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Transfer from Track Two Peacebuilding to Track One Peacemaking:

Insights from Yemen and Syria

Policy Brief

This policy brief presents findings from a study that explored the process of transfer from informal peacebuilding initiatives (track two) to formal peace-making processes (track one) in the context of the intra-state wars in Yemen and Syria, including a specific focus on the role of women therein.[1]

Over the past 30 years, international approaches to peace processes have focused on the multi-track model of peacebuilding, which divides peacemaking and peacebuilding activities into separate "tracks": track one, track 1.5, track two, and track three. "Track one" is understood as official diplomacy, between government and military leaders, focused on the negotiation of ceasefires and peace accords. "Track two" refers to unofficial dialogue sessions, workshops, and problem-solving activities seeking to rebuild relationships and involving civil society leaders and influential individuals. "Track 1.5" entails unofficial interaction between representatives of conflict parties and non-governmental experts to prepare the ground for an official peace process or to keep interacting if track one negotiations have been interrupted. "Track three" comprises inter- or intra-community dialogue activities at the grassroots level to encourage mutual interaction and understanding.

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One of the principal aims of track two peacebuilding has been seen as influencing and/or supporting track one negotiations. The concept of "transfer" conceptualises how this can be done. There are two categories of transfer: "upward transfer", through which ideas and outcomes from track two workshops move to and influence formal, high-level track one negotiations, and "downward transfer", through which ideas and outcomes influence public opinion and affect the conflict as a whole.[2] Thus, what is being transferred from track two can travel "upwards" to track one and track 1.5, but also "laterally" to other track two initiatives and "downwards" to track three programmes. Such "movement" can take place in different directions simultaneously or sequentially.

Nevertheless, the concept of transfer remains ambiguous and challenging to grasp and enact. Despite some instances of effective transfer, it is a dynamic process that has often elicited frustration and pessimism among peace practitioners. The concept of transfer from track two to track one needs to be rethought in light of the mostly stalled and complex peace and political transition processes currently ongoing, to make it more relevant and effective.

This research had two objectives. The first was to assess:

- the extent to which transfer from track two to track one is taking place, and has taken place, in Yemen and Syria;

- the obstacles opposed to transfer from track two to track one in these two contexts;

- the means by which transfer from track two to track one may be made more relevant and effective in the future in these two countries and further afield.

The second objective was to outline a framework that can be used to assess and plan for effective transfer, examining questions around what is transferred, who receives the transfer, and how the transfer takes place. The framework presents the numerous mechanisms and approaches contained within the process of transfer from track two to track one.[3]

The research and framework draw on a review of the secondary literature on transfer and analyses of data gathered from 24 interviews and three workshops with convenors, donors, and participants in track two and track one peacebuilding and peacemaking efforts in Yemen and Syria.

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2   E. Çuhadar and T. Paffenholz, "Transfer 2.0: Applying the Concept of Transfer from Track-Two Work-
     shops to Inclusive Peace Negotiations," *International Studies Review* 22:3 (2020), p. 652.

3   For the framework, see "Transfer from Track Two Peacebuilding to Track One Peacemaking."
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1. Key Findings on Track Two to Track One Transfer

Transfer from track two to track one is being sought in Yemen and Syria, and a number of interviewees described such transfer as crucial. There are two important characteristics of transfer from track two to track one: that it is frequently long term and not a singular act, and that it can be either formal or informal (albeit it is mostly the latter).

The research identified a series of obstacles and barriers to transfer:

- **Track one blockage:** The overall obstacle to transfer is the protracted nature of the wars in Yemen and Syria and stalled formal track one peace processes, which make it extremely difficult for civil society and community leaders, particularly women, to influence processes positively.

- **Structure of track two:** Barriers to transfer stem from the structure of track two, participants' perceptions of the superficial nature of track two initiatives, and failures in communication. Transfer is further hindered by sporadic funding patterns and insufficient coordination among track two convenors to convey joint messages.

- **Practical and conceptual confusion:** Peace practitioners in both countries offered some examples of effective transfer, but they were lacking in detail. When they did identify specific instances, their reports were often tempered by cynicism about the impact of these efforts. The examples provided of successful transfer were often phrased in such a way as to reveal a lack of clarity and precision about the concept.

- **Lack of protection:** Danger to the safety of track two participants, particularly women, is a primary barrier to their participation. Women who participate in the track two space face hostility and persecution.

- **Exclusion of women:** In both countries, women—particularly from marginalised communities—face structural and systematic exclusion from public and political life, from influential track two initiatives, and from track one negotiations.

Interviewees also outlined various ways in which transfer between track two and track one in Yemen and Syria could be improved. It was suggested that the very idea of separating the tracks should be abandoned, and that track two should shape or decide the agenda of track one. It was also proposed that local mediation skills and mediators should be deployed within the track one process; that better communication is needed between the convenors of the two tracks, particularly on the way in which needs and objectives are conveyed; that there should be an overlap of participants between track two and track one; that track one truly needs to invest in track two processes; and that more flexible, gender-responsive, and long-term budgets are needed to better support transfer.

2. Spotlight on Inclusion in the Peace Processes in Yemen and Syria

Interviewees underlined a series of specific challenges and opportunities facing women in the context of transfer from track two to track one in both Yemen and Syria.

Since the conclusion of the 2014 Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, track one peacemaking has struggled and stalled, with agreements (already few) barely being implemented.[4] Track one has also been criticised for excluding and disregarding women's input on the dynamics of the war, the nature of any political settlement, and the specific experiences, rights, and needs of women and girls.[5] The delegations to official negotiations have rarely included women, and all of the four United Nations (UN) Special Envoys appointed to Yemen thus far have been men. However, at the level of official talks, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), in coordination with UN Women and Tawafuq (a track two network), formed a track 1.5 initiative, the Technical Advisory Group, a body of Yemeni women with whom the OSESGY has consulted during the rare negotiations.

In track two spaces in Yemen, women and civil society actors have found greater freedom and opportunities to work towards peace. For instance, women have mediated local disputes, played instrumental roles in securing humanitarian access and in campaigning for the release of missing persons, and formed networks and launched campaigns to advance both women's rights and peace.[6] However, this work has neither been recognised at higher levels nor been scaled up into meaningful participation in the track one space. Moreover, interviewees stated that the conflict parties in Yemen were opposed and unwilling to listen to the views of Yemeni women involved in track two initiatives, and that Yemeni women tend to be excluded from prominent track two initiatives and from political life in general.

In Syria, despite women's prominent role during the 2011 uprisings,[7] their participation in the track one space has been relatively limited. As a result of their international advocacy, the UN-led process has become more inclusive, with the

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4   For a more detailed exploration of this question, see T. Paffenholz, "Perpetual Peacebuilding: A New Paradigm to Move Beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peacebuilding," *Journal of Intervention and State-building* 15:3 (2021), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17502977.2021.1925423, pp. 367–85.

5   See, for example, M. Awadh and N. Shuja'adeen, "Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Yemen," UN Women (2019), https://yemen.un.org/en/15853-women-conflict-resolution-and-peace-building-yemen [last accessed: 16 August 2021], p. 17.

6   See, for instance, "The Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group Plays an Active Role During the Sweden Consultations," UN Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (2018), https://osesgy.unmissions.org/yemeni-women%E2%80%99s-technical-advisory-group-plays-active-role-during-sweden-consultations [last accessed: 17 January 2021], pp. 18–21.

7   C. Moore and T. Talarico, "Inclusion to Exclusion: Women in Syria," *Emory International Law Review* 30:2 (2015), https://scholarlycommons.law.emory.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1154&context=eilr, p. 299.

Office of the Special Envoy for Syria committing to a minimum quota of 30 percent women's participation in the Constitutional Committee.[8] Yet the process is still largely dominated by the Astana track, which does not include mechanisms for inclusivity or civil society influence. Furthermore, all four UN Special Envoys to Syria have been men, although the outgoing Deputy Special Envoy is a woman. In addition to the high-level political process, the UN has supported the creation of track 1.5 programmes, including the Women's Advisory Board (WAB)[9] and the Civil Society Support Room.[10] However, the WAB has faced criticism for its limited influence on the process, its untransparent selection criteria, and its mandate as an advisory body as opposed to a direct representative in the delegations.[11]

At the local level, Syrian women and civil society organisations have negotiated ceasefires, de-escalated fighting to facilitate aid access, organised nonviolent protests, monitored and documented war crimes, led humanitarian efforts for displaced Syrians, and worked in schools and hospitals.[12] This work has not been incorporated into or even recognised by the formal political process.

Concerning both Yemen and Syria, participants spoke of the hostility and persecution women have faced for taking part in track two initiatives. It was suggested that capacity-building could improve the communication skills of Yemeni and Syrian women involved in track two, and that in Yemen track two convenors should support women to develop better relationships with the conflict parties. Yet there appear to be deep-seated barriers to the inclusion of women, and to the transfer of women's initiatives to track one, that capacity-building may fail to address. Cultural and attitudinal shifts on the part of track one actors may help to enact change in this area.

8   Established under "Resolution 2254," UN Security Council (S/RES/2254) (2015), http://undocs.org/S/RES/2254(2015) [last accessed: 18 January 2021].

9   "Statement by UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka on the Establishment of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board to Contribute to Peace Talks," UN Women (2016), www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/2/ed-statement-on-syrian-womens-advisory-board [last accessed: 18 January 2021].

10   "Civil Society Support Room," SwissPeace (n.d.), www.swisspeace.ch/projects/mandate/civil-society-support-room [last accessed: 18 January 2021].

11   "The Case for More Inclusive—and More Effective—Peacemaking in Yemen," International Crisis Group (2021), www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/221-case-more-inclusive-and-more-effective-peacemaking-yemen [last accessed: 6 April 2022].

12   A. Bandura and M. Blackwood, "Women's Role in Achieving Sustainable Peace in Syria," US Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security (2018), www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/12th-us-cswg-may22-2018-v2.pdf [last accessed: 6 September 2022], p. 1; see also R. Coulouris, "Here's Why Syrian Women Need to Be Included More in Peacebuilding," Atlantic Council (2018), www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/here-s-why-syrian-women-need-to-be-included-more-in-peacebuilding [last accessed: 16 August 2021].

3 Conclusion

There is an urgent need to rethink and refine transfer, particularly in light of stalled and complex peace and political transition processes such as those in Yemen and Syria. There is insufficient understanding within the international mediation and peacebuilding community about how transfer can take place and inadequate planning of how transfer will be facilitated. It seems paramount to reflect on whether transfer should be sought and, if so, exactly how it should be achieved in each respective context, with careful consideration of women's barriers to access and influence.

Persevering with attempts to transfer to a struggling or stalled track one process could prove futile, and other forms of transfer may be more fruitful. Possible measures include rethinking both track one processes and their primacy in the multi-track model; reconceptualising the tracks to ensure that they are complementary rather than separate and divided; making current and future track two efforts more goal-oriented and less dependent on track one; and ultimately ensuring that negotiation processes are more inclusive.

Dividing peacebuilding and peacemaking into separate tracks may also serve to obscure blurred boundaries between the tracks and prevent truly inclusive outcomes. Broadening the understanding of what constitutes peacemaking and peacebuilding towards a more flexible, homegrown, emancipatory, and participatory conceptualisation could make it possible to move away from the very need for transfer.[13]

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13   Paffenholz, "Perpetual Peacebuilding".

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