

Success and Failure of National Dialogues: Selected Countries' Case Studies: General Lessons for Ethiopia

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the successes and failures of national dialogue by drawing lessons for Ethiopia from the experience of other nations that have undertaken national dialogue in challenging political environments. Using a qualitative research methodology, this study analyzed the national dialogue conducted from 1990 to 2016. Countries selected as part of the case study were South Africa, Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, and Tunisia. Document analysis was utilized to glean information on the characteristics shared by all national dialogues, as well as the political and procedural elements and circumstances that have either facilitated or impeded the negotiated outcomes of national dialogues. The study found that while the majority of the National Dialogues under study came to agreements, in half of the cases, the agreements were not executed or were only partially implemented. This paper made the case that for Ethiopia's national dialogue to be successful and to end the persistent conflict and holistically address the underlying causes of conflict, the national dialogues should be considered beyond the typical circle of elitist decision-makers. According to the article as a whole, national dialogues will be more likely to succeed if they include the following principles: political will, inclusiveness, openness, and public engagement, a broad agenda, an implementation plan, suitable and understandable rules of procedure, and a trustworthy convener.

Keywords: National Dialogue, Conflict Transformation, Success, Failure, Ethiopia

1. Introduction

National dialogues have been effective peace-building instruments in recent years across Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa (Christopher, 2016). National dialogues offer significant extra-constitutional methods for creating substitute frameworks and different sorts of "self-mediation structures" for repairing the national systems and aiding in constitution-drafting processes, from South Africa (1991) to Yemen (2013-2014). Political agreements are essential to maintaining politics' primacy as the non-violent way of resolving conflicts over interests, ideologies, and power in a fragile or post-conflict environment (USIP, 2021).

The opportunity to address the core causes of conflict and problems brought on by the previous constitutions' inability to serve as a foundation for an inclusive social compact and to meet the requirements of all stakeholders is another benefit of national dialogue procedures. As a result, national dialogues have emerged as an alternative strategy for conflict transformation that conflict management organizations are now turning to to promote peace and settle long-standing disputes in polarized countries. National discussions, however, are not just for open disputes. The Convention for a Democratic South Africa, national conferences (Benin, Congo, Togo, Mali, Niger, Zaire, Chad), multi-party discussions, roundtables (Poland, Germany), constituent assemblies (Bolivia, Afghanistan), and other formats are all used for national discourse. As in Bahrain, Yemen, Tunisia, and Lebanon, national forums may also be used in situations of political impasse or institutional delegitimization (Berghof Foundation, 2017; USIP, 2021).

The Ethiopian government has finally taken an important step to start a National Dialogue after putting it off for more than a year and receiving repeated requests from various opposition parties. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives gave the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission its approval on December 29, 2021. According to the legislation establishing the commission, its purpose is to "clear the way for national consensus and uphold the integrity of the nation" (SIHA, 2022).

For Ethiopians, the national debate is an opportunity to forge a new course towards peace, political tolerance, national cohesion, economic equality, and a shared Ethiopian destiny. According to Awol (2022) the national dialogue is also seen as a solution to several issues that have plagued Ethiopian politics, particularly since the 1960s, such as the country's official historical narrative, the institutional aspects of linguistic self-determination, the power dynamic between national and regional governments, the way that

regions and linguistic groups are represented in the centre, the distribution of national revenue, dispute resolution mechanisms, and arrangements for the future of the country (Awol, 2022).

The lessons learned from other countries' national dialogue experiences show that effective national dialogues are those that are carried out from beginning to end according to general national dialogue principles like inclusion, transparency, and public participation, as well as a credible and impartial convener, a clear mandate, and a structure, rules, and procedures that are tailored to the needs of the specific country's political context.

This study will examine the success and failure of national discussions and apply its lessons to Ethiopia by using the experiences of countries like South Africa, Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, and Tunisia as case studies. In addition, the paper looks at the characteristics shared by all national dialogues as well as the political, legal, and procedural elements and circumstances that have either facilitated or restricted the negotiated outcomes of national dialogues. Cover the historical context, creation and mandate, planning phase, agenda, participants, structure, convening and facilitation, opportunities for public participation, political and conflict developments during the dialogue, international involvement, immediate results, implementation, and long-term implications in each case study.

1.2. The methodology

This study outlines broad trends in the development of National Dialogues, from their inception to their execution. The information about the national dialogue process was gathered from secondary sources, including magazines, newspapers, websites, books, articles, and electronic journals. Instead of extensive statistical analyses, inductive, comprehensive qualitative data analysis was employed to find patterns. For this, each of the 6 examples was initially subjected to a process tracing approach. I've outlined each National Dialogue's history so you can understand how it started, how it developed, who was involved, and what outcomes it had. In each instance, I also tried to figure out how the National Dialogue fit within the wider political transformation in terms of other significant events. After that, commonalities among the instances were found. These paid particular attention to several inductively found elements that were crucial in influencing the results of national dialogues, most notably the conclusion and application of agreements.

2. The Concept of National Dialogues

National dialogues are nationally owned political processes intended to promote consensus among a wide range of national stakeholders during times of intense political crises, in post-war circumstances, or during

significant political upheavals. According to Paffenholz et al. (2017), national dialogues can be used as tools for (a) crisis management and prevention, a tactically undertaken project aimed at ending political impasses and re-establishing a minimal level of political consensus (e.g., Tunisia); or (b) fundamental change, a longer-term project aimed at redefining state-society relations or creating a new "social contraption.

Since they allow access to parties and groups that are typically excluded from or underrepresented in political debates, national dialogues are currently a well-liked tool for structural reforms (Harlander, 2016). Commonly, national dialogues followed by broader, more inclusive societal dialogues are intended to include the public's wants and concerns in the process as well as to strengthen legitimacy and ownership over the process and its outcomes (CEG, 2017; Paffenholz et al., 2017; Papagianni, 2014). National dialogues contain specified norms and procedures for dialogue and decision-making, as well as clear structures (typically a combination of plenary sessions and working groups).

National dialogues can be conducted for a few days to several years and have a wide range of sizes and compositions. The aim of the National dialogues can be broad-based change processes (e.g., negotiating a new social contract, redefining state-society relations, establishing new political institutions, and/or determining the process by which reforms will be implemented, etc.), according to Blanck et al. (2017), Kaplan and Freeman (2017), Paffenholz et al. (2017), and Harlander (2016). National dialogues with shorter-term endeavors and/or a more constrained set of goals (such as creating security arrangements, amending the constitution, establishing truth commissions, etc., and/or focused especially on resolving or preventing the outbreak of violence) tend to have more limited mandates, be smaller in scope, and last for a shorter period of time. National dialogues proceed through three consecutive stages: preparation, process, and implementation (Blunck et al., 2017). Because it usually comprises mini-negotiation procedures to establish mandates, agendas, participant selection policies, and other institutional frameworks, the preparatory phase might last exactly as long as the formal process does (Paffenholz et al., 2017).

2.1. Distinguishing National Dialogue from Related Concepts

The literature carefully distinguishes national dialogue from other conflict resolution mechanisms. Unlike mediation, which involves a third party facilitating resolution between conflicting parties, or negotiation, which brings adversaries together to find common ground, national dialogue mandates inclusivity and broad consultation. Papagianni (2014) notes that national dialogues expand participation beyond political and military elites to integrate diverse groups and interests. However, scholars acknowledge that in

practice, mediation, negotiation, and dialogue may overlap, with each occurring before, after, or parallel to the others.

2.2. Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding National Dialogue

A significant contribution to the literature is Mandikwaza's (2024) proposal of a comprehensive theoretical framework drawing from three interconnected theories: conflict transformation, social contract theory, and consociationalism. This framework addresses what the author identifies as a "theoretical deficiency" in explaining the assumptions underlying national dialogues.

2.2.1 Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict transformation, associated primarily with the work of Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach, provides a foundational lens for understanding national dialogues. Unlike conflict resolution, which seeks to end conflicts, conflict transformation aims to change the underlying structures, relationships, and discourses that perpetuate violence. Lederach (1995, 2014) emphasises that sustainable peace requires transforming destructive patterns of interaction into constructive relationships capable of generating reconciliation.

Applied to national dialogues, conflict transformation theory illuminates how these processes can address root causes of conflict rather than merely managing symptoms. The theory's emphasis on building trust and cooperation among diverse actors resonates with the inclusive, consensus-building objectives of national dialogues. As Mandikwaza notes, conflict transformation provides a normative framework for understanding how dialogues might achieve more than temporary ceasefires or elite bargains.

2.2.2. Social Contract Theory

Social contract theory, with its focus on renegotiating the relationship between state and citizens, offers another crucial analytical lens. Loewe, Zintl, and Houdret (2021) conceptualise the social contract as encompassing the rights and obligations linking citizens and the state. In contexts of political crisis or transition, national dialogues can be understood as forums for renegotiating this contract.

The literature suggests that successful national dialogues address the breakdown of trust between citizens and their representatives. Mosharraf (2020) identifies low trust between citizens and representatives, distance between people and decisions affecting their lives, and lack of pluralism as key problems that national dialogues might address. By providing space for inclusive deliberation on fundamental governance questions, dialogues can potentially rebuild the social contract on more legitimate foundations.

2.2.3. Consociationalism

Consociational theory, developed by Arend Lijphart (1977) and others, addresses how deeply divided societies can achieve democratic stability through power-sharing arrangements. Core consociational principles include grand coalitions, mutual veto powers, proportional representation, and segmental autonomy.

National dialogues often incorporate consociational elements, particularly when they address conflicts in ethnically or regionally divided societies. As Mandikwaza observes, while the three theories approach peacebuilding from different angles, they share common themes essential for successful national dialogues: participatory governance, addressing root causes, and building trust and cooperation. The integration of these theoretical perspectives provides a more comprehensive foundation for understanding, designing, and evaluating national dialogue processes.

3. Discussion

3.1. National Dialogue analyzed in the Case study

A. South Africa Multi-Party Negotiation Process of 1993

The Apartheid system was disintegrating due to the global economic crisis, isolation, and its own psychological and social effects. The liberation movement faced difficulties as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union because it lost both political and financial support. As a result, there was intense international pressure to end the conflict, and both sides were caught in a situation that was damaging them both. On February 2, 1990, then-President FW de Klerk made a statement announcing the beginning of talks for a "new South Africa" and the lifting of all political movement bans. A National Peace Accord was signed by 27 political, labour, and government leaders after formal meetings between the ANC and the government were held in Groote Schuur and Pretoria. It provided a set of guidelines for behaviour throughout the transition and paved the stage for the first multi-party forum, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) (USIOP, 2021; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

The South Africa Multi-Party Negotiating Process (or Multi-Party Negotiating Forum) convention, where an interim constitution was agreed, and ongoing bilateral discussions between the ANC and the government helped negotiations resume after CODESA I and II failed. A constitutional assembly that enacted the constitution in 1996 was required by free and fair elections on April 27, 1994. The peace process, which famously sought to establish a new consensus on societal norms, procedures, and fundamental principles, sought to build the new "Rainbow Nation" by combining elements of crisis management (limiting violence) and fundamental reform. One of the most well-known peace processes, it stands out for its high level of national

ownership through self-mediation, serious efforts to vertical inclusivity despite its essentially elite character, and the quality of leadership displayed by both top leaders and leaders on all societal levels and sectors (note the significant role played by religious leaders as well as the Consultative Business Movement).

Goal: To work towards the main goal of drafting a new constitution for South Africa by developing and adopting constitutional principles that are binding on the Constitutional Assembly (CA) and negotiating a constitution for the Transition.

Mandate: The talks were mandated by a record of understanding between the ANC and the NP, and a later all-party planning conference after CODESA I and II failed.

Criteria for selection and participation: 26 parties, including political organizations, representatives of the national and homeland governments, and traditional leaders, participated in the MPNP. The KwaZulu homeland government, the Conservative Party, and the Volksunie participated in the process, making it more inclusive than the previous two attempts. With reservations, the Pan-Africanist Congress was present. The Azanian People's Organization and a few extremist Afrikaner parties were the only ones to decline to sign on.

Facilitation: To increase the parties' sense of inclusion, MPNP meetings were presided over by members of the negotiation teams instead of senior judges, as was the case with earlier CODESA talks.

Foreign backing: The NP administration and the ANC, both major parties, were opposed to foreign mediation. The result was that the process was largely self-mediated, with the notable exception of the Kenyan academic Washington Okumu, who, in March 1994, following a failed negotiation attempt by the late Lord Carrington and former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, was able to broker an end to an IFP boycott (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Results: The MPNP produced a Constitution for the Transition as well as four other draft bills on temporary bodies to oversee broadcasting (the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the Independent Electoral Commission, the Transitional Executive Council, and the Independent Media Commission). A new electoral law that would govern elections for the Constitutional Assembly was also adopted by delegates (USIOP, 2021; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Challenges and lessons learned: The national discussion of 1990 provided South Africa with a once-in-a-lifetime chance to resolve its unresolvable conflict. In an all-party preparation conference in March 1993, the parties revised the negotiation process and structures in light of the lessons learned from CODESA. They discovered the importance of a clear structure

with a single negotiating and decision-making body, the use of technical experts to facilitate "interest-based" discussion, the formation of a dependable "coordinating committee" to serve as process guardians and anticipate and prevent problems, and the critical importance of deadlock-breaking mechanisms that the parties had previously agreed upon. Local peace committees in South Africa played a significant role in bringing the community together, lowering tensions, and halting the bloodshed (USIOP, 2021; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

B. The Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference in Yemen (2013–2014)

Yemen was shaken by the Arab Spring in January 2011 after Tunisia and Egypt, and it hasn't been able to transform into a democratic and peaceful state. In January 2011, mass demonstrations to remove President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been in office for 33 years, started. Ultimately, Saleh was compelled to consent to a plan to cede power in April 2011 that was mediated by the GCC. He wouldn't sign it, though, until November 2011. In exchange for full immunity from prosecution, Saleh agreed to step down from his position as president and make way for Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi under the terms of the GCC agreement. Before the country's presidential elections, Hadi was to establish and lead a Government of National Unity (Haider, 2019; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

A national conversation would be held to lay the groundwork for fresh elections to be held by February 2014, and a two-year transitional phase was also formed. During this time, the military and security institutions were to be reorganized. The GCC agreement stated that the national dialogue would give representatives from all facets of Yemeni society, including women's and youth organizations, the Southern and Houthis movements, other political parties, and members of civil society, the chance to express their opinions and concerns. In order to prepare for the national dialogue, a Preparation Committee with 25 members—including women and young people—was established in July 2012 (Lackner 2012).

Objective: To formulate the fundamental tenets of constitutional change; to talk about the process of developing a new constitution, including the creation of a constitutional drafting panel; to handle concerns with a national scope (the Southern and Sa'ada issues); and to discuss issues with transitional justice, racial harmony, human rights protection, gender equality, and sustainable development. The NDC's overarching goal was to build the groundwork for a social contract that would promote social cohesion and national unity in Yemen.

Political mandate: Discussions and eventual agreement between the largest opposition JMP bloc and the Yemeni ruling party, GCC

implementation mechanism, and subsequent Presidential Decree No. 30 (July 12, 2012) provide the formal mandate.

Criteria for selection and participation: The Technical Committee for the Preparation of the NDC established the participation requirements. The GCC initiative implementation mechanism outlined the key constituents. Although certain groups, like the Hiraq movement, felt underrepresented, no groups were excluded. Political parties and components were asked to nominate their own delegates throughout the selection process in accordance with the NDC mandate's quotas (30% women, 20% youth, and 50% Southerners). The Technical Committee selected independent women, young people, and CSOs delegates following a call for applications and evaluation. Age requirements (18–40 for youth) and non-political involvement were among the requirements. The President selected the remaining 61 delegates using ad hoc criteria (Haider, 2019). Each of the NDC's nine working groups elected its own chairperson, vice chairperson, and rapporteur to serve as the group's facilitator.

International assistance: The "G10 + countries" (permanent members of the UNSC, the EU, and GCC) gave international assistance. A competent office support staff led by UNSESGY Jamal Benomar was provided. The GCC initiative implementation stipulated the involvement of the UN and Special Envoy (USIOP, 2021; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Results: The NDC outcomes paper served as a guide for the new constitution and provided a summary of the working groups' findings. Due to the start of the civil war, discussions over the draft constitution were unable to proceed (Haider, 2019; USIOP, 2021; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Challenges and lessons discovered: The 2013 National Dialogue Conference in Yemen was successful in ensuring inclusivity in the dialogue process. The participation of a wide range of political and social actors in Yemeni society was made possible by it (Elayah et al., 2018; Hartmann, 2017; Gaston, 2014; Hassan and Eshaq, 2014). This included groups like youth, women, and other groups (including smaller political parties) who had previously been excluded from political decision-making. However, some of the criticism focused on the South's underrepresentation, particularly in relation to the Hiraq movement. Additionally, the NDC's broad scope, lack of community involvement and interaction, and lack of confidence-building measures, particularly in the South and Sa'ada, all hampered the achievement of the goals. Additionally, the central government's and the president's lackadaisical attitude slowed down and prevented the realisation of the NDC outcomes. 2017; Berghof Foundation.

C. **The Afghan Constitutional Loya Jirga (2003–2004)**

The Constitutional Loya Jirga was a component of the country's transitional framework (better known as the Bonn Process) after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent overthrow of the Taliban regime in late 2001. The Bonn Process was mediated by 25 prominent Afghan and international actors during the UN-sponsored International Conference on Afghanistan held in Bonn in December 2001. Thus, the Constitutional Loya Jirga was a component of Afghanistan's nation-building under the Bonn Process. The Drafting Commission was established in April 2003 as a crucial step to promote inclusion of the drafting body and public participation in the drafting process, even though it was initially not anticipated in the Bonn Agreement (Berghof Foundation, 2017). The Commission was tasked with broad public consultation, thorough revision, and finalization of the draft constitution in light of the results of the consultation. Although the Bonn Agreement's inclusion of greater inclusivity, gender sensitivity, and multi-ethnicity was a cornerstone of the CLJ's goals, it was primarily a crisis management tool that facilitated the rapid construction of functional governing institutions. The Constitutional Loya Jirga is regarded as a procedure that greatly increased Afghan ownership while establishing forums for public involvement and facilitating debate among political actors. The Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami's absence, however, diminished the inclusiveness and validity of the process.

Goal: creating a constitution based on public consensus is the goal.

Mandated: mandated by the peace accord that followed the US invasion (the Bonn Agreement).

Participation and selection requirements: 502 delegates, of which 450 will be elected, while the remaining 50 (25 women and 25 specialists) will be nominated by the president. Two additional representatives for the disabled community will also be appointed. 33 representatives of the judicial system and the transitional government were invited as observers but were not given speaking or voting privileges. Senior military, police, and government personnel are not permitted to participate. The 450 elected delegates were selected in the following manner: (Berghof Foundation, 2017; Haider, 2019) The Emergency Loya Jirga process elected 344 members by secret ballot from district representatives; 42 members were chosen by representatives of refugees in Pakistan and Iran, internally displaced people, Kuchis, Hindus, and Sikhs (15%); and 64 women were chosen by women representatives in the 32 provinces.

Facilitation: Hazrat Sibghatullah Mujadeddi is the Chair (of the Leadership Bureau and the CLJ). Although there were some international advisors, foreign technical aid was kept to a minimum to allay suspicions that non-Afghans were writing the constitution. IGOs (UNAMA, UNDP,

UNHCR, UNOPS, ISAF), national and international NGOs, the Ministry of Interior, and the security company Global Risk Strategies all contributed to the process. Throughout the Bonn Process, the US and the UN were crucial players (Berghof Foundation, 2017; Haider, 2019).

Outcome: On January 26, 2004, the president approved the constitution. The 162 articles of the constitution offer a framework for the creation of the rule of law, a centralized presidential administration with a bicameral parliament, robust minority rights, and a strengthening of women's rights.

Challenges and lessons discovered: A respectable variety of political actors were able to participate in a political discourse that was mostly owned and driven by Afghan actors and involved popular consultations, thanks to the architecture and structure of the transitional process and the Constitutional Loya Jirga in particular. However, important organizations like the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami were not included. At the CLJ, women made up about 20% of the participants. Despite this significant representation, warlord intimidation hindered women's active engagement and participation. To create unambiguous Rules of Procedure, the Secretariat of the Constitutional Commission established a fairly thorough structure. However, implementation proved difficult due to warlords' attempts to control the working groups and place undue pressure on them. After initial funding challenges, a donor friend group for the procedure was created. The draft constitution that the CLJ debated was heavily influenced by President Karzai rather than the Constitutional Commission's public consultation efforts because the Commission was not independent of the Afghan President (Berghof Foundation, 2017; Haider, 2019).

D. National Dialogue Conference and Sudanese National Dialogue (2014–2016)

The South Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and Darfur long-running civil wars, along with internal unrest and instability, were the backdrop for the emergence of the Sudanese National Dialogue. The conflict between the government and the various resistance forces had painfully stalled, with no obvious victor. In light of this, the Sudanese president requested in January 2014 that all political forces in the country, including armed opposition groups and parties, take part in a National Dialogue process. Through a collaborative approach encompassing all Sudanese, the National Dialogue sought to restore the political and constitutional underpinning of the state. The National Dialogue's explicit goal was to write a constitution that would safeguard and reaffirm all Sudanese people's basic freedoms, rights, and social fairness. It led to the acceptance of the Sudanese National Document, which will be the foundation for crafting a new constitution. The lack of diversity in terms of

representation and content in the process persists. Notably, the most powerful armed groups and opposition parties backed out of the process and skipped the National Dialogue Conference (Berghof Foundation, 2017; Haider, 2019).

Goal: Establishing a political, constitutional, and social base for a just state based on unity and cohesion among all Sudanese is the goal.

Mandate: President El Bashir issued a call for discussion in January 2014 in reaction to the war, political upheaval, and economic hardships.

Criteria for selection and participation: There were roughly 250 people in the General Assembly of the National Dialogue Conference from political parties, armed groups, national figures, and community leaders. The High Coordination Committee chose them by unanimous vote. Representatives and deputy representatives were proposed by each Dialogue participant. The precise number of participants fluctuated over the course of the process as certain parties, movements, and individuals joined during the conference while others departed to abstain from the National Dialogue. President El Bashir presided over the General Assembly as well as the three preceding Consultative Meetings. Each committee was presided over by a high-ranking official from either the government or the opposition, and their deputy was chosen from the opposing camp.

International assistance: The procedure was run on a national level, with assistance from the AUHIP, the UN, and other international partners. The presidents of Egypt, Mauritania, Chad, and Uganda, as well as the prime minister of Ethiopia and the secretary-general of the Arab League, all attended the final session (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Outcomes: The General Assembly approved the National Document, which will serve as the foundation for a new constitution, on October 10, 2014.

Challenges and lessons discovered: The entire process was characterized by a lack of feasibility and a lack of political will to abide by the terms set forth, such as ceasefires and governmental decrees intended to permit unrestricted political activity by the opposition. Representation problems plagued both the planning process and the actual National Dialogue Conference. The major opposition parties, notably the Umma party, the Reform Now Movement, and the National Unity Parties Alliance, withdrew from the process even though a huge number of movements participated. They established a new coalition known as "Sudan Call" that boycotted the election and included the Sudanese Communist Party, Sudanese Congress Party, unionist and Ba'ath parties, Nasserists, CSO initiatives, and the Sudanese Revolutionary Front, which included the SPLM/N, JEM, the SLM, Abdel Wahid, Meni Arkawi, and others (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

E. The Iraqi National Conference (2004)

After the US-led invasion of Iraq, a transitional framework incorporating the Iraqi National Conference was put in place by the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The National Conference was mandated by the Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL), which was opposed by a number of groups and did not reflect a broad political consensus. The Interim National Council, a non-legislative oversight body of the Interim Government with a restricted mission, was mandated to be established by the National Conference. A national dialogue process and national consensus-building were other goals. The second purpose was geared towards fundamental change, whereas the first was primarily focused on crisis management. The second purpose was geared towards fundamental change, whereas the first was primarily focused on crisis management. Even though the Conference was successful in creating a National Council, it did not increase political participation in the National Council or foster national consensus because there was little public awareness of the TAL and no political consensus on it, which directly led to the exclusion of important national stakeholders. As a result, the National Conference was marginalized politically and effectively lost its purpose (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Goals: To build consensus across the country and form the Interim National Council as an oversight body for the Interim Government

Mandatory: Following the US invasion of Iraq, the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) mandated the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL).

Participation: Change the first paragraph to read "1,200 to 1,500 delegates." Representatives from political parties, regions, women's organizations, other civil society organizations, universities, and the major tribes, ethnic groupings, and religious sects of Iraq, including Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, and Christians, were among the attendees. The Provincial Supervisory Committees chose around half of the participants. The committees examined applications and nominations in each of Iraq's 18 regions before submitting the names of delegates to the High Preparatory Commission (HPC). The provincial preliminary selection procedure was frequently criticized as being ineffective. Other delegates were put forward by HPC members directly. In order to properly represent minorities and other underrepresented groups, UN representatives aiding the Iraqis further requested to increase the number of participants beyond the initially anticipated 1,000 delegates in the last phases of planning (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

International assistance and participation: US officials assisted with the security, lodging, and logistics of the National Conference, and US representatives attended as observers. By appointing the members of the Iraqi

Governing Council (IGC), which later defined and dominated the whole process (via TAL, HPC, and the choice of National Conference participants), the US gave the entire process a strong directional drive. During the planning and execution phase, the UN provided support. Muad Massum presided over the plenum of the National Conference as well as the High Preparatory Commission.

Outcome: The Interim National Council was constituted by the Conference and governed the Iraqi Interim Government from August 2004 to January 2005. It was commonly regarded as a formalization of pre-existing temporary arrangements.

Challenges and lessons learned: The entire process was mostly elite-driven (and to some extent viewed as foreign-driven), lacking in ownership, inclusivity, and credibility. The Conference ultimately failed to forge a national consensus due to the planning phase's lack of agreement on fundamental concepts (significant disagreement regarding the deployment of foreign forces and the selection of the Interim Government).

F. Tunisian National Dialogue (2013–2014)

As a result of widespread protests during the so-called Dignity Revolution in January 2011, elections to select the members of the National Constituent Assembly were held in October 2011. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali had been removed from office by this point. Ennahda, an Islamist political party, won the elections with just 37% of the vote. As a result, it was forced to join forces with two secular parties to establish the "Troika," a coalition government. This power-sharing structure resulted in never-ending disagreements about a new Constitution inside the Constituent Assembly. Since it was thought that 89 of Ennahda's 217 delegates were promoting their Islamic agenda, political fighting erupted (Ottaway 2013:2). The formulation of the Constitution was consequently delayed. Due to the murder of party leader Mohamed Brahmi on July 25, 2013, the Constituent Assembly's work on drafting a new constitution came to a complete halt. After party leader Chokri Belaid was assassinated in February outside his home, it was the second politically motivated murder to occur in 2013 (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

The gap between the government, which is headed by the Islamist party Ennahda, and the new alliances of left-wing and secular movements and parties widened. To prevent the situation from getting worse, it was an ad hoc procedure that was not planned and designed, with a lot of individuals pulling and pushing in several directions at the same time. The national dialogue was conducted. Quartet was effective in assisting the roadmap negotiations, which allowed it to end the political impasse. It outlined three topics that would be discussed at the National Dialogue: the completion of the constitution, the

transition to a technocrat-run government, and election preparation (USIOP, 2021; Berghof Foundation, 2017).

Goals: To complete the constitution's writing, install a technocrat-led administration in its place, and set up elections. **Mandatory:** On October 5, 2013, the roadmap was signed by 23 of the 27 political parties participating in the National Constituent Assembly, indicating their consent to engage in a National Dialogue process mediated by the Quartet.

Participation: The Quartet addressed the National Constituent Assembly's 27 political parties and requested that they accept the roadmap and begin a process of talks and dialogue. In order to prevent the nation from imploding, numerous people and organizations held simultaneous meetings, conversations in public spaces, phone calls, and negotiations. Outside, demonstrators from activists, civil society groups, party supporters, intellectuals, and politicians tried to sway the political process. The Islamist party Ennahda, which leads the government, and Ettakatol, a member of the administration, along with the front-runner Nidaa Tounes, all signed the roadmap. The agreement was neither signed by the ruling Congress for the Republic (CPR) party nor the former Aridha party, Tayar Al Mahabba. The Wafa party and Attayar Dimokrati steadfastly declined to take part (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

The Quartet, a coalition of the Tunisian General Labour Union, the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts, the Tunisian Human Rights League, and the Tunisian Bar Association, was facilitated by the General Labour Union of Tunisia. Throughout the National Dialogue, the Quartet served as a mediator. Politicians and members of civil society participated in a challenging but fruitful National Dialogue at this crucial time:

International support: The UNDP, the EU, other countries through the UNDP project, as well as international NGOs, all assisted in the process.

Results: On January 26, 2014, the Constituent Assembly adopted the constitution. With a president serving as head of state, a prime minister as head of government, and a unicameral legislature, the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, the constitution establishes a unitary semi-presidential representative democratic republic.

Challenges and lessons learned: The Tunisian National Dialogue addressed a political crisis and involved quick crisis management. As a result, it was an ad hoc procedure rather than one that had been carefully thought out and designed. Elites and politicians participated in the process, while the general public was excluded. The Tunisian National Dialogue did not distinguish between the preparation and process phases because it was an ad hoc crisis management tool (USIOP, 2021).

4. General Lessons for Ethiopia from Selected Case Study: Success and Failure of Nation Dialogues

Long-standing deficiencies in state-building are at the basis of Ethiopia's violence and instability. These generally include varying perspectives on the nation's political past, a lack of social cohesion, and a lack of a shared understanding of the country's most important symbols and institutions. According to the aforementioned case studies' experiences, the approach must take into account local circumstances, particularly conflicts in other parts of Ethiopia. A successful national dialogue takes into account the numerous beneficial lessons learned from the case studies, including:-

A. Politicians will

Paffenholz et al. (2017) show that the likelihood of achieving and executing agreements is significantly influenced by the support or opposition of elites to national dialogue based on a comparative examination of national dialogues (Paffenholz et al., 2017). Ethiopia currently requires a political atmosphere that would support an inclusive national dialogue. For that to happen, the Government must acknowledge the gravity of the situation.

An inclusive national conversation must meet a number of prerequisites, including the cessation of armed conflict in Tigray, Oromia, and Benishangul-Gumuz, and the release of all political prisoners (Awol, 2022). But how sincere the government is will determine if it is successful. The National Dialogue will fail if the government intends to use it as a "fig leaf" and does not participate in it in good faith. In light of this, it is helpful to evaluate the National Dialogue process thus far using standards that are widely recognized (Buli 2022). The intended national dialogue in Ethiopia must first accept a procedure by which decisions and compromises will be made, as learned from the case studies outlined above. Similarly, the opposition political parties should refrain from attempting to set any preliminary substantive red lines, as this would weaken the process. On the other hand, the initiative for the discussion has been taken, and some of the actions have been carried out completely by the ruling coalition. Instead of trying to impose its will, the government should acknowledge that it is a participant in the dialogue (Adem, 2021).

B. Neutrality Convener

Experience suggests that inclusivity and procedural fairness are essential components of national dialogues that are successful in achieving a transition towards enduring peace. The custodian must be impartial for the conversation to succeed. The crucial role of choosing the process's goals, participants, agenda, and structure is performed by this body. As a result, the custodian must foster a sense of trust among participants in order for the

discourse to be valid. There are three stages to a national dialogue: preparation, process, and implementation. Each of these stages complements or detracts from the others (Buli, 2022).

The need to create impartial working groups or committees during the planning stage is demonstrated by the experiences of nations like Poland and Iraq. National Dialogues are more legitimate when they are led by trustworthy individuals. The integrity of the process and its results depend on the organizers' selection, vetting, and appointment procedures. For instance, one of the reasons the Sudan conversation failed was that the conveners were chosen by the presidents of those nations, with little to no input from armed opposition groups and political parties (Meressa and Dawit, 2020). Therefore, in a very divisive society like Ethiopia, the convener's honesty, objectivity, and public image should be crucial throughout the entire process to win the public confidence.

C. Links to further transition techniques

National dialogues must be incorporated into larger transformation processes to promote meaningful structural change (Blunck et al., 2017; Murray, 2017). To achieve its objectives, such as fixing problems with the current constitution or assisting in the creation of a new one, a national dialogue must be linked to a process and set of institutions that achieves that aim (Blunck et al., 2017). In this regard, the Political discussions in South Africa shaped the country's constitution, as well as how elections were to be held and how a constitution-making body would be established (Kaplan and Freeman, 2004). In contrast, the national dialogue in Sudan's national weren't properly connected to other current processes. Hence, the National Dialogues should not be viewed as the end goal by the Ethiopian government, but rather as a step along a larger transitional roadmap that also includes procedures for structural, political, judicial, and economic reform.

D. Common ground

In order for national dialogue procedures to be successful, the negotiation parties have to have both the political will to carry out the agreements reached and a solid basis of support from their constituency (El-Battahani, 2014). The various objectives of the main warring parties in Sudan between 2005 and 2011 (El-Battahani, 2014), for instance, and between opposing forces in Yemen (combined with an outside agenda) impeded the emergence of a consensus viewpoint or goals in negotiation. Conflicting players' mistrust of one another increased as a result (Elayah et al., 2018). Given Ethiopia's continuing ethnic, religious, and political differences, a national dialogue is essential. There are significant differences in its history, national anthems, system of governance, and other features (Buli, 2022). For

the nation to survive, a new national consensus and political structure that guarantees the dignity, coexistence, and unity of the people are required (Awol, 2022). To arrive at a consensus and long-lasting political settlement, Ethiopia's national dialogue process should consider locations where all parties, including significant political actors, armed groups, and civil society, can congregate and discuss crucial national concerns. The intended national dialogues should simultaneously take into account some significant group divisions, but their main objective should be to establish a shared national agenda.

F. Public support

Another important factor that either facilitates or impedes progress in the national discussion process is public support, or its absence (Paffenholz et al., 2017). The level of popular support and views of legitimacy are thus influenced by public information, effective communication, and media participation. Contrarily, if the public is uninformed of the national debate, it will be unable to contribute ideas and will not be motivated to support its outcomes (Blunck et al., 2017). For instance, there was little media coverage and no credible public debate or information effort during the Iraqi national discourse. In addition, barely a few days before the event, the schedule was decided upon. Due to the absence of information interchange, opposition parties and civil society were effectively excluded from participating, which resulted in a constrained and politically biased process that only included the immediate political elite (Paffenholz et al., 2017).

Through public forums, persistent outreach, and media attention, it is possible to achieve transparency and public participation, which are crucial to the process of having a national dialogue. The lesson from Iraq and Sudan shows that both had their own restrictions in this area. For instance, only in the conference room used for the talks did debates occur in Sudan. The government instituted repressive measures, including the imprisonment of certain important opposition individuals, and media coverage was insufficient (Meressa and Dawit, 2020). On the other side, there was little public engagement in the debates in Tunisia, which were dominated by political elites. In Sudan, the discussions were initiated by the current president, with little involvement from some significant armed opposition organizations. This turned out to be a drawback, affecting the credibility of the conversations during the planning stage and afterwards impeding the execution of suggestions (Berghof Foundation, 2017).

In light of this lesson, the planned Ethiopian national dialogues process should take into account public outreach initiatives and citizen input, while the media should diligently document each and every step. The reconciliation

commission should kick off the process by informing the public about the aspects of reconciliation and what the commission hopes to accomplish.

F. Broad-based inclusion and participation

All parties must be involved for the National Dialogue Commission and the ensuing national dialogues to have the desired reconciliatory effect, including Ethiopia's marginalized groups, women, youth, and members of the civil society. Power brokers from Ethiopia's informal and traditional sectors, including as religious and cultural leaders, must also be included (SIHA, 2022). Divergent interests and needs must be accommodated during talks by being inclusive and involving a wide range of stakeholders. For instance, despite having numerous participants, the national discussion for Sudan failed to fully incorporate the main military and political opposition organizations. The groups either boycotted the proceedings because they were unhappy with the government's position, or they were purposefully left out of the discussions (Meressa and Dawit, 2020).

As the lesson demonstrates, exclusion of the participant from the process is one of the failings of Sudan's national conversation, making inclusion and widespread involvement of the utmost importance. Therefore, inclusivity must be present from the start, starting with the original formulation, to ensure the credibility and validity of the planned national discussions in Ethiopia. The nation's problems cannot be resolved by discourse alone. The dialogue's recommendations for changing law and policy as well as those related to accountability and reconciliation must be put into practice effectively. It's important to control the process's high expectations.

The final lesson learned from South Africa and Sudan is the importance of having clear implementation procedures for national conversation conclusions from the beginning. Whether or if the recommendations are implemented will ultimately determine the process's worth. For instance, 994 proposals were made during Sudan's national talks; none of them were carried out by the administration (Meressa and Dawit, 2020). South Africa, on the other hand, demonstrated how the outcomes of the debate could be put into practise. The success of the negotiated resolution of the national discussion depends on adequate and clear norms of procedure and an implementation strategy, as shown by the case study. Therefore, the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission has to create specialized institutions with the authority to carry out the recommendations reached during discussions. Space should also be made available for the civil society to track and assess how well the implementation is going. The working groups should create a roadmap that may contain guidelines, institutional procedures, and discourse goals in this regard.

G. International players and domestic ownership

Although it is often agreed that national Dialogues are a process owned by the nation, their success can also be influenced by the support or resistance of outside parties (Odigie, 2017; Paffenholz et al., 2017). Neighboring nations, global solidarity movements, and regional and international organizations are a few examples of pertinent external actors. To balance national ownership and outside assistance, nevertheless, is crucial (POMEPS, 2013). Navigating the involvement of numerous external players can be difficult since they might have competing goals or viewpoints in support of the national conversation (Harlander, 2016). For instance, locals in Yemen expressed worries that the NDC was more of an internationally driven process than a Yemeni national process and that external actors had different goals (Kestement, 2017).

According to the lessons learned from the cases study outlined above, the national discussion planned for Ethiopia should consider where all stakeholders can gather and debate urgent national concerns in order to reach an agreeable and durable political settlement. Further, The national Dialogue, sought to be a locally controlled but globally supported process (Awol, 2022). The commissioners and technical support personnel could learn valuable lessons from international facilitation and negotiating expertise as well as capacity development training. The National Dialogue Commission should also make sure that the country has the resources necessary to carry out its purpose. Thus, national ownership and the conversations would be ensured. This would ensure that the conversations are regarded as an Ethiopian process and not an outside imposition, which will in turn ensure national ownership (SIHA, 2022).

Conclusion

Ethiopia needs more than ever for national dialogue-fostering initiatives. Previous regimes in Ethiopia, such as the one presided over by the Tigray People Liberation front (TPLF) until 2018, minimized the necessity of such conversation by arguing that the timing was off and that Ethiopia was currently confronted with too many difficulties. A national dialogue would give Ethiopia's conflicting ideologies and communities a way to reframe their connections and advance greater understanding on difficult and polarizing issues, the research findings conclude, drawing a lesson from the cases reviewed and discussed. A national conversation could help close the gap between the many players and encourage a spirit of cooperation. To participate in a true National Dialogue project, however, there are a few necessary components. Inclusion of all important stakeholders and a sense of national ownership among the government and state institutions, political actors, and civil society are among them. In addition for the successful national dialogue there must also be a strong political will and widespread societal support.

Recommendations

All parties must be involved for the National Dialogue Commission and the ensuing national dialogues to achieve the desired effect of rapprochement, including Ethiopia's marginalized groups, women, youth, and members of the civil society. Power brokers from Ethiopia's traditional and informal communities, such as religious and cultural leaders, must also be included.

- To ensure that the outcomes of the conversations can be put into effect and won't be challenged in court as being illegal, National Dialogues must explicitly identify their relationship to the state and the current constitution.
- The agenda should be defined by the public and free from political power plays and corruption.
- Indigenous practices of conflict resolution are acknowledged and taken into account.
- A wide range of players must be acknowledged as having a legitimate part to play in resolving the Ethiopian situation.

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