeks after the removal of Mubarak, the different priorities, and approaches between Islamists on one side and non-Islamist advocates and revolutionary youth movements on the other surfaced more clearly. A question emerged as to the direction of the transitional period: a choice between 1) amending the 1971 constitution and moving quickly to the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, or 2) writing a new constitution, and giving time for political parties to emerge from the revolution, along with movements capable of competing with the Muslim brotherhood and other long-established, well-organized political parties.[21] The contention at the time was around the identity of the state and the role of Sharia law in legislation and governing.

This tactical question soon turned into an identity polarization between Islamists and non-Islamist advocates. Discourses on the proposed

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21   For example, Elwafd Party (Liberal) and Eltagmo'a Party (Leftist) both were long-established and well-organized with MPs in the 2005 and 2010 parliaments. They also had offices in most governorates, yet they didn't have as much grassroot support as the MB and NDP.

amendments to the constitution, supported by Islamists, turned into a quarrel over Article 2 of the constitution, related to the supremacy of Islamic Sharia among other sources of legislation. Almost all media debates, talk shows, and political parties presented the issue as if Islamists were supporting the amendments to safeguard Article 2 against seculars' attempts to get rid of it through their calls to write a new constitution.

Although Article 2 was not put to vote in the constitutional amendments' referendum in March 2011, differences between Islamists and non-Islamist advocates revolved around it. This was a clear sign of the use of religious notions in the management of the political conflict. In fact, the essence of the question about whether the elections or the new constitution should come first was the idea of allowing other non-Islamist political forces to form and organize in order to be able to compete with the well-organized Muslim Brotherhood, which had a long expertise in electoral politics.

In retrospect, while between 2011 and June 2012 there was a basic common understanding between Islamist and non-Islamist actors to avoid military dominance of the government, there were also differences in approaches that made this common cause vulnerable and that could be used by those in favor of a strong military role in the government. It was a phase marked by the collapse of old political formulas, and the dissolution of established political and security apparatuses, where a whole new set of questions regarding the appropriate new formulas and institutions for the post-transition era were raised.

These tensions continued to rise throughout the second transitional period (June 2012 – 3 July 2013) and manifested in multiple venues: 1) inside the newly formulated political institutions, i.e., House of Representatives and Shura Council, 2) within the 100-member Constituent Assembly tasked to write the new constitution, and 3) in media talk shows and ordinary conversations. The alleged manipulation by the deep state (a conglomerate of long-established security apparatuses alongside allies in the judiciary, media, and businesspeople, as well as regional and international allies) of most political and societal players to serve its agenda is one common reason given to explain the rising escalation in that period.

The Muslim Brotherhood's year in office (June 2012 – June 2013) was shaped by a political and societal turmoil that culminated in nation-wide mass protests, calling for the removal of the first democratically elected civilian president, Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and even for the Army's intervention, i.e., to remove the president by the end of June

2013. This in fact occurred, in place of other would-be measures, such as future elections or official impeachment. The protests resulted in a palace coup where the then-minister of defense Abdelfattah El-Sissi, who was presiding over the military chain of command, ousted and arrested the president and his entourage on the third of July 2013, announcing a new transitional period under the interim-leadership of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court. Thus, the Islamist and non-Islamist alignment against military rule that lasted between 2011 and June 2012 (with its disagreements about approaches and priorities), was replaced in July 2013 by a re-empowered military rule and factionalized opposition.

The fierce opposition of the National Salvation Front, a political coalition of 35 Political parties and movements, to the Brotherhood rule under late President Morsi, and their support of the military intervention in the political process and the ensuing security persecution against Islamists created further grievances that complicated the turbulent transition context. With a proclivity for dehumanizing and demonizing the other at the time, mutual accusations of responsibility for the deterioration of the revolution predominated in most political discourses among key actors. Stringent political stances were the norm, and compromises became very rare.

2.2   Why self-criticism in Egypt's polarized transition?

Before exploring why self-criticism as a form of intra-group dialogue was chosen in this context from July 2013 onwards, it is necessary to give some more insight into the complicated and fluid nature of most parties and movements in this transition phase.

Characteristics of parties and movements during transition

On the eve of the 2011 revolution, Egypt's restrained political pluralism only allowed for 25 political parties to operate. Nearly half of them were authorized via court verdicts after initial rejection by the official 'Committee for Political Parties' Affairs'. After the revolution this number extensively increased, with the easing of unnecessary restrictions in the 'Political Parties law', standing at 100+ registered political parties in the post-revolution phase.

Political groups that were active before the revolution soon established new political parties. Other parties resulted from the politicizing effect of the revolution that mobilized thousands of usually non-politicized

Egyptians to assume a political role and form into new political parties that self-identified with the revolutionary youth across the spectrum. Those parties, however, included in their ranks extensively diverse affiliations, ideological backgrounds, and sub-groups; and in the rush of the transitional period and its black-and-white zero-sum games, nearly all newly born political parties suffered from internal divisions and polarizations (these even culminated into splits in some cases). Put differently, the new political entities, parties, and movements alike, were either adapting to the new situation or still evolving from loose formats into more organized ones. Therefore, most key players were in a fluid condition that made decision making very troublesome.

Identities of key political actors in the wake of the revolution were often, for the sake of simplification, grouped in two key groups: (1) Islamists; and (2) Seculars or Non-Islamist. It should be clear, however, that neither of these two groups represented a harmonious whole and their political role and relations shifted between 1) 2011 to June 2012, 2) June 2012 to June 2013, and 3) post July 2013. Indeed, each category witnessed a high level of fluidity and fragmentation over time to the extent that within each group other forms of polarizations and sensitivities prevented coordinated efforts.

With regards to Islamists, different groups started to form into organized political parties to parallel their established societal/religious organizations. The Muslim Brotherhood launched the *Freedom and Justice Party,* and the *Salafist Movement* launched *El-Nour Party* and a couple other parties to represent various sub-groups within the Movement. The *Wasat Party,* another Islamist party operating since 1996 under leadership of former dissident members of the Muslim Brotherhood, was also allowed to register by a court verdict one week after the revolution. The *Islamic Group (El Gama'a El Islamiyya),* a militant Islamic organization that renounced violence in the 1990s, launched its political arm, the *Construction and Development Party.*

On the other hand, liberal and leftist actors started to organize in new parties and organizations such as the liberal *Free Egyptians Party (FEP),* the centrist *Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP),* and the leftist *Socialist Popular Alliance Party (SPAP).* The *Egyptian Current Party (Eltayar El-Masry Party)* was also formed by some members of the famous *'Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution',* including dissident youth members of the Muslim Brotherhood, and lastly Abd Elmoniem Aboul Fotouh, who is a leading figure in the Muslim Brotherhood, ran independently for presidency, while his presidential campaign transferred, after the election, into a new political party carrying the same name *Strong Egypt Party* (SEP).

Figure 1: Map of political powers in mid-June 2013
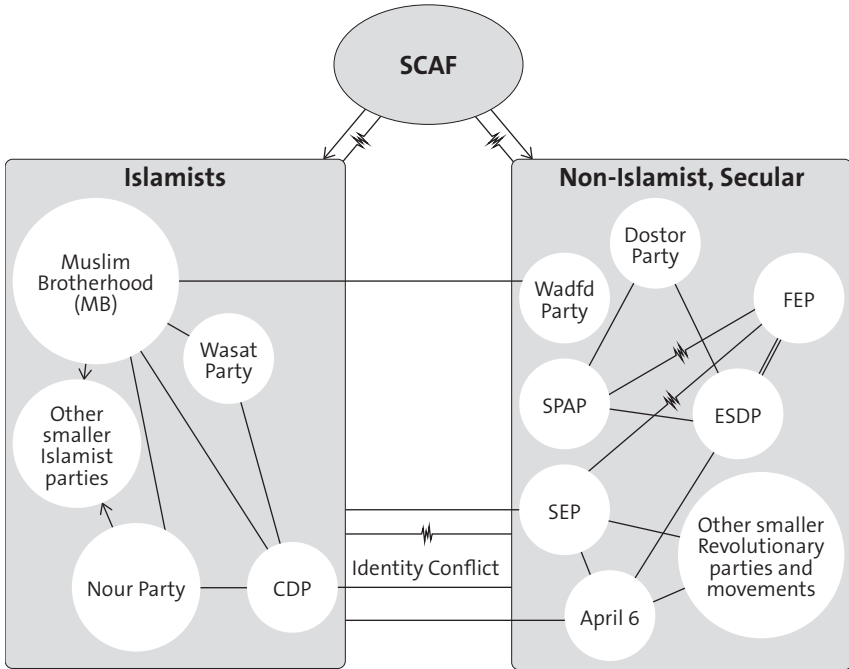
- ⌇ tension/conflict
- — relationship/communication
- = alliance
- → direction of influence/pressure

MB: Largest Islamist group and Party, lead member of "Democratic Coalition" electoral coalition, 222 MPs.

Nour Party: Islamist, Salafist Party, Sharia Law Advocate, lead Member of "Islamic Block" electoral coalition, 112 MPs.

Wasat Party: Islamist, less polarized, 10 MPs.

SPAP: Socialist Popular Alliance Party, a leftist party, member of "The Revolution Continues" electoral coalition, 7 MPs.

SEP: Strong Egypt Party, centrist/conservative/post-ideology, formed after presidential elections.

FEP: Free Egyptians Party, liberal, lead member of "the Egyptian Block" electoral coalition, 15 MPs.

ESDP: Egyptian Social Democratic Party, centrist, member of the "Egyptian Block" electoral coalition, 16 MPs.

April 6: Revolutionary youth movement, effective participant, and organizer of street movements.

Wafd Party: Liberal, long established before 2011 revolution, member for a time of "Democratic Coalition" electoral coalition, but ran independently afterwards, 39 MPs.

SCAF: Supreme Council of Armed Forces, leading authority in Egypt's transition.

CDP: Construction and Development Party.

The point here is that political actors in the post-2011 phase, June 2012 to 3 July 2013 phase, and then post July 2013 phase were in a fluid situation, where they constantly changed and developed. They all faced important questions and had to deal with complex contradictions starting from their political and ideological identities, their value systems, plans of actions, and political agendas. Most of them did not qualify completely for being an organization (see chapter 1 above), with a clear membership, a structure that defines the relationship between members, and a defined goal. The values and goals of most political actors were actively contested in an attempt to adapt to the new circumstances. They did not necessarily have defined structures and they certainly lacked clear sets of values and goals shared by their members.

Self-criticism to address lack of internal cohesion of parties and movements

The composition and structure (or lack thereof) of post-2011 political parties and movements dictated the course of the intra-group self-criticism-based dialogue that RCMD launched with a selected set of political parties and movements towards the end of 2013. Most political parties and movements in the wake of the 2011 revolution could not decide the best strategies to pursue their interests. They were so consumed in attempting to dictate the direction of the transition, revolving mainly around identity politics, amid the turbulent developments on the ground, that all they cared about was scoring against their opponents, winning the referendum, for example, or controlling the parliament and the constituent assembly for the new constitution. In the rush of this zero-sum game, most political entities did not have the time or the ability to sort out their internal contradictions, leaving them to further escalate.

The high intensity of the political and societal conflict that followed the 2013 military overthrow of the late President Morsi rendered most inter-group contact and dialogue nearly impossible, since all parties were entrenched behind their polarized positions. The words dialogue and reconciliation themselves gained negative connotations. For Islamists, it meant letting go of their colleagues' blood, which was shed in the security crackdown on the president's supporters after the coup, while for liberals and leftists it meant opening a door to the restoration of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian politics. A motto of the phase became: "If you don't like it here, you can emigrate". First, it was said by Islamists, in their moment of triumph between June 2012 to July 2013, to liberals and leftists who detested the so-called Islamic awakening, which pushed them to emigrate to the West.

After mid-2013, it was used against the Islamists who were ousted from power, this time the potential destination they were pushed to was either Qatar or Turkey, which embraced the political Islam project in the region.

Against this backdrop, intra-group dialogue was the only possible conflict transformation activity that could be implemented as a way station towards an inclusive inter-group dialogue. Basing parallel rounds of intra-group dialogues on self-criticism was RCMD's intervention to help these parties and movements reach internal agreements with regards to their goals, identities, agendas, and strategies.

Self-criticism as an approach to intra-group dialogue is very important in transition contexts that are often ripe with contradictions and unsettled questions that demand compromises rather than clear victories. In the post- July 2013 phase of the Egyptian transition, it was our conviction that political parties' endogenous factors were as conducive to political and societal polarization as other equally important exogenous factors stemming from the context and the surrounding environment.

Dialogues in such contexts often look for exogenous reasons for polarizations like contradictory positions, controversial issues, and/or international or regional alliances, etc. They often are sought in the inter-group level, where most social and political conflict transformation activities occur. Our intervention, however, was a process of self-criticism-based dialogue at the intra-group level to address the endogenous reasons behind polarization, i.e. the deeply rooted traits and constructs of the influential political and societal players, their contradictions and/or misperceptions about the other, that hinder conflict transformation prospects and contribute to intensifying the wider political polarization.

By engaging in such dialogue, it was our understanding that different parties would come to consolidate their identities, sharpen their value consistency level, rectify their mistaken perceptions of the other, and therefore become better equipped to deal with the fears and premonitions that result from the uncertainty of the political process in the transition context. This way, by internally reviewing a political party's, or movement's, record against their value systems and their political agendas, they can settle important questions and contradictions and come out better equipped to constructively deal with the wider political conflict.

Part of the self-criticism process centered on discussions about the self-proclaimed identity of the party/movement, corresponding values, and their consistency with behaviors, because most political players did not have a

clear vision for their identity (were they a group or a party? Leftist or liberal? Where did they stand with regards to religion? etc.); some of them reneged on their promises, which undermined mutual trust, while others claimed values of participatory decision making but kept the loop very tight in the higher echelons. Additionally, mutual fear and misperception ruled over most inter-group relations: Islamists feared the seculars, while liberals and Christians feared the Islamists. In short, a cloud of fear, premonitions, and mistrust very much dominated the political scene in this transition context.

Our assumption was that by offering different influential political parties and movements the opportunity to review their stances and positions since the beginning of the turbulent transition period in February 2011, each would come out with a clearer understanding of their own internal contradictions, those which might otherwise impede them from opening up and accepting others. This would in turn present the increasing possibility of an inter-group dialogue to remedy the larger political and societal conflict, with the prospects of emerging democracy enhanced with improved political parties and movements.

2.3   Goals and objectives of the dialogue

The self-criticism-based internal dialogues that RCMD initiated separately with several political parties and movements between 2013–2017 aimed ultimately at supporting democratic transition. It aimed to do this through easing the unhealthy polarization of the political and societal conflict that emerged in the wake of the 2011 revolution, as well as that which had intensified after the mid-2013 ousting of the first democratically-elected civilian president, Mohamed Morsi.

An internal dialogue centered on the idea of self-criticism was our approach towards dealing with the rising polarization, especially since inter-party dialogue was not possible at that moment. Our assumption was that encouraging and supporting important political parties and movements (especially from the change camp: those forces that championed the revolution) to review their positions towards the various contentious issues of the transitional period would bear fruitful results with regards to their approach towards the wider political conflict.

This was supposed to happen incrementally, that is, first internal dialogue targeted incurring necessary changes at the group level, which would in

turn lead to positive changes in the groups' interactions with the wider context, including the rising political and societal conflict. To clarify more, these self-criticism-based intra-group dialogues targeted several objectives on two key levels: 1) general objectives related to the wider society and political system, 2) group-level objectives related to the performance of different parties and movements and their internal structures. It is important, however, to note that these two objectives went hand in hand and mutually reinforced each other.

General objectives

The dialogue aimed generally at empowering the participating parties to deal with the complexities and contradictions of the transitional period in a way that enhanced the prospects of democratic transition and their positive contribution towards the establishment of the new democratic system.

Furthermore, a core idea of the intra-group design was that by creating a space for the engaged parties and movements to discuss and share the outcomes of the internal self-criticism processes in a complementary inter-group dialogue format, mutual credibility of the participating parties would increase and therefore trust might be re-established between seeming rivals with broadly similar visions. In other words, when a specific party or movement announced the results of its internal self-criticism process (a process that necessarily included acknowledging the party's role in the deterioration of the revolution), this would enhance its credibility in the eyes of other political entities and would encourage them to follow its lead. Consequently, the level of trust would increase among rivals within the change camp. In short, RCMD's approach to intra-group was always conducted under the premise that it ought to contribute to mutually acceptable agreements between all parties and movements in Egypt.

Another general objective of the self-criticism-based internal dialogues was to prevent political violence, because when political entities and their members think about their own share of responsibility for the stumbles of the transitional period, and review their key positions throughout that period, they will come out less inclined to resort to violence because they now acknowledge their role in the stumbling of the revolution.

The last general objective of the self-criticism process was that it ought to facilitate the reintegration of political players excluded from the political process in the aftermath of the third of July 2013 military intervention. Namely, parties and movements in the *Coalition Supporting Legitimacy* that opposed the military intervention and refused to recognize the legiti-

macy of the third of July regime. It was RCMD's perception that facilitating a process of self-criticism among Egyptian political parties and movements might encourage parties of the *Coalition Supporting Legitimacy* to engage more constructively with other actors and this may then facilitate their peaceful reintegration in Egyptian politics. Such a reconciliation between all parties and movements could possibly avoid demonstrations and chaos like those that paved the way for the military coup on the third of July 2013.

Specific objectives at the group level

It was planned for the participating parties and movements to be the owners of the intra-group dialogue processes occurring within their own groups. For that reason, the general objective of the process at the group level was to offer participating parties the opportunity to create a safe space for their members and leadership to contemplate sensitive issues regarding: 1) their self-proclaimed identities and value systems, 2) the consistency of their actions with their identities, and 3) their relationships with other political players and with the state institutions. This was extremely important considering the tumultuous transition in Egypt after 2011, where no party or movement had the liberty of reviewing its past actions and trying to resolve the unsettled questions it continued to face. On the group level, the dialogue targeted several objectives, including:

- **Promoting self-reflection and critical thinking:** the dialogue offered members of different groups the opportunity to reflect on their group's attitudes and behaviors towards the wider political conflict. The dialogue aimed specifically at enabling different parties and movements to critically examine their own contributions to the conflict and what kind of changes the group may need to make to contribute to transforming it.
- **Helping different groups reach a deeper understanding of the contentious issues and dilemmas of the transitional period:** due to the fluidity of the political scene after the 2011 revolution, and the turbulent developments and complications of the transitional period, most political groups struggled with the unfolding issues and dilemmas that were new to them, including for example transitional justice, civil-military relations, the role of religion in politics and society, and new institutions of the post-transition phase, etc. In general, helping group members reach common understandings about these issues allows groups to engage constructively in any inter-group effort, since ultimately, they become aware of what they exactly want.

- **Enabling participating political groups to successfully deal with the transitional period's consecutive and/or simultaneous crises:** Egypt's post-2011 transition was akin to a roaring sea, with never ending crises escalating easily to violence. The idea of the intra-group dialogue was to help the participating groups to conduct a joint analysis of the political conflict in order to reach a shared understanding of it, so that the groups could then act in a more coordinated way.
- **Strengthening internal group cohesion:** this applied specifically to parties and movements that enjoyed an extensive level of internal diversity. Disparities among different sub-groups within the same group often stalled decision making and hindered coordinated actions. In fact, representing all important views in the internal dialogue would result in increasing the legitimacy of future actions and positions. Therefore, the dialogue aimed at helping the participating groups realize and acknowledge their internal diversity and build on it. Enhancing the internal group cohesion would forestall divisions and cleavages that plagued most political groups in the post-2011 transitional context, mainly through reinforcing the sense of belonging on the part of groups' members. The internal dialogues aimed at enabling group members to agree on shared values and identity, as well as a shared sense of purpose.
- **Identifying common identity, values, concerns, and interests:** Most participating groups struggled with internal dilemmas and unsettled questions with regards to their self-proclaimed identity, common interests, goals, strategies, and tactics. For example, members of one of the participating new social movements that played a very important role in the revolution and its aftermath were undecided about the nature of the movement and whether they needed to transform into a political party and participate in elections. They also were undecided about the choice between street movement and pressure on one side or formal political channels on the other.

  The dialogue also aimed at enabling group members to reach common understanding about the groups' value systems, structures, and codes of conduct. This required a joint analysis of the key founding documents of the group and their reflection (or lack thereof) on the group's actions and positions.
- **Training groups' members on tolerance of difference and acceptance of the others:** a large part of the problems of the Egyptian post-2011 transition was the absence of democratic culture, where politicians can tolerate differences and learn to build on them. In response, the intra-group

dialogues aimed at enhancing the level of tolerance and acceptance on the part of the participants so that they become more accommodating to their political rivals and more willing to reach compromises that are necessary for the transitional context.

2.4   Design and activities of the dialogue

The process was not a pure intra-group dialogue focused on self-criticism. Rather, the dialogue design moved back and forth between three intersecting cycles: 1) The Steering Committee of the Dialogue, formed from focal members representing the targeted forces of change (opposition parties and movements),[22] 2) intra-group dialogues within the respective forces of change centered on the idea of self-criticism, customized to address the issues and dilemmas of each party and movement respectively,[23] and 3) a larger self-criticism-based inter-group dialogue that expanded the dialogue to include more parties representing various components of the political spectrum after June 2013, not limited to the direct forces of change. Of the inter-group meetings, there was a total of 5 that took place between early to mid-2017.

Figure 2: Illustration of the Dialogue Process

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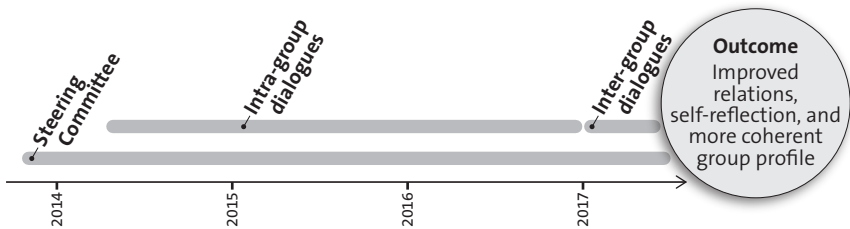
22   The whole intervention started with the formation of the steering committee (SC), between seven to ten members. Explaining our approach and discussing it with the steering committee happened over a three day retreat. Then individual members went to their respective parties to get the process up and running but we maintained a regular meeting for the SC members roughly every one or two months. In those meetings, they discussed how their parties saw developments and outputs of the self-criticism processes that were ongoing within their parties. Between 2015 and 2017, meetings were less frequent due to security concerns, but nonetheless communication via email and WhatsApp remained.

23   We were flexible with the organization of the intra-group dialogues, so each party/movement did it differently. Some did it over roughly 10 weekly meetings and then issued a report. Others favored to extend the process and transfer it to lower ranks in localities outside Cairo. The common thing was that each self-criticism process concluded with the respective group issuing a report detailing the outputs and key takeaways of the process.

The Steering Committee

The idea and objective of the dialogue, alongside the challenges and their mitigation, dictated the design and implementation of the dialogue process. RCMD initiated the self-criticism-based dialogue with the aim of supporting democratic transition through easing the unhealthy political and societal polarization. In the context of mutual accusations and distrust we needed entry points to the parties and movements that we intended to engage in the process. We formed one steering committee including representatives of all the parties and movements we wanted to engage with in our initiative (e.g. the forces of change). Members of the steering committee varied between seven and ten along the timespan of the intervention. They were necessarily key members in the top echelons of their respective groups so that they could influence the groups' leadership into launching the intra-dialogue. This was our first step towards engaging these parties and movements in the project. The committee was formed on a convenience basis so that pre-existing relationships between RCMD and the members of the committee could spare us the questioning of the intentions behind the dialogue and the whole project.

Once the steering committee was formed and after discussing and adopting the idea of a self-criticism-based dialogue, it was up to the members of the steering committee to introduce the project to their respective groups and start parallel intra-group dialogue processes that were owned and controlled by the participating parties and movements, with technical support and facilitation from the RCMD team.

The steering committee's regular meetings discussed the idea of self-criticism at length and contemplated joint problems and dilemmas that most opposition forces faced. The committee meetings provided a safe space for a small-scale inter-group dialogue that assessed the project, discussed thematic issues such as polarization, transitional justice, and civil-military relations; and tried to reach common understandings about these issues.

Members of the steering committee were responsible for developing narratives for their groups to convince them of the idea of the dialogue. This committee contributed to designing the dialogue process within each party, including the rules of the dialogue, who to address within the party leadership, how to convince the addressed party's leadership of the dialogue's added value, what topics to address, positions to review and questions to pose, etc. With the help of the steering committee, it was agreed that the dialogue should follow the following rules:

- Ownership and total control of the dialogue by the engaged party: the project team's role was limited to technical support and the parties led the dialogue themselves.
- Avoiding media coverage.
- Ensuring the inclusiveness of the dialogue within the addressed party (youth, men, and women; different ideological wings; members from the center and the periphery)
- The dialogue is protected by Chatham House rules.

Intra-Group dialogue: Self-criticism centered

Once the party or movement had approved engagement in an internal dialogue centered on self-criticism, it assigned one or more of its members (preferably with a research background) to coordinate the process. This person was asked to provide the team with the required data to develop a 'background paper' that served as the basis of the dialogue.[24]

In this background paper, the party's positions and viewpoints were reviewed against its declared core values in order to highlight any contradictions therein. The respective papers highlighted: 1) the parties' value systems, ideological references, organizational structures, visions, and missions, 2) dynamics and dilemmas of the parties' ability to deal with other parties and movements, and 3) the parties' positions, decisions, statements, and its viewpoints about the concurrent political developments. It also investigated the party's diversity level in order to draw a preliminary map of the party showing its geographic expansion, diversity levels in terms of age, gender, profession, and class, and the competing ideological wings within the party and their respective strength/influence.

These preliminary maps helped in designing the ensuing dialogue rounds to ensure their inclusiveness of different bearings and groups within the addressed party or movement. Once this paper was prepared, the dialogue began over several consecutive rounds that involved different groups and currents within the party.

Each intra-group dialogue round was informed by the respective background paper, facilitated either by a member of the RCMD team or a

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24   Sometimes the Party's representative in the steering committee played this role and some other times another mid-ranking member was assigned this task in fellowship with his/her party's representative in the Steering Committee (SC). In both cases RCMD would help in drafting the report and map of the party/movement, design the dialogue process, and the guiding questions. All this happend in consultation with the party's leadership or representative in the SC.

member of the respective group and designed to address five key areas: 1) self-image and the other (including the core values of the group, its ideology, and its relations with other political players), 2) strategy and tactics (including the group's political platform and its approval rates, as well as consistency between discourses, strategy and core values), 3) internal organizational structure (including transparency and internal democracy level, internal hierarchy and division of authority), 4) past positions and decisions (including the decision-making mechanism and members' participation therein, as well as reviewing key positions and decisions since the 2011 revolution, identified in the background paper), and 5) relations and interactions (including reviewing cooperation and conflict relations with other political powers).

Background papers addressed internal dilemmas including ideological self-proclamation, such as questions to the members about how they perceive ideological orientation of the party, whether they can separate party-identity from original group identity and roles; dilemma of the un-institutionalized role of founding fathers, and questions about strategic priorities of the party/movement, internal decision making mechanisms, and how they evaluate past positions in terms of the party's political platform. Engaging participants with such questions, in a safe and trusted environment promoted self-criticism and ended with participants evaluation of their party/movement's course of action and most contentious positions.

With regards to the venues of the dialogue rounds, it was agreed that, in light of the increasing restrictions on activities of the public sphere, the safest venues for the intra-group dialogues were the parties' and movements' premises themselves, since it was natural for them to hold regular meetings there.

With regards to the participants and format of the dialogue, it varied from one group to another and from one level to another within the same party or movement. We were catering to the structures and values of the addressed parties and movements, based on the preliminary assessment conducted with each party before launching the process. Every detail was discussed with the parties' leadership who directed the entire process with the technical support of RCMD.

For example, a socially conservative Islamist party that participated in the process was unfamiliar with and unwilling to organize mixed dialogue rounds where male and female members of the party would join the same meetings. They preferred to hold separate meetings with male members and others for female members. They were also keener to keep the party's infor-

Table 1: Steps of the self-criticism dialogue process
This table was used in the preparation of the internal dialogue with different parties and movements.

Step	Responsibility	Output/Outcome
Preparation	RCMD Team	• Background Paper • Identifying and coordinating with the entry point to the group. • Forming the steering committee. • Developing a narrative to convince the addressed group. • Preliminary approval of the group to take part in the process.
Joint design of the dialogue	Project team + Entry Point	• An agreement with the addressed group's leadership on the best way to lead the self-criticism process internally (facilitation by RCMD Staff or by members of the entity).
Preparatory research	RCMD researcher Or a researcher from the entity	• A background paper on the group. • Preliminary map of the groups' sub-groups. • A few interviews with the group's senior and medium level leadership. • Tailored design of the dialogue for the respective group: identifying areas and issues for the dialogue.
Internal dialogue	RCMD team Or internal facilitators	• A few group meetings/focus group discussions. • A report for each round of dialogue. • Dialogue rounds in both the center and the periphery and therebetween. • A final report on the entire internal dialogue process for the respective group.
Inter-group Dialogue	RCMD team + Official partner think tank	• Separate rounds of dialogue for different political currents (Liberals, Leftists, Islamists, and Centrists). • Background paper for each dialogue round. • Report of each dialogue round. • A final report on the entire inter-group dialogue process.

mation and revisions in house, so they requested training for insider facilitators from the party and it became their prerogative to facilitate rounds of dialogue both in the center and on the periphery.

Other political parties preferred to assign one of their members with a research background to take part in the preparation process of the dialogue, i.e., to develop the background paper, designing different dialogue rounds with regards to participants and agenda, as well as the follow-up with the RCMD team.

In retrospect, we can say that the intra-group dialogue rounds indirectly allowed for the building of trust bridges between ideologically different and at-times polarized political groups. In particular, the steering committee meetings served as a trust-building mechanism. Meanwhile, side-talks and break times allowed the informal setting for personal connections and networking. Reflections on the self-criticism processes of their groups and their respective positions towards past developments added warmth to the evolving network among the steering committee members and undermined existing polarizations.

On the group level, each group concluded the process with a report or a list of recommendations for the future. Some groups ended up with dialogue plans for identified internal dilemmas. Two groups, in particular, issued self-criticism-based public statements that called for ending polarization. Inter alia, the intra-group dialogue rounds resulted in understandings about some internal issues/dilemmas, past developments, and stereotypes about how the group's actions played into polarization politics.

2.5   Wider inter-group dialogue

This dialogue process started with the aim of easing political and societal polarization, to break deadlock, to compromise, and to support democratization, especially in transition contexts. Therefore, the groups that participated in the process were chosen on a convenience basis at the beginning. Namely, we started with parties and movements which identified with democratization efforts and with whom we had working relations.

Consequently, the process bypassed other influential parties that didn't identify directly with change, or which declared their support of the third of July 3 political regime. As the process moved forward and as different parties and movements from the *forces of change* went a long way in the

intra-group dialogue processes, we sought to enlarge the process of dialogue by involving more parties and movements that reflected other components of the post-July 2013 political spectrum in partnership with a prominent official think tank in Egypt, which opened the door for political parties with which we did not have working relations.

In line with the ownership and control of the steering committee of the entire dialogue process and its developments, the idea of enlarging the dialogue to include other political parties in a parallel track was introduced, discussed, and approved by the steering committee.

This happened in late 2016/early 2017 when it was clear that the diminishing public sphere was not going to recover from the increasing security restraints. Then, it was thought that the time was right to expand the dialogue to better reflect different shades of the political spectrum of the time in an inter-group dialogue process under the auspices of an official institution. This was our approach towards re-establishing communications and bridges of trust between influential political parties that formally supported the new political regime and were officially represented in the parliament, and the pro-democracy parties that were vocal in their opposition to the regime but lacked any official representation in the parliament or any official political institution whatsoever.

Under auspices of the official think-tank, representatives of ten political parties from different strands of Egyptian politics sat for the first time after the 2013 ousting of the late President Morsi on the same dialogue table. The dialogue convened representatives from three liberal political parties, three leftist political parties, three parties representing the center, and one Islamist political party.

Choosing the participating political parties this time was a joint process between RCMD and the official think tank which rejected the participation of some parties and movements on the grounds of their refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the third of July political regime or their affiliation with the *Legitimacy Support Coalition,* which was led by the Muslim Brotherhood in opposition to the military intervention of third of July, 2013.

The ten selected parties convened in several meetings, including a general meeting for all parties and separate meetings for parties representing the four present ideological affiliations: leftists, liberals, centrists, and Islamists.

This inter-group dialogue was also centered on the idea of self-criticism, while its rounds were informed by background papers that tried to identify common dilemmas facing the respective political currents. It fo-

cused on three thematic areas: 1) Ideology and political platform, 2) internal governance and organization, and 3) strategies and external relations. The inter-party dialogue rounds were designed around a group of guiding questions that were posed by the background paper tackling each political current's shared dilemmas, and the entire process resulted in identifying key features and dilemmas of the partisan scene in Egypt and recommendations for dealing with them.[25] These features and dilemmas included weak structures, the familial nature of some parties, weak or absent leadership rotation, absent internal democracy and democratic decision-making, scarcity of funds, and erosion of popularity, among other things.

This wider intergroup dialogue was too short to yield any significant consequences in the long run. It was after all five sessions across a number of months. However, the immediate feedback of the participants was highly positive. While parties from polarized camps each attended, i.e. both the opposition to, and supporters of, President Sissi's rule, each recognized the legitimacy of the other. Additionally, the participation of some members of the steering committee, representing their parties, was a motivating factor for other participants to open-up about what they thought the core problems of their parties were. The participant steering committee members talked about how their parties benefited from a genuine internal dialogue based on self-criticism.

Preliminary understandings were reached about supporting democratic institutions, extending, and institutionalizing communications between the attending parties, the importance of listening to political parties and movements that are not represented in the parliament, and other official institutions, and the importance of sustaining the dialogue.

2.6   Discussion and conclusions

In the conclusions of this chapter, we explore insights we learnt first from a content perspective, and second from a methodological perspective. While these insights are partly case-specific, we believe they also have general implications for the design of intra- and inter-group dialogues in countries

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25   For more information about the inter-party dialogue process look at: Amr Rabie, Nagwan Al-Ashwal, Ahmed Hamdon (eds), *"Dilemmas and opportunities facing Egyptian Political Parties: a Self-criticism based report",* Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies & Regional Center for Mediation and Dialogue, Cairo, Egypt, June 2017. *(in Arabic)*

undergoing political transition as Egypt was between 2013 and 2017. This is especially the case for the methodological insights, as method is often more generic than content. However, the content insights do indicate what kind of results such dialogue processes are likely to generate, even if they look different in a different context.

Content insights: Awareness of challenges and internal clarity helps external engagement

Internal self-criticism within different parties and movements can be challenging, but if implemented properly, it can yield considerable benefits to the participating group. The benefits included an increased awareness of the challenges and dilemmas faced by the parties and movements. This awareness was the basis to deal with them more constructively. Challenges participants became aware of, which were faced by most Egyptian political entities from the change camp, can be categorized into six groups:

1. **Identity problems:** unclear objectives, unclear social and economic inclinations, unclear positioning on the political spectrum.

2. **Problems in internal diversity management:** absence of institutional mechanisms to deal with and remedy any splits or potential splits that accompany fateful decisions, and lack of awareness of the diversity level within the group.

3. **Lack of institutionalization:** division of powers, roles and responsibilities are unclear, weakness or un-enforcement of institutional arrangements, lack of polling capabilities to include the bases in decision making, center-periphery communication problems, moral authority of some founders trump institutional arrangements.

4. **Problems in managing external relations:** absence of a vision for dealing with state institutions (military, judiciary, police and media) that are in the heart of transition politics; unclear position towards remnants of Mubarak's regime, absence of visions and plans for alliances and/or coordination possibilities; and exclusion of bases from external relations management.

5. **Preoccupation with daily developments:** absence of a back-office to inform party/movement decision making (via policy papers and research);

transfer of the party's leadership from leadership strategic bodies to crisis-response committees.

6. **Problems in popular communications and mobilization:** lack of political mobilization strategy and lack of effective media messages from the political entities.

Furthermore, alongside many of the participants of the parties and movements who were part of the intra- and inter-group dialogues, we as facilitators found the following points to stand out as benefits resulting from the process:

1. **Inner processes affect external engagement:** increase in internal democracy and inclusivity in parties and movements is a necessary step towards increase in society-wide inclusivity and democracy. This goes hand in hand with a shift from confrontational inter-group contact to more dialogue-oriented engagement. There was some evidence that this happened, namely when new actors in the inter-party dialogue learned from the actors who had already spent some time in the intra-group process.

2. **Clarification of differences and similarities helps build a common vision:** clarity on similarities and differences between different actors and movements allows for the first steps towards a vision built around the minimal similarities, one that ultimately all actors can aspire to. Differences may still remain on the best way to get there, but a common vision of society is the first step towards a more inclusive, negotiated way of governing. While our dialogues did not reach a common vision shaped by all actors, they did move closer in this direction. Thus, some key building blocks exist that can be taken up when the space for this is provided.

3. **Adapt content and design of dialogues depending on context:** international and national factors which are outside of the control of actors and movements shape the space for intra-group and inter-group dialogue. Thus, the design and content of these dialogues have to be adapted as the context changes and evolves. This also requires close collaboration between the facilitator (in this case RCMD) and the steering committee representatives of the parties and movements.

4. **Move from crisis mode to strategic approach:** one feature that was acknowledged by all participants is that they were so consumed in the turbulence of the transitional period that they basically operated as crisis-response committees. They had neither the time nor the ability to engage with their internal problems in a constructive way. Intra-group dialogue helped them become more strategic and structured in their approaches, regarding both the internal organization and its processes, and how to engage with other actors.

Method insights: Challenges and their mitigation
The entire dialogue process, including its intra- and inter-group dialogues, provided many methodological insights. The different dialogue components also faced several challenges. How we dealt with them provides key insights for other conflict transformation actors wanting to use intra-group and inter-group dialogue with a self-criticism angle. Here we specifically explore: inclusivity, spoilers, and risk of self-flagellation. We end with an outlook: as there is no real alternative to dialogue, we need to continue exploring if, when and how it can be used and improved.

Inclusivity of the process
The inclusivity of any dialogue process, or even any conflict transformation work, is vital for reaching just and sustainable peace through allowing everyone and every sub-group to have its voices and concerns heard. Inclusivity of the dialogue was one of the central principles that RCMD agreed on before launching the project. There are multiple dimensions of inclusivity. Here we address: 1) inclusivity and diversity *within* the intra-group meetings of a party or movement, e.g., between center and periphery, internal ideological differences or diversity of women and men participants, 2) inclusivity of process *between* different groups, i.e., how to move from intra-group to inter-group over time.

Inclusivity within groups
For all forms of inclusivity, understanding and mapping are key. In order to ensure the inclusivity of the intra-group dialogue processes that commenced within different opposition parties and movements, part of the preparatory research was mapping various sub-groups and ideological wings within the group. The joint designing of the dialogue that was developed by RCMD and the respective group heeded the inclusivity concerns as well as the party

values and structures. Most parties and movements held dialogue sessions in the center and the periphery as well as joint sessions that convened members from the center and the periphery at the same time.

Fair representation of women and youth was observed throughout the dialogue processes. Where few parties preferred to hold separate sessions for men and women, others integrated male and female members in the same dialogue sessions. Sometimes accepting separate sessions for men and women was seen as the best way to encourage conservative parties to join the process. Most parties and movements suffered from lack of cohesion due to the disparities in the political and ideological affiliations of their sub-groups, therefore representing various political affiliations within the intra-group dialogue processes was key to enhancing that cohesion and for the rapprochement of different sub-groups.

Parties and movements that already experienced internal divisions and cleavages had a considerable level of resistance to starting the process. There was a fear of exposing internal problems to the public which would further undermine the party's or movement's public image. This was approached through multiple reassurances of their complete ownership of the process, and the guarantees for being future oriented.

A related important dilemma was the disparity between the center and the peripheries in the same party organization. Concerns voiced by the bases in governorates were extensively different from those voiced by the party/movement central leadership. Local politics had other dimensions that were in most cases more personalized and more polarized than its central counterpart. Thus, once in the process, most participant parties/movements initiated propositions to expand the process to their bases in the governorates as a practice of participatory decision making, thereby linking center and periphery within their party or movement. They preferred heavy engagement in the process and how it was facilitated. Variations of implementation unfolded as we proceeded with different parties and movements. Most utilized the Center's facilitation and research support to highlight in a single document what needs adjustment and rectification starting from un-institutional dominant roles of founding fathers, to unclear strategies and priorities, and inefficient back offices that work on public policy.

Inclusivity between groups

It was difficult to start an inclusive inter-group dialogue process from the beginning due to the mutual accusations and lack of trust among key

political players that were prevalent at the moment of the dialogue commencement, as well as the increasing restrictions on the public sphere. This increasing restriction on the public sphere limited different parties' ability and willingness to sit with each other. This challenge was there for us from the beginning: how to bring different parties and movements to sit together against the prevalent trend of confiscating available spaces in a shrinking public sphere.

Our approach to dealing with this challenge was to start the process of intra-group dialogues with the opposition parties and movements who welcomed the initiative and then expand the process to include more parties and movements from the regime-supporting camp as we moved forward. When the opportunity arose, with the cooperation with the official think-tank in late 2016, other pro-regime influential parties joined the inter-group dialogue (as mentioned above, this dialogue was also centered on the idea of self-criticism). It is worth mentioning that representatives of opposition parties that went through internal self-criticism process were positive forces, i.e. insofar as they encouraged self-criticism in the larger inter-party dialogue, more willing to acknowledge their mistakes and encourage others to follow suit.

Risk of exposing the process to spoilers

Due to the sensitivity of the information unearthed during the intra-group dialogue, another challenge was to avoid leaks. Any leaked information might have been used against the interests of the participating entities. Due to this challenge, the participation of some entities in the process was ruled out due to fears that they could leak information to outsider spoilers.

This was very clear in the case of one of the more socially conservative Islamist parties that participated in the process and demanded to supervise and implement the entire process with minimum intervention from the RCMD staff. We understood their request in the context of their default to secrecy and with working undercover. They feared that our intervention in the process would disclose sensitive information with regards to the party membership and its geographic expansion, as well as other information about the party's internal problems and cleavages.

To safeguard the entire process, it was agreed that the participating parties would be the owners of their respective entities' dialogue process and that they would host the dialogue rounds in their own premises, the rooms they would regularly meet in to undertake their partisan activism. Another measure was to avoid disclosing any information to the media, to observe

Chatham House rules with regards to the dialogue, its agenda, and its participants, and to adopt a secure protocol for communication.

Self-criticism: risk of self-flagellation and furthering internal divisions
The project team was aware of the fact that self-criticism can easily descend into an agony of self-flagellation or, worse perhaps, open the door to further internal divisions, i.e. if it transformed into a tool to merely manage internal conflicts within the group. Our mitigation of that risk was to orient the entire process towards the future, so that the political group is reviewing past positions and decisions not to point fingers or to cry over past mistakes but to reach common understandings about its internal dilemmas and what needs to be done to address them in the future. This way the intra-group self-criticism dialogue was future-oriented and not a prisoner of the past.

It was the role of the dialogue facilitator to remind dialogue participants of this future orientation whenever members would partake in self-flagellation or mutual accusations. The process was, after all, about the future not the past, ultimately aimed at allowing the group to positively contribute to transforming the political conflict and thereby helping to avoid past mistakes. Venting was sometimes inevitable, since participants were reviewing past position and trying to identify past mistakes, but it was the facilitator's role to try to move as quickly as possible to a forward-looking dialogue, that is reviewing past mistakes to determine future rules of conduct that would avoid the recurrence of these past mistakes.

Outlook
To avoid always reinventing the wheel, the methodological insights from the process were captured in writing and can be used in the future in this or other contexts. Thus, the observations and efforts of the facilitation teams translated into three final knowledge-outputs that were shared with the participant entities: 1) a policy paper on "Managing diversity within political parties and movements", 2) an operational manual for "Self-criticism process within political parties and movements", and 3) a brief paper on "Common dilemmas of political entities in times of transition". These outputs depended on the multiple internal dialogue processes, as well as inter-group dialogue rounds of the steering committee members. If/when the space opens up for multi-party democracy, these documents can be used to facilitate a peaceful and constructive engagement of the extant parties concerned.

To conclude, we would say that this experience of facilitating intra-group dialogues centered on self-criticism within different Egyptian political parties and movements was eye-opening to the challenges of transition contexts. So too, it illuminates the requirements of the incipient democracy movements to overcome these challenges, some of which we discussed in the "content insights" above. At the same time, we learned large amounts on the method of dialogue facilitation and design. We believe the methodological insights presented here for the first time, and in such a comprehensive manner, will inspire other peace practitioners and mediators to use intra- and inter-group dialogues with a self-criticism angle. Our experience indicates that this methodology can help deal with the many challenges of polarization in political and social spheres in phases of transition. Even if such transition phases stop and start, then stop again and start again, there is no real alternative to intra-group and inter-group dialogue if a society wishes to move from a zero-sum game of division and instability to one that involves inclusive and peaceful co-existence based on a common understanding of how to deal with differences in non-violent ways.

3. Case study: Weaving Peace Together in Thailand 2015–2022

By Suphatmet Yunyasit, Duanghathai Buranajaroenkij and Owen Frazer

Weaving Peace Together is an intra-group dialogue platform focused on the conflict in the southern border provinces of Thailand. It was established in 2015 under the title 'Intra-Buddhist dialogue for Majority-Minority Coexistence in Thailand'. The founding premise of the platform was that dialogue between representatives of different sectors of the Buddhist community could address some of the obstacles to conflict transformation in the South and support positive engagement by Buddhists in efforts to transform the conflict.

3.1 Context at the beginning of the dialogue in 2015

The southernmost region of Thailand, comprising of the three southern border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, has a long history of separatism. Although the majority of people in Thailand are Buddhists, in the southern border provinces, the majority of the population identify as 'Malay Muslim', and Buddhists make up only a minority of the region's population.[26] Throughout history, the Malay Muslims have demanded independence from the Thai state. An armed separatist struggle was active throughout the 1970s and 1980s until becoming dormant in the mid-1990s. Violence erupted again in 2004. Between 2004 and 2007, Thailand's southern unrest was qualified as Southeast Asia's "most violent internal conflict".[27] By 2015 6'400 people had been killed and over 11'500 injured in the violence.[28]

The region was formerly part of the 'Kingdom of Patani', which was overthrown by the Siamese in the 1700s. The Thai government originally

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26   The Malays known also as *Melayu* is an ethnic minority group of approximately four percent of Thailand's population of 67 million people. However, in three southernmost provinces they are a majority group accounting for about 80 percent of the population (K. Rupprecht 2014: 23)

27   ICG, "Thailand: The Evolving Conflict in the South", *Asia Report*, N°241, 11 December 2012.

28   Statistics compiled by Deep South Watch (www.deepsouthwatch. org/dsid) cited in ICG, "Southern Thailand: Dialogue in Doubt", *Asia Report*, N°270, 8 July 2015, p. 3

pursued an integrationist policy, attempting to create a sense of 'Thai-ness' amongst the local population, particularly through the promotion of the Thai language and a uniform education system. Despite these policies a 'Malay Muslim' identity remained strong amongst the local population, maintained, and transmitted via the traditional *pondoks* and other Islamic schools.[29] In their more recent efforts to resolve the conflict, successive governments pursued a number of strategies simultaneously. These included adopting multiculturalism policies aimed at addressing Malay Muslims' grievances, the promotion of economic development, and legal and military measures designed to suppress the underground militia operations. In 2013, an intermittent official 'peace dialogue' process between the government and representatives of some of the insurgent factions began but has yet to yield many substantive results.

With no end to the conflict in sight, the region's residents – both Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists – had begun to question the efficiency and effectiveness of the security operations and other measures implemented by government officials during the past decade. They were also increasingly skeptical of the conflict resolution process and measures to mitigate violence. The consequences of the protracted conflict had eroded people's sense of security and trust. They felt that their lives and property were not safe and they faced restrictions on leading normal daily lives.

Despite this bleak outlook, there were reasons to hope. The level of violence had been in relatively steady decline since its peak in 2004–2007. In addition to the official 'peace dialogue' there were a number of efforts and initiatives working to transform the conflict and promote peace and reconciliation, including civil society groups actively seeking to contribute to the peace process and to social healing.

3.2   Reasons for establishing an intra-Buddhist dialogue

The identity dimension of the conflict had fueled divisions between the two main ethno-religious communities in the South. Thai Buddhists were perceived as, and many were, supporters of the Thai state and its policy of

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29   Yusuf, Imtiyaz. (2007). The Southern Thailand Conflict and the Muslim World. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 27:2. p. 319–339. DOI: 10.1080/13602000701536232

maintaining national unity. Conversely, support for autonomy or independence for the region, was high amongst the Malay Muslim population. Members of both communities, including religious leaders, were targeted in violent attacks based on their identity. The general insecurity, conflict-related displacement, and growing suspicion between the communities had resulted in an increased segregation of daily life. In a vicious cycle, the reduction in contact had only increased suspicion and further reduced interaction between the communities. It was common to hear accounts from older residents about how they used to have many contacts and friendships with members of the other community but that this was no longer the case. A conflict that began primarily as a conflict between the Thai government and a Malay movement for greater independence had broadened and complexified to take on an inter-community dimension that needed to be addressed if there was to be peace in the region.

Within each of the main identity groups in the South there were those that felt the other community posed a threat to its identity and its way of life. Being in the minority, this feeling was particularly strong amongst southern Buddhists. Many felt threatened by how articulate and organized they perceived Malay Muslims to be. This had to do with the long history of organizing within the Malay Muslim community in order to create a common identity, a desire for more political autonomy, and in standing up for their human rights in the face of a heavy-handed state security response to the insurgency. Within the Buddhist community, on the other hand, perhaps owing to a close identification to the state and an expectation that the central state would have the Buddhists' interests at heart, there was less of a perceived need to organize politically. The Buddhist community was also divided about how to respond to the conflict between those who had some sympathy for Malay Muslim proposals for autonomy and those who expected the state to preserve the status quo. This limited cohesion and unity amongst different Buddhist groups, exacerbated by displacement and outward migration, fed a sense that the Buddhist community was weak in comparison to the politically well-organized Malay Muslim communities in the South.

Buddhists were not, however, passive in the face of the situation of insecurity and conflict. They reacted in three ways. First, many moved out of conflict-affected areas, either into the larger towns, or out of the region completely. This contributed to the sense of insecurity of those who remained. Second, individuals and communities took measures to protect themselves. In addition to reducing their interaction with those from outside their com-

munity, in some villages Buddhists erected walls and fences to enclose the Buddhist part of the village. Many went further, taking part in firearms training and establishing self-defense militias.[30] The third response, though limited, was to try to draw attention to their situation and needs by organizing and networking amongst Buddhist organizations, including some of those established for self-defense purposes, in order to peacefully pressure officials through coordinated representations and protests. However, there was little engagement by Buddhists in conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts.

With a state and national identity strongly identified with Buddhism, it was not surprising that Thai Buddhists expected the state to look out for their interests. Although officials at local levels of administration (district, sub-district, and village heads) were often Malay Muslims, the main government and administration structures in the region were controlled by the central Thai state. Senior positions were inevitably occupied by Thai Buddhists, although often from outside the region. Owing to the special legal regime in place in the region, the Thai military had always played a central role, and soon after the installation of a military-run government in 2014, the army command in the region officially became the ultimate authority in the region. The head of the civilian administration (the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre) and the provincial governors were appointed by central government.[31] The state had played a role in supporting the establishment of self-defense militias and providing military protection to Buddhist communities and temples. However, the state also promoted peaceful coexistence and tried to bridge inter-community divisions by encouraging a policy of multiculturalism. Paradoxically, the policy fueled inter-community divisions by creating resentment on the side of many Buddhists. They opposed

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30 Since 2004, groups of "Village Defense Volunteers" *(Or Ror Bor)* have been established and a number of Buddhist people attended firearms training and joined these militias. The "Village Defense Volunteers" were not always exclusively Buddhist groups. In mixed villages Buddhists and Malay Muslims would sometimes form joint militias to protect themselves against outsiders. In 2005 in Yala, *Ruam Thai* (Thai United), was established as an armed group for self-defense in situations of unrest. Most of the members are Buddhist, with only a few Muslims in the group. Then, in 2008, the village security teams *(Chor Ror Bor)* were set up.

31 Perhaps owing to the limited possibilities for democratic expression in the region, political parties are not organized along identity lines. Local political parties are affiliates of national-level parties. Generally, those sympathetic with Malay Muslim demands for autonomy have supported the "pro-democracy" parties associated in the past with the "red-shirt" movement, while those supportive of maintaining the status quo have supported the pro-establishment, pro-monarchy parties associated with the "yellow shirt" movement. However, owing to the suspension of parliamentary democracy for several years, political parties have only recently become again a channel for expressing political concerns.

the multiculturalism policies because they perceived the policies as actually favoring Malay Muslims, and at the same time restricting the rights of local Buddhists. The sentiment that the authorities were ignoring, or even betraying, the concerns and needs of Buddhists grew. This perception led to an increase in tension between the authorities and Buddhist groups, who felt abandoned by the state that they thought should be looking after them.[32] Some in the Buddhist community were also suspicious of the government's efforts to engage representatives of the insurgency in dialogue, fearing that anything that looked like negotiation would inevitably mean some concessions to the rebels' demands and therefore a further threat to Buddhists' way of life.

The resentment towards the state amongst southern Buddhists was made worse by the perception that policy towards the South was decided in Bangkok and that southern voices had little influence. Interest in, and understanding of, the conflict in the southern border provinces is quite low amongst both the general population and the political elites outside of the South. However, there are a number of national-level organizations that are concerned about the situation in the South. Some of these organizations are particularly concerned about what they perceive as the declining presence of Buddhism in the South. Movements such as the *Dhammakaya* and the Center for Buddhist Protection, as well as the "Or Ror Bor" programme or Village Protection Volunteers, have sought to support Buddhists and Buddhism in the South, providing support to temples and Buddhist villages. These linkages between the Buddhists in the South, and national-level actors with a strongly Buddhist nationalist outlook, has potentially contributed to strengthening a simplistic discourse at national level about Buddhism being under threat from Islam. This links to wider discourses at a supra-national level, reinforced by voices in Myanmar and Sri Lanka particularly, about the threat that Islam poses to Buddhism. Although this discourse does not represent the mainstream or official view, it poses a potential obstacle to peace by narrowing the government's room for maneuver in pursuing a negotiated end to the conflict and policies aimed at reconciliation.

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32 Prasit Meksuwan, the chairperson of Civil Society Council of the Southernmost Thailand and a respected Buddhist leader, had addressed this issue with FT Media & Friend on April 8, 2014. He stated: "The Thai Buddhist community has very little knowledge and understanding on the root causes of the unrest." (FT Media & friend, April 8, 2014). He further noted that the Buddhists were too overcome by a sense of being forgotten or neglected by the authorities to react towards the conflict (Ibid).

3.3 Goals and objectives of the dialogue

In 2015, the Institute for Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University outside Bangkok, together with the Center for Security Studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, initiated the 'Intra-Buddhist dialogue for Majority-Minority Coexistence in Thailand'. Through facilitating a dialogue amongst key actors from different Buddhist groups and Buddhists from different sectors of society the project aimed (and aims) to contribute to transformation of the conflict in the south ("Peace Writ Large") in two ways.

Building a peace constituency

The first way that the project hoped to contribute to transformation of the conflict was by increasing the 'constituency for peace'. It was assumed that for the conflict to be transformed, there needed to be sufficient support in society for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Owing to the identity dimension of the conflict, Buddhists were an important constituency who could influence state policy and whose support for conflict settlement was therefore important. The first main goal for the dialogue therefore became to develop support among Buddhists for peacemaking efforts.

The changes that the dialogue sought to bring about at the group level in pursuit of the first objective were:

1. **Increasing Buddhists' cohesion in support of peace.** This involved supporting the group to develop "a common understanding and common actions on conflict transformation in southern Thailand",

2. **Strengthening Buddhists' participation in the peace process.** Initially this focused on helping the group to agree and transmit "the needs, fears and concerns of Buddhists in the South" so that they can be "understood and taken into account in peace process efforts by the government and by other political actors",

3. **Increased social communication and connection of WPT.** This aimed at the dialogue group becoming" known and recognized as legitimate and representative by the wider Buddhist community".[33]

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33 Citations from original project documents.

Strengthening Buddhist-Muslim relations

By 2017, the dialogue group was relatively well established. An additional aspiration was to reinforce mechanisms for Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims to manage their differences and disagreements peacefully. Without strong conflict resolution mechanisms there would always be a risk that inter-community tensions could escalate into violence, or simply contribute to further polarization that would undermine support for a negotiated settlement of the wider conflict. The second main goal of the project therefore became the strengthening of cross-community relations. In pursuit of this goal, the change that the dialogue aimed to achieve was that the dialogue group "engage with Muslim communities, particularly the ones in the South, on building a peaceful future together".[34]

3.4 Design and activities of the dialogue

The design of Intra-Buddhist dialogue started with a question raised by the project partners, IHRP, Swiss FDFA and CSS ETH Zurich in 2014: *where are the Buddhists' voice, actions, and contributions towards conflict transformation for the Southern Unrest? And what should be done in order for the Buddhist community, which is also one of the key stakeholders of the conflict, to play more roles in the conflict transformation of the Unrest?* The initial design was to establish two "reflection groups" made up of influential Buddhists (monks, media personalities, academics, members of the administration, civil society activists), one in Bangkok and one in Southern Thailand. *Weaving Peace Together* or WPT was chosen by the people as the name of the group. The purpose of having two groups was to facilitate intra-group dialogues in order to build a common understanding amongst different tendencies and groupings within the Buddhist community which would lead on to constructive efforts by the groups to contribute to conflict transformation in the South.

The two groups were to play different roles in transforming the conflict. The southern group, WPT South, would communicate the needs, fears, concerns, and grievances of the Buddhist community in the south among themselves and to other conflict stakeholders. The center group, WPT Center, though not engaging directly in the conflict, would communicate the

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34 Project Document, "Intra-Buddhist Dialogue for Majority-Minority Coexistence in Thailand", 11 January 2017.

situation of the south as well as that of the southern Buddhists to the wider Thai society. It was expected that WPT Center would be able to positively influence the policy of state, as well as non-state, actors towards the south.

The Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies (IHRP), Mahidol University served as organizer and facilitator of WPT reflection group meetings, which later were called WPT dialogue platforms. IHRP considered itself a third party in the southern unrest and had been engaging in conflict transformation and peacebuilding in the south since 2004, organizing and facilitating inter and intra religious dialogue. IHRP possessed an insight into the situation and was familiar with the local culture. It had also cultivated relationships with Buddhist key actors, especially monks, in the area for quite some time. Being an academic institute, most actors in the south perceived it as of neutral standing and working without a hidden agenda. The success in establishing the WPT group and platform and having them active for the past five years relied considerably on this identity and traits of IHRP.

Main activities

The project employed various types of activities, with dialogue as its key process. The activities are classified into five broad types as follows:

- **Human-relation dialogue:** among various types of dialogue generally employed in peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts, the project focuses on human-relation dialogue. This type of dialogue sets relationship and trust building as its primary goal. The WPT dialogue platform was a '*safe space*' where WPT could get to get to know one another more, to exchange experiences, concerns, and grievances and foster intra-group cohesion without fear of judgement or critique from members of other identity groups. Other stakeholders of the conflict, such as Malay-Muslim key actors and representatives of state agencies, notably Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC) and Southern Border Provinces Administrative Center (SBPAC), also participated in some of the dialogues. They engaged with WPT members in exchange and discussion on controversial issues related to state policies and implementation of those policies in the south.
- **Capacity building workshops:** having a dialogue platform for sharing, exchanging, and building relationships was not sufficient on its own to achieve the project's aim of enhancing Buddhists' support for peacebuilding and to have them act as conflict transformers and agents for change. When the project was launched in November 2014 many of the participants' knowledge about the unrest, and their level of skills needed to adopt

such roles, were quite lacking. Unlike the Malay-Muslims who had received a lot of attention and skills training from both local and international NGOs, the Buddhists were not given similar opportunities. *Conflict analysis, strategic peacebuilding/negotiation, deep and double listening, non-violent communication, Buddhist approach to conflict transformation and inner peace* were among training topics for WPT members. The workshops greatly enhanced WPT members' ability to act and respond appropriately to the situation and boosted their confidence and assertiveness when they addressed their standpoint to their fellow WPT members and to other stakeholders engaging in the dialogue platform and outside.

- **Field trips both within and outside the three southernmost provinces:** the purpose of having fieldtrips to local communities was to (1) deepen the WPT group's understanding of the current state of unrest; (2) meet and directly engage with local Buddhists, authorities, and Muslim leaders; and (3) learn first-hand about the strategies of coexistence practiced by some peaceful Buddhist-Muslim communities in the region. Through the fieldtrips WPT members also met with civilian and military authorities and nominated a group of envoys from within each reflection group who engaged in ongoing outreach with the authorities, but also other influential actors within the Buddhist and Muslim communities.

- **Public forum:** in the fourth and fifth year since its establishment, WPT as a group and a dialogue platform, became more known to the wider Thai society via the organization of a series of public forums. WPT public forums were usually organized over two hours at venues like Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Thai Public Broadcasting Services (Thai PBS), and CS Pattani Hotel. They were designed as dialogues, providing a safe space, and ensuring an inclusive participation. Issues selected to be discussed in WPT public forums were not particular or embedded entirely in the southern context. They were issues of concern for, or of interest to, the whole Thai society. News Media support for WPT public forums was a key instrument allowing the group to gain a degree of recognition from the wider Thai society as representative of Buddhist views. Participating in the public forums with the WPT name, the members also felt a sense of belonging to the group and that led to stronger group cohesion.

- **Sub-projects run by WPT members with assistance by IHRP:** Apart from the activities mentioned above, each year there are sub-projects carried out by WPT members with assistance from IHRP. These projects were aimed primarily to encourage ownership and sense of belonging to

the group among WPT members. Through these projects WPT succeed in expanding its network to new Buddhist actors in the South, communicating the group's identity to the wider Thai society and embracing a broader spectrum of diverse Buddhist groups.

- **Online engagement platform:** in addition to meeting and engaging with one another face-to-face, WPT members also interacted regularly via LINE application. Each WPT group, the south and center ones, had its own LINE group: WPT South and WPT Center (in Thai abbreviation). Cross-group interaction was doable via another LINE group with the group official name *Weaving Peace Together*. Online interaction was vital in keeping the momentum of the group after activities organized by IHRP end. These LINE groups were also platforms for WPT members to exchange on issues found in their communities, to get to know one another's works, and to seek collaborations for ad-hoc projects responding to the conflict. A Facebook page was also created to promote WPT activities and increase visibility of the group. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic from March-August 2020 when all face-to-face activities were banned by the state, WPT spirit and group cohesion was kept alive via these online platforms.

Results

After five years the project has had some successes in bringing about changes at three levels: individual, organizational, and societal.

At the individual level (observations made by participants themselves):

- The dialogue processes gradually helped WPT members to become listeners. Participants came to support each other by listening during dialogue. Those who used to easily lose their temper became calmer and able to listen to different points of view. Those who had been passive became more thoughtful and more communicative with people who had different opinions. A number of participants said they applied the dialogue techniques to their daily life using it with their family members and their community members.
- Many of the participants appreciated an opportunity provided by WPT platform to expand their network with both Buddhists and Muslims, authorities, and civil society at different levels in the South and beyond.
- Exchanges with other Buddhists and Muslims in the area enhanced participants' understanding of the situation each individual and group was facing.

- Learning from resources, people at dialogue sessions, capacity-building workshops, and public forums, from field trips and from sub-projects opened new perspectives and provided ideas that could be applied to their work in communities and organizations.

At the organizational level (WPT as a group):
- WPT has gradually developed as a group. WPT collectively designed a strategic plan according to working themes agreed amongst the members. They also developed an organizational culture and produced position papers which increased ownership. There was a balance between a structure designed by IHRP, and participants deciding on content and subprojects. Members increasingly identified as members of WPT. WPT gained understanding and acceptance from other stakeholders including the government, the separatist movement, CSOs and local authorities.

Figure 1: Development of Weaving Peace Together (WPT) 2015–2019

2019
Agreeing on the organizational culture and cross community peacebuildingg

2017–2018
Publishing the position papers and beginning the community based projects

2016
Founding WPT and agreeing on working thermes
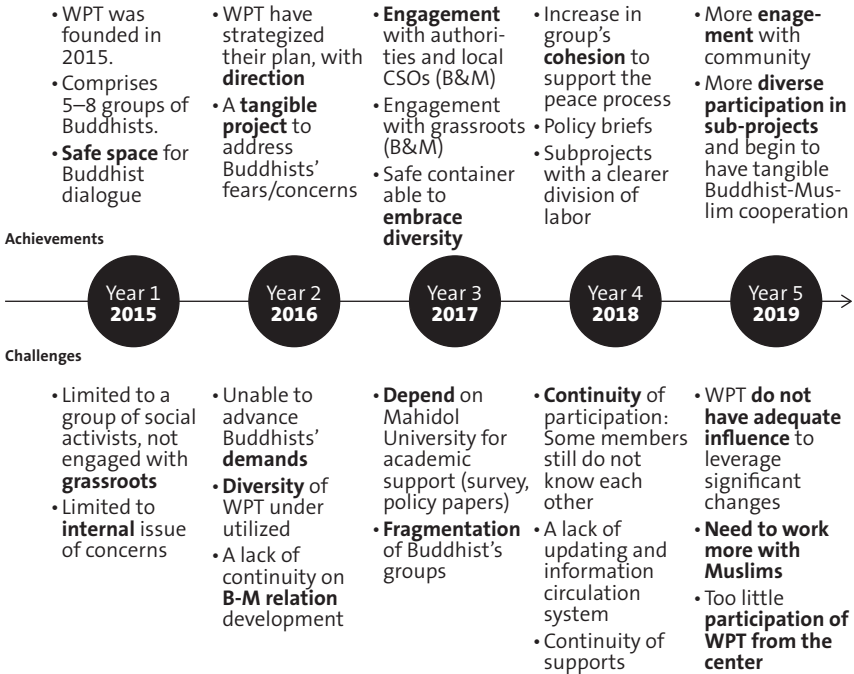
2015
Searching for possibility
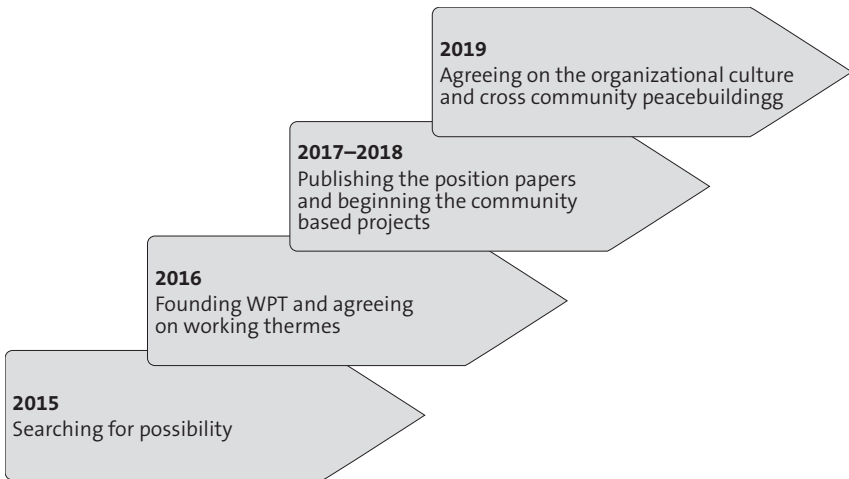
- The majority of participants considered WPT as a safe space for Buddhists to voice their opinions in the South. In 2019 about 10 groups/networks of Buddhists participated in WPT activities, there were; 1) Buddharaksa, 2) Buddhist Women's Group, 3) Buddhists' Network for Peace, 4) Bhikkhuni, Voluntary Dhammaduta (Buddhist Missionary), 5) Ruam

Thai, 6) Buddhist Protection Organization for Peace, 7) Network of Socially Engaged Buddhist Monks, 8) Buddhist's Network for Buddhism, 9) Association for Buddhism Security of the Southern Border Provinces, and 10) Buddhist Federation of Southern Border Provinces. Some of WPT members pointed out how each Buddhist group had different positions and demands and some of them do not acknowledge and accept the others. Although WPT did not have the capacity to solve practical problems, and has little direct influence on the peace process, it provided a platform for Buddhists' groups to meet and discuss their dire situation.

At the societal level:
- Exchanges between members of WPT highlighted the potential of supporting the engagement of young Buddhists in peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities and of expanding the WPT network to schools, teachers and parents in the future.
- Members of WPT were acknowledged by key stakeholders in the South. They were invited to participate the CSOs council occasionally. Their demands and concerns were acknowledged by a larger civil society in the area. At least five WPT participants became members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Working Group (Track three) of the Peace Dialogue Process at local level – headed by the Fourth Army commander.
- The picture below illustrated how WPT members see WPT development. The important trend is they expressed greater empathy toward Muslims and saw the importance of engagement with Muslims communities. WPT members showed their willingness to improve competency of WPT to engage with key stakeholders including authorities and peace dialogue delegates to advance Buddhist's agenda.

Figure 2: Achievements and Challenges of the Process

Achievements

Year 1 2015	Year 2 2016	Year 3 2017	Year 4 2018	Year 5 2019
• WPT was founded in 2015. • Comprises 5–8 groups of Buddhists. • **Safe space** for Buddhist dialogue	• WPT have strategized their plan, with **direction** • A **tangible project** to address Buddhists' fears/concerns	• **Engagement** with authorities and local CSOs (B&M) • Engagement with grassroots (B&M) • Safe container able to **embrace diversity**	• Increase in group's **cohesion** to support the peace process • Policy briefs • Subprojects with a clearer division of labor	• More **enagement** with community • More **diverse participation in sub-projects** and begin to have tangible Buddhist-Muslim cooperation

Challenges

Year 1 2015	Year 2 2016	Year 3 2017	Year 4 2018	Year 5 2019
• Limited to a group of social activists, not engaged with **grassroots** • Limited to **internal** issue of concerns	• Unable to advance Buddhists' **demands** • **Diversity** of WPT under utilized • A lack of continuity on **B-M relation** development	• **Depend** on Mahidol University for academic support (survey, policy papers) • **Fragmentation** of Buddhist's groups	• **Continuity** of participation: Some members still do not know each other • A lack of updating and information circulation system • Continuity of supports	• WPT **do not have adequate influence** to leverage significant changes • **Need to work more with Muslims** • Too little **participation of WPT from the center**

Despite the successes of the dialogue, the conflict in southern Thailand continues, inter-community divisions persist, and many of the challenges outlined at the beginning of this chapter remain. Over the course of five years the dialogue had to adapt, both to a changing context, and to take account of lessons learned during the process itself. In this section, we summarize some of the main challenges confronted and measures taken to address them. We do not pretend to have found all the answers and rather hope that sharing our reflections about the difficulties we have faced can be helpful for others. The challenges can be classified into two broad categories: those relating to effecting change at the intra-group level and those relating to the link to the inter-group level.

3.5 Challenges confronted and lessons learned at intra-group level

The first set of challenges relate to organizing a meaningful dialogue platform for a diverse group of actors. Adhering to the same religious affiliation does not automatically forge a sense of unity among the people. To make sure that WPT was as representative as possible of the Buddhist community in Thailand, efforts were made to be as inclusive as possible. There were lay people with a diversity of professional backgrounds (education, business, politics, government, and administration) as well as monks drawn from different orders and sects.[35] There was diversity in terms of gender (including amongst the monks), socio-economic background, political preferences and geography (a mix of participants from the central and southern regions). These differences meant they differed in how they perceive the unrest in the South. For example, those coming from the central region tended to have a superficial understanding about the conflict in the south while the majority of those of the south had first-hand experience of violence and social tension between Buddhists and Muslims. Accordingly, their ideas of how to respond to the conflict were not so uniform, and sometimes even conflicting. Some participants viewed peaceful means as the only way to transform the conflict while others were skeptical about it. Other participants, some shaped by years of seeing Buddhists losing their lives in violent attacks and living with the consequences of violence, were of the opinion that resorting to violent means may be the only way to ensure security and to end the conflict. Then there were those somewhere in the middle, who adopted a situational approach, seeing both peaceful and violent means as having a time and place depending on the given situation. Nor were differences limited to views on the conflict. There was also a certain degree of mistrust and prejudice towards one another based on other issues. For example, representatives of the *Dhammakaya* sect were not always perceived in a good light by Buddhists of the mainstream sect due to *Dhammakaya's* unorthodox interpretation of the *dhamma* and its emphasis on the linkage between worldly attachment and

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35 In Thailand there are two main Therevada Buddhist orders: *Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttikanikaya* (the smaller of the two). There are also a number of well-known sects with a large following such as *Dhammakaya* or *Buddha Wajana*. The Sangha is the name given to describe the community of ordained monks. It has a clear hierarchical structure. It is overseen by the Sangha Supreme Council, and the Supreme Patriarch is the most senior monk. Although the Sangha does not admit women as monks a small number of female monks known as *Bikkhuni* exist, who have been ordained in Sri Lanka or by another *Bikkhuni*.

spiritual achievement. Similarly, some male monks found it difficult to accept the participation of female monks. These differences led to the following lessons learned:

Having the right facilitation team

At the beginning of the project, some WPT members refused to attend the activity once they learned that someone from a different group, they disagreed with was invited too. Also, when engaging in the discussion, it would become an issue if a representative of a certain group seemed to be given more opportunities to air their opinion than other participants. The organizing team had to tackle this challenge with extreme care. First of all, it was crucial to stress to the actors during the invitation stage that inclusivity and a diversity of views are precondition for a meaningful and successful dialogue and that dialogue is a platform for participants to learn about different perspectives and experience of others and, accordingly, to gain a holistic picture of a situation. Particularly helpful in persuading Buddhist monks that they would be entering a safe and respectful space was the fact that the IHRP project lead was a particularly observant Buddhist who was well-known and respected in Buddhist circles.

Once they agreed to join the dialogue, it was the facilitators' responsibility to make sure everyone had an equal opportunity to share their experiences and viewpoints throughout the discussion. The atmosphere in which most – if not all – participants could feel empowered, and a relative balance of power existed among the participants was dependent on having experienced and respected facilitators. This helped to reduce the negative feeling among participants and allow them to engage with one another more constructively despite their differences. The facilitation was shared amongst different members of the IHRP team. The academic status of the facilitators (teachers and academics are highly respected in Thai culture), combined with a long experience of dialogue facilitation with different groups in the South contributed to participants' confidence in the facilitators. It also helped that they worked as a team so that bad feelings towards any one facilitator at any particular moment could be mitigated through a variation in facilitators.

Diverging expectations as an opportunity

WPT members joined the group with different expectations and levels of commitment to the group. In the second year of the project, after an initial series of dialogues had focused on developing a joint understanding of the

situation in the south, different expectations about the future direction of the dialogue emerged. Some wanted WPT to be just a dialogue platform where they could join and share their experiences and views on the situation of the South while others participated in order to become more engaged in joint action for peace. The latter expected to see WPT as a cohesive Buddhist group with concrete action plans for the future. Even amongst those who wanted to see the group becoming more active there were different interests and priorities. Some thought that the relationship among Buddhists and between Buddhists and Muslims in the South needed to be enhanced first while others wished to strengthen the role of Buddhists in the peace process. Others saw the need to empower Buddhist youths in terms of their leadership skills and have them engage with Buddhist organizations in the area. A series of dialogues organized by the organizer team was not enough to cover all of these interests. The dialogues mostly served as a platform for WPT members to interact with one another, with state authorities and with their Malay-Muslim counterparts and share their views on certain selected issues causing tensions between communities.

These diverging expectations provided an opportunity for the group to develop their capacity to reach agreement by discussing something over which they had full control: the direction of the dialogue. The process of agreeing the direction of the dialogues was formalized into a meeting at the beginning of each year to come up with a so-called *'WPT strategic plan'* of the year. Efforts were made to ensure as many WPT members as possible could attend and those who could not were informed about the group's decision via LINE application group created to be a channel for internal group communication.

A second solution developed from 2016 to handle diverging expectations and interests was the development of seed money projects, later called WPT "sub-projects". These provided an opportunity for those who wanted to become more engaged in specific activities. Participation in sub-projects was entirely voluntary so those who simply wanted to attend the dialogues to participate in an exchange of views were not obliged to do more. Initially, the organizing team designed the sub-projects based on what had come up in the dialogues until then. From 2018 onwards, at the first WPT meeting of the year, WPT members would brainstorm possible sub-projects they would like to execute, discuss the projects' rationale, objectives and expected outcomes, and draft activity plan for those projects themselves. This strategy not only kept WPT members engaged but also greatly created a sense of belong-

ing to the group among WPT members. The sub-projects provided evidence that the WPT group had translated the results of their discussion and exchange into action. Two vivid examples were the sub-projects called "Envoys" and "Tha Dan" projects. The "envoy" project was created to better connect Buddhists in the South with the Buddhists and other actors at the center and to help wider Thai society understand the situation in the South, concerns that had been repeatedly discussed in the dialogues. Tha Dan project grew out of a wish to help the Buddhist victims of violence to rebuild their communities and livelihood and to reduce the Buddhist migration out of the three southernmost provinces. Support and accompaniment was provided to a small community of displaced Buddhists to return to their village of Tha Dan.

Making a trade-off between ownership and third-party facilitation

In the first two years of the project (2015–2016) the design and running of the project's activities was very much in the hands of the project initiators. WPT members were getting to know one another and trying to overcome their differences, so played very little part in the activity design and execution. From 2017 onwards the group started to enjoy the fruits and outcomes of the dialogues and sub-projects. They felt that by engaging in the platform they had strengthened the bond with one another, and their voices and needs were being heard by the authorities and the Muslim community. The project's outputs such as Narratives on *Relationship Weaving (2017), Position Paper on the Situations of Buddhists in the South (2017),* and *Report on the Feelings and Suggestions of the Buddhists Concerning the Peace Dialogue Process* (2018) were regarded by WPT as concrete achievements of the group. When they presented these documents to the authorities and actors, they felt pride and a sense of belonging to the group. In 2018–2019 they increasingly referred to themselves more as WPT members as compared to the previous years when their identity as heads or members of other networks still largely defined who they were.

With the strong sense of belonging to the group, WPT members started to talk about more participation in the steering and overall management of the project. At the end of 2018 they discussed the organizational culture and structure. This was a positive sign that they wished to continue being engaged in the project. They requested to be regularly updated on the status of sub-projects as well as to participate more in the project's strategic planning. In March WPT's organizational culture was laid out and accepted

by the members.[36] The group tried to come up with an organizational structure; they discussed how the group would survive in the future without the project partners' support, whether it would be appropriate to have a WPT president, vice-president and committees selected among the members and other related issues. At the end it was agreed that the group is not ready to operate with any solid structure. Without a doubt, by having a WPT management team the group could enjoy an increase in freedom to steer the direction of the group without IHRP's or the project partners' control. However, this would also mean that some members would have more power over the rest. The imbalance of power within the group became an issue of concern and the decision was made in mid-2019 that the group would retain its loose organizational structure with all members enjoying equal rights and status. This confirmed also for the organizing team that the primary purpose of the project remained to provide a safe space for exchange between different voices and perspectives within a diverse Buddhist community and that such a safe space required an external facilitator.

Striking a balance between nationalist and moderate voices

The initial plan of the project was to create two groups of Buddhist key actors, one at the center and the other in the South. In mid- 2015 the two groups were established. The one at the center had fewer participants than the one in the South. Bringing the two groups together the project partners hoped to create cohesion. The two could keep supporting and learning from each other. The group at the center could provide the southern group with an outsider's perspective of the conflict and, perhaps, a better approach to transform the conflict. However, in reality, some members of the center group tended to project strong Buddhist nationalist and Islamophobic viewpoints. These viewpoints matched the standpoint of the hardliners of the group in the South. When these two sets of participants with similar viewpoints came

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36   The IHRP team had helped formulating the guidelines discussed into a WPT organizational culture which stipulates: "The WPT is a space for Buddhist groups, particularly from the southern border provinces, to meet and work toward peaceful coexistence between the minority and majority in Thailand. The WPT connects Buddhists to diverse stakeholders, such as connecting Buddhists to Buddhists, Buddhists to Muslims, Buddhists to other religions, Buddhists to the authorities, and includes Buddhists and those who have different opinions. WPT values comprise generosity, listening without being judgmental, a readiness to learn, the practice of inner peace, a volunteer spirit, toleration and open-mindedness, and adaptability in work. The WPT as a group opposes all forms of violence and does not resort to violence. The WPT does not support any particular political party. WPT members will not exploit information or statements given during WPT dialogue activities against anyone and will not reveal the identity or affiliation of speakers without permission. WPT members will not refer to the group for personal benefit".

together in meetings between the two WPT groups or in dialogues between WPT and other stakeholders, especially with Muslim actors, the sense of negativity and close-mindedness was high. The discussions revolved around the victimhood of the Buddhists of the south and the stereotypical claim that most Muslims sympathize with the insurgents and indirectly support their movement. There was a strong risk that these negative viewpoints could reinforce each other and also influence, or drown-out, more moderate voices within the dialogues.

Faced with this ever-present risk the organizing team had to make a constant effort to ensure that the dialogue circle was filled with a good balance between participants with moderate views as well as those of nationalist views. When the discussions were going on, the facilitators had to make sure no one viewpoint dominated the discussion. By ensuring a variety of views were presented to the circle, the sense of negativity could be curbed, paving the way for learning opportunities. It was always helpful to stress the dialogue's ground rules like deep listening, listening without prejudgments, suspending previous experience and understanding, and to remind participants that the goals of the dialogue related to "supporting peace". This required the organizing team to plan ahead to anticipate potentially difficult moments in the discussions as well as being attentive to the flow of the discussion in the moment, in order to actively intervene when necessary.

3.6   Challenges and lessons related to effecting change at the inter-group level

One of the key goals of the project is to improve the quality of intergroup engagement by working within the Buddhist community to help prepare them and to support them in engaging with other stakeholders including the authorities, representatives of the resistance movement, and representatives of the Malay Muslim community. However, linking changes at the intragroup level with changes in intergroup relations presented a number of challenges that required corresponding adaptations.

Working with what you have got when you cannot have it all
During the first two years (2015–2016) of the project, two WPT groups – one at the center and the other in the South–were actively engaged in dialogues and other activities of the project as well as staying connected via the

LINE social media group. From the outset, it was hard to convene the desired actors from the center – those with sufficient seniority and authority to be potential influencers. From 2017 onwards, there was a decline in the engagement and enthusiasm of those it had been possible to convene. As most of them were either high-level Buddhist monks, politicians, heads of Buddhist organizations and activists, their schedules were quite hectic, barring them from participating consistently in the project. At the end of 2018 only a few from the center still maintained their participation and interest. The organizing team had to decide whether to continue to maintain the center group and try to encourage them to participate more or to drop it and divert the project's focus and resources to the group of the South alone.

The idea of having the group at the center was to have it serve as a linkage between the group of the south to the policy-making structures and actors in the capital and to the wider Thai society. It was clear that the dwindling participation in the center group could not be addressed and so the group was no longer an effective link. The decision was taken to wrap up the center group and pursue the linkage in other ways such as inviting policy makers and other key actors – be they Buddhists or Muslims – at the center to join the dialogues in the South. A few of the motivated remaining participants of the center group were invited to participate occasionally in meetings of the group in the south. The "envoy" sub-project also provided a means for representatives of the south group to connect with policymakers and other influential people. Efforts were also made to work on the group's media outreach through its Facebook page *'Weaving Peace Together'* and developing the group's connection with popular news media and channels like Thai PBS.

The difficulties in convening actors at the center, however, also forced the project to become more focused in what it was trying to achieve. In its first year, the project aspired to transform national-level discourses that had a bearing on the conflict: the relationship between Buddhism and the state, whether Buddhism was under threat, and the meaning and possibilities for decentralization. With the level of people it was possible to convene at the center, it became clear that these aspirations were overly ambitious. To prioritize these goals would have required a complete rethink and redesign of the project. Rather than start again, the organizers elected to work with what they had, and focus more on the southern group, their concerns and what could be achieved through working with them, as well as gradually building bridges between the southern group and Malay Muslims

Training as a key to unlocking rigid mindsets

One of the goals of the project was to promote increased inter-group dialogue between southern Buddhists and Malay Muslims. However, it gradually became clear that the intra-group dialogue alone was not preparing WPT members sufficiently for their inter-group dialogue experiences to be truly transformative. Although there were moments of insight and understanding generated in early inter-group encounters, many members of WPT remained very close-minded and struggled to move beyond their discourse of Buddhist victimhood. More effort was therefore invested in capacity-building in the intra-group format. Workshops were organized to increase basic knowledge and understanding – for example sessions were organized to improving Buddhists understanding of Muslims' groups – their different political stances and means to achieve their goals in order to break down the view of a monolithic Muslim 'other' – as well as capacities for self-reflection, understanding of conceptual tools for thinking about conflict transformation, and different ways of bringing about change.

It takes two to tango: the need for prepared dialogue partners

Although there is an official 'peace dialogue', the nature of Thai politics means it has not been designed in a very inclusive manner. There are not clearly established mechanisms to involve broader civil society in the process. The fact that democratic institutions were suspended for several years also meant that avenues for engaging with the political and policy-making process were limited. Thanks in particular to good contacts between IHRP and civilian and military authorities in the South it was nonetheless possible to arrange regular exchanges with high-ranking officials. However, the quality of the exchange was often low. Some authorities regard Buddhists' concerns as irrational – driven by emotions and lacking in factual basis from reliable sources. Therefore, most of the meetings with authorities fell into a pattern of authorities providing information and giving clarification intended to correct WPT members' misunderstandings. The authorities would also take the opportunity to present their achievements and projects to the participants. Although the WPT participants did gain more understanding of the state's policies and their implementation, WPT members did not feel heard, which created resentment against the authorities who were perceived as simply presenting propaganda as a means to justify their operation, while the violence situation had no end in sight.

With regards to Buddhists-Muslims dialogue, the main Muslims counterparts that engaged with WPT were Muslims leaders (e.g. imams,

chairs of Islamic Commission at provincial level, representatives from the Sheikhul Islam Office) and Muslims activists and members of local CSOs. However, there were as many divisions within the Malay Muslim community as there were within the Buddhist community yet there is no equivalent intra-Muslim dialogue in the area. For the inter-group dialogues to be most effective, ideally there would have been preparatory intra-group dialogues in both communities. Given the organizing team's involvement in facilitating intra-Buddhist dialogues it could have been difficult for them to be also accepted as a facilitator of intra-Malay Muslim dialogues. There was also a constraint in terms of time and resources. The team had tried encouraging other peacebuilding organizations to consider getting involved on the Malay Muslim side, but with little success as the priority focus of most of those who do try to promote dialogue within the Malay Muslim community is conflict between the separatist movement and the state.

Transparency to avoid misperceptions of a 'Buddhist front'

Many of the members of WPT were motivated to participate because of their concern at the weak solidarity amongst Buddhists. Over the course of the project there was a growing number of Buddhists' groups in the region. This somewhat enhanced Buddhists' sense of cohesion even though they have different political stances and demands. The Buddhists groups have been active in trying to strengthen their groups and gain the support from different organizations including this project. In the context where there is increasing tension between Buddhists and Muslims communities, the project team was very conscious of the risk that supporting WPT could actually strengthen a Buddhist network that is perceived as a threat by others, particularly people within the Malay Muslim community.

Part of this risk was managed by making sure other stakeholders (Malay Muslim leaders, authorities) were well informed about the project and its purposes and confirming they did not have a problem with it. The project team ensured regular visits, formally and informally, to provide updates on the project progress and seeking collaboration with all stakeholders, oftentimes inviting them to participate in WPT's activities. In addition, the project team ensured it provided enough opportunities for WPT members to self-reflect and review their strategies and goals to ensure they remained in line with the aims of peaceful coexistence, strengthened cross-community relations and building peace.

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter we have given an account of how an intra-Buddhist dialogue was established to address a perceived gap in conflict transformation efforts in southern Thailand. In addition to explaining how the dialogue was designed and implemented, we have identified a series of challenges that arose during the process and summarized how we dealt with them.

Perhaps the most important conclusion we can draw is that while the design and implementation of the process was carefully tailored to intra-group dynamics, it was also significantly shaped by the wider inter-group context. At the intra-group level, we gave careful consideration to the composition of the group in order to have a diversity of voices and expectations, without one tendency dominating. We also established a strong facilitation team that was both viewed as legitimate and able to cede enough control to build a sense of ownership within the group. However, the dialogue could not ignore the wider context. Goals and modalities were adapted to take account of who was actually willing to participate. Some activities had to involve preparing participants for dialogue with other groups. At the same time, outreach to other groups was necessary in order to gauge their readiness for inter-group dialogue, and to actively explaining the purpose of the intra-group dialogue in order to avoid being misunderstood. From a facilitator's point of view, the tactical level of how to construct and maintain a constructive intra-group dialogue cannot be separated from strategic considerations of how the intra-group dialogue relates to the wider inter-group context.

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"This is an excellent report about intragroup and intergroup dialogue processes in two rarely documented conflict situations i.e., in Egypt in the post Tahir Square context, and in Thailand on the challenges of Buddhist/Malay Muslim dialogue. Both cases exemplify the need for dialogue processes to be carefully and culturally sensitive to the differing political, national, and religious value systems of societies who are struggling with the complexities of pre democracy situations, and with religious identity issues and worldviews. It will add considerably to the knowledge base of mediators and others seeking to equip themselves with a wider understanding of the requirements of intragroup process beyond their usual contexts."
Mari Fitzduff, Professor Emerita, Heller School, Brandeis University

"Intra-group dialogue can increase negotiation flexibility with the other side, but in a way that is internally legitimatized and therefore sustainable."
Ambassador Simon Geissbühler, Head Peace and Human Rights Division,
Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs until July 2024