

THE PROPELLER TOOLKIT

**Sharing Lessons Learned
— and Practical Tools — for
Application in Conflict Resolution
and Complex Systems**

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A comprehensive resource for practitioners, educators, and policymakers. The Propeller Toolkit offers a research-based framework for diagnosing, designing, and evaluating interventions in conflict and complex systems operating under political and institutional constraints.



HARVARD Kennedy School

Center for Public
LEADERSHIP

NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT
RESOLUTION COLLABORATORY

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About The Source Research

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WHY IT WORKED

Acknowledgements and About Why It Worked

Why It Worked is a pioneering global and interdisciplinary initiative focused on understanding how long-standing, bloody conflicts have successfully transitioned to better, violence-free realities. This project delves into the transformative processes that ended prolonged conflict, aiming to identify key components that led to improved outcomes. By analyzing these cases, the project seeks to provide invaluable insights and strategies that can be adapted and applied by communities in conflict zones around the world. Learn more about [Why It Worked](#).

The Propeller Toolkit and all related insights are derived from reports from various universities, listed below, as part of original research part of the research project, “Why It Worked: Research-Driven Model for Conflict Resolution,” a project devised and funded by Bridging Insights, Inc. and designed and led by Harvard Kennedy School’s Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory. Bridging Insights, Inc. is a registered nonprofit organization seeking to build a research-based framework for conflict resolution to provide new ideas, paradigms, and methods of engagement applicable to practitioners in diverse conflicted areas. Between 2021 and 2023, it conducted a large-scale, multi-team and multi-case comparative, interdisciplinary study of political conflicts between 1946 and 2018 that are considered resolved.

Our Why It Worked research findings are now available in the released **Special Issue** of *Negotiation Journal*, published by MIT Press in collaboration with Harvard Law School’s Program on Negotiation. This special issue highlights insights from an ambitious multi-university study examining what makes peace processes succeed in the world’s most intractable conflicts. The issue explores key themes such as leadership and power dynamics, religion and identity, land and resources, and informal negotiation processes—offering practical strategies for lasting conflict resolution. [View the Special Issue here](#).

Table of Contents

Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory	2
Why It Worked Helps Propel Conflict Resolution	4
Executive Summary	6
Who This Toolkit Is For	6
How to Use This Toolkit	7
What This Toolkit Offers	8
Global Core Cases.....	9
Introducing The Propeller Framework.....	10
How to Apply The Propeller Framework	14
The Hub	16
Diagnosing The Hub.....	18
Why The Hub Matters.....	19
Identity and Meaning	20
Diagnostic Questions: Identify Gaps in Conflict Systems	22
Intervention Questions: Design Actions in Conflict Systems	23
Lessons from Why It Worked.....	24
Collaboration and Engagement.....	28
Diagnostic Questions: Identify Gaps in Conflict Systems	30
Intervention Questions: Design Actions in Conflict Systems	31
Lessons from Why It Worked.....	32
Governance and Procedures	36
Diagnostic Questions: Identify Gaps in Conflict Systems	38
Intervention Questions: Design Actions in Conflict Systems	39
Lessons from Why It Worked.....	40
Guatemala: A Case Study in Conflict Resolution	44
Checklist for Lift-Off.....	49



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Inside The Propeller Toolkit:

An **accessible overview** of The Propeller Framework for conflict analysis and resolution

Straightforward, easy-to-use **action-guiding questions** that are immediately applicable in real-world contexts

Step-by-step instructions on how to apply diagnostic and intervention tools across multiple conflict dimensions

Practical resources to support planning and field implementation

Guiding questions and **lessons learned** for each of the framework's forces: Identity and Meaning, Collaboration and Engagement, Governance and Procedures

Cross-case insights and **adaptable strategies** drawn from global research and field validation

Case studies including in-depth analysis of the Guatemala peace process mapped to each element of the framework

This Toolkit is designed for flexible, modular use—whether you are leading negotiations, facilitating dialogue, teaching conflict resolution, or seeking evidence-based solutions to protracted, asymmetric, and identity-driven conflicts.

Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory

The **Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory (NCRC)** at Harvard Kennedy School builds on three decades of innovative teaching, research, and real-world engagement in the fields of negotiation and conflict resolution. Our origins trace back to 1994, when Professor Brian Mandell launched seminal courses like *International Mediation and Conflict Resolution* and *Introduction to Negotiation Analysis* for public policy students, offering both a rigorous foundation in theory and immersive skill-building experiences.

Over the following decades, Professor Mandell pioneered a teaching approach that blended negotiation theory, behavioral science, and experiential learning. From the early design of complex simulations and cases that put students into the “driver’s seat” to the launch of the Kennedy School Negotiation Project in 2006, his work helped define a pedagogical style that was both intensive and playful, grounded in research but focused on practical outcomes: micro-skills, multiparty strategy, coalition management, and real-time feedback.

In 2016, the project was revitalized and expanded under the joint leadership of Brian Mandell and Monica Giannone, marking a new era of interdisciplinary innovation. With a focus on simulation and case design, and growing attention to psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of conflict, the work began to grow beyond the classroom and into a broader set of global contexts. By 2020, this evolution culminated in the creation of the **Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory**—a hub dedicated to advancing the fields of negotiation and conflict resolution through three core pillars: **Create. Convene. Equip.**

In everything we do, we straddle the academic, the practical, and the reflective. We prepare people to negotiate across sectors, cultures, and ideologies—and in doing so, we investigate how identity, history, and power shape the negotiation landscape. As our work moves from the complex but knowable (e.g., policy or business negotiations) to the deeply complex and less knowable (e.g., sacred land, identity, belonging), we draw on and contribute to the evolving field of conflict resolution—continuing to ask: how do we move through conflict, not just manage it?



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WHY IT WORKED

Why It Worked Helps Propel Conflict Resolution

The Spark: Shared Recognition of Exceptionalism & Despair

Why It Worked began as an initiative of **Bridging Insights, Inc.**, an organization committed to understanding how some of the world's most difficult conflicts actually moved toward resolution, and to sharing those lessons with practitioners working on the front lines. While many studies focused on why conflicts failed, far fewer examined how and why they succeeded. The project was created to fill that gap and to offer conflict practitioners evidence-based insights for real-world application.

Seeking Answers: A Global Effort to Study the Hardest Conflicts

With this mandate, BI devised and funded a multi-university research consortium—Uppsala University, Harvard University, the University of Ottawa, George Mason University, and the University of Delaware—designed and led by the Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory at Harvard Kennedy School. Together, these teams examined some of the world's most protracted and asymmetric conflicts, not to retell stories of stalemate, but to uncover what conditions, strategies, and interventions had actually enabled progress.

Key Discovery: Hope Lies in Local Interventions

Their research yielded a vital lesson: even in the most difficult situations, hope is not only possible but measurable—when rooted in local initiatives. Sustainable transformation does not depend solely on sweeping, top-down agreements; it is built incrementally, piece by piece, through the combined efforts of governments, communities, and individuals.

What's Needed: Impact at Every Level

The evidence showed that peace is most attainable when transformation occurs across three interdependent dimensions: the system of governance and policy, the collective efforts of groups and communities, and the mindsets and behaviors of individuals. If momentum falters in any one area, progress stalls across the whole system. A plane cannot take off if even a single propeller wing fails to move in sync. The Propeller Framework is designed to align and energize all three, generating the coordinated thrust needed for a genuine lift-off toward lasting conflict resolution.

Unlocking Change: How to Jumpstart the Process

Unlocking change requires deliberate process management and inclusion: engagement of policymakers, activists, faith leaders, and citizens, all committed to moving beyond gridlock. The Propeller Guide offers tools and lessons to support this collective process, inviting people to become active agents of resolution.

Plan and Act: Tools for Seeing and Resolve Conflict Dynamics

- **System Diagnosis:** Understand the underlying systems: its actors, blockages, and reinforcing loops.
- **Program Design:** After diagnosis, design programs tailored to local realities and needs.
- **Application & Intervention:** Implement initiatives that repair, connect, and empower local leadership.

Real-World Action: Focus on Local Impact

To-date, we have engaged youth in East Africa, democratic organizers in Southeast Asia, business leaders and civil society leaders in the Middle East, government actors in South America, and Harvard Kennedy School students from dozens of countries. In the future, diverse changemakers can access and apply Why It Worked materials and tools for local programming. Communities own and drive the process, utilizing materials and best practices.

Call to Action: Join Us in Expanding Peace

We invite collaborators, funders, and visionaries to work alongside us—scaling this initiative to reach more communities and spark wider transformation.

Together, we can generate the momentum needed for lift-off.

Executive Summary

Who This Toolkit Is For

Built for educators, practitioners, and leaders applying The Propeller Framework to enact real-world change.

Instructors and Professors:

Enhance your courses with real-world frameworks and inquiry-based analysis rooted in the complexities of contemporary conflict resolution. Teach students using case studies and guide students through independent and applied research projects.

Facilitators:

Systematically map conflict environments and design interventions, leveraging step-by-step guidance and practical tools to build the next generation of conflict transformers.

Practitioners:

Diagnose, plan, and adapt field programs using robust checklists, customizable templates, and lessons drawn directly from some of the world's most challenging conflict environments.

Policy Analysts and Advisors:

Apply rigorous diagnostic and comparison guides to create informed, evidence-based recommendations in dynamic policy environments.

Advanced Students and Learners:

Develop deep analytical skillsets through cross-case exercises, reflective practice, and exposure to the nuances of the most intractable conflicts globally.

How to Use This Toolkit

Use dynamically, not linearly.

1. Begin with The Propeller Framework overview and quick reference, including the visual diagram to orient your approach.
2. Start each section with diagnostic questions—ground yourself in facts and stakeholder perspectives.
3. Use guiding questions to shape practical steps for intervention, tailored to your situation.
4. Reflect on real-world lessons and draw on cross-case insights: adapt strategies and approaches to the specific conflict dynamics you face.
5. Refer to wing sections for hands-on application, utilizing resources to drive your own program, class, or intervention.
6. Move fluidly among the forces; nearly every case requires attention to all three, and their synergy is at the heart of The Propeller Framework's power.
7. Explore the Guatemala case as a structured model for systematized conflict analysis.
8. Use the Toolkit modularly: each section is designed to stand alone for ease of reference, training, or rapid problem-solving.

What This Toolkit Offers

Purpose and Innovation

At the heart of the Why It Worked initiative is the recognition that protracted, asymmetric, and ethno-national (PAE) conflicts present persistent challenges where conventional approaches routinely fall short. Long time horizons, unequal power relations, and identity-based claims constrain incentives, limit trust, and make progress difficult to sustain. The Propeller Framework was developed as a direct response—a research-based, practical guide designed to systematize interventions and highlight the leverage points most essential for breaking entrenched cycles of violence and mistrust under these conditions.

A New Perspective—Beyond Success or Failure

This Toolkit challenges conventional, binary thinking in the field. Instead of asking only what “succeeded” or “failed,” it equips users to identify, analyze, and address the interlocking factors that either propel a conflict process forward or impede progress—dynamics that recur across conflict and systems-change contexts, beyond PAE settings. You are invited into a dynamic process of learning, reflection, and adaptation—drawing from global cases and the unique lessons each provides to practice worldwide.

Why It Worked: Global, Peer-Validated Research

The Toolkit results from an unprecedented, multi-institutional study led by Harvard Kennedy School’s Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory, together with teams from Uppsala University, Harvard University, University of Ottawa, George Mason University, and University of Delaware. Each team contributed a distinctive academic lens—ranging from conflict analysis and leadership studies to negotiation, identity, and environmental dimensions—capturing the true complexity of contemporary conflicts.

The study focused on the world’s most seemingly-intractable cases—conflicts that lasted at least a generation, involved profound power disparities, and were shaped by ethno-nationalist identity. These conditions often undermine negotiated agreements and make sustained progress difficult, offering a rigorous test for identifying what actually drives change. Out of roughly 350 global armed conflicts (1946–2018), only 51 resulted in durable peace; just six met the full PAE criteria. These global core cases —Guatemala, Philippines, Bangladesh, Northern Ireland, Angola, and Sudan—anchor the insights, supplemented by additional comparative cases, stress-tests the framework’s applicability, ensuring its relevance not only to asymmetric and ethnonational conflicts but also to other complex systems marked by polarization, unequal power, and stalled change processes.

Global Core Cases

Guatemala – URNG (1996): One of Latin America’s longest and most brutal civil wars, driven by deep ethnic cleavages, historic land inequality, and military rule. The case is central for its comprehensive, multi-accord peace process and extensive civil society inclusion—showing the importance of addressing governance, group identity, and trust simultaneously.

Philippines – MNLF (1996): Decades-long Moro conflict marked by exclusion, ethnic and religious identity suppression, and power imbalance between Manila and Mindanao. Illustrates how power-sharing, external mediation, and phased autonomy were used to start building trust and institutional reforms.

Bangladesh – JSS/SB (1997): A generational struggle for Indigenous autonomy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, marked by forced resettlement and cultural marginalization. This case demonstrates both the promise and the challenges of negotiated autonomy, inclusion, and the management of resource/right disputes along identity lines.

Northern Ireland – PIRA (1998): A 30-year conflict rooted in national and sectarian identity, political exclusion, and historical grievance. Notable for the power-sharing and cross-community mechanisms of the Good Friday Agreement, and for integrating armed groups into democratic institutions—core lessons for transition out of violence.

Angola – UNITA (2002): A Cold War–fueled struggle over state power and natural resources, with shifting external alliances and extreme asymmetry. Highlights the importance of resource management, monitoring, and the transformation of armed movements into political actors.

Sudan – SPLM/A (2005): A protracted war rooted in identity, religion, and resource competition between the North and South. Illustrates multi-stage peace processes, international mediation, and lessons on the complexities of federalism and power-sharing in deeply divided societies.



INTRODUCING THE PROPELLER FRAMEWORK

In this section, you will:

- Understand the Propeller as a systems-based framework for diagnosing stalled momentum
- Learn how the Hub and three Wings work together to generate durable change
- See how the framework can be applied flexibly across contexts

Introducing The Propeller Framework

Understanding Conflict as a System

Transforming complex, long-running conflicts—particularly those rooted in power asymmetries or identity divides—requires a systems lens.

The Propeller Framework, developed through Why It Worked research and decades of peacebuilding insight, helps practitioners diagnose what drives conflict, identify where processes stall, and design adaptive interventions. It focuses on how interconnected dynamics—rather than isolated actions—generate or block sustained change.

Conflict systems rarely move in straight lines. Setbacks and reversals are common. Progress emerges when multiple forces align and reinforce one another over time. The Propeller provides a way to understand how momentum is generated, lost, and rebuilt across a system.

In this Toolkit, conflict resolution refers to the achievement of agreements and the cessation of violence, while conflict transformation refers to the deeper shifts in relationships, institutions, and narratives that enable those agreements to endure. The Propeller Framework links both to outcomes—helping practitioners build the conditions for durable peace rather than temporary settlement.

At the center of the framework is the Hub: leadership stakes, issues, and contextual conditions that shape readiness for change. Surrounding the Hub are three interdependent domains—**Identity and Meaning, Collaboration and Engagement, Governance and Procedures**—that must move in alignment to produce durable progress. Unlike top-down or bottom-up models of change, The Propeller Framework does not privilege any single domain as the primary driver: momentum may originate in institutions, coalitions, or identity dynamics, with each capable of initiating movement that activates the others.

This framework is not a checklist or linear sequence. It is a diagnostic and design aid meant to be revisited as conditions evolve, helping practitioners adapt strategy, sequence interventions, and sustain momentum over time.

The Propeller Framework

Effective conflict transformation depends on coordinated movement across interconnected domains. The Propeller Framework offers both a diagnostic lens and a practical guide for moving from analysis to action.

The Hub: At the center of the framework is The Hub. This is where momentum is generated or stalled. It captures the system’s energy—its urgency, actors, leadership, and alignment. A strong Hub signals readiness for change; a fragmented Hub requires recalibration.

The Three Forces: Surrounding the Hub are three interdependent Wings. They do not operate in silos. Progress in one can reinforce—or undermine—progress in the others.

Governance & Procedures

This domain focuses on formal negotiations, constitutional reforms, and inclusive policymaking. Sustainable outcomes require institutions that are both operationally sound and broadly trusted, often built through phased implementation, external facilitation, and strategic inclusion.

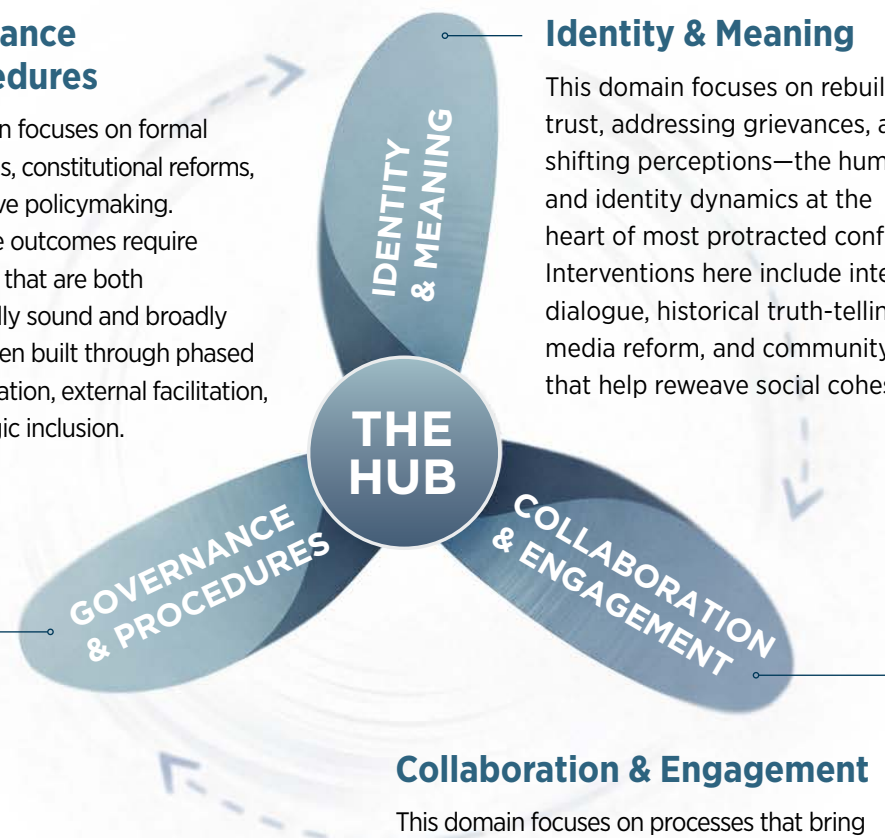
Identity & Meaning

This domain focuses on rebuilding trust, addressing grievances, and shifting perceptions—the human and identity dynamics at the heart of most protracted conflicts. Interventions here include intergroup dialogue, historical truth-telling, media reform, and community rituals that help reweave social cohesion.

Collaboration & Engagement

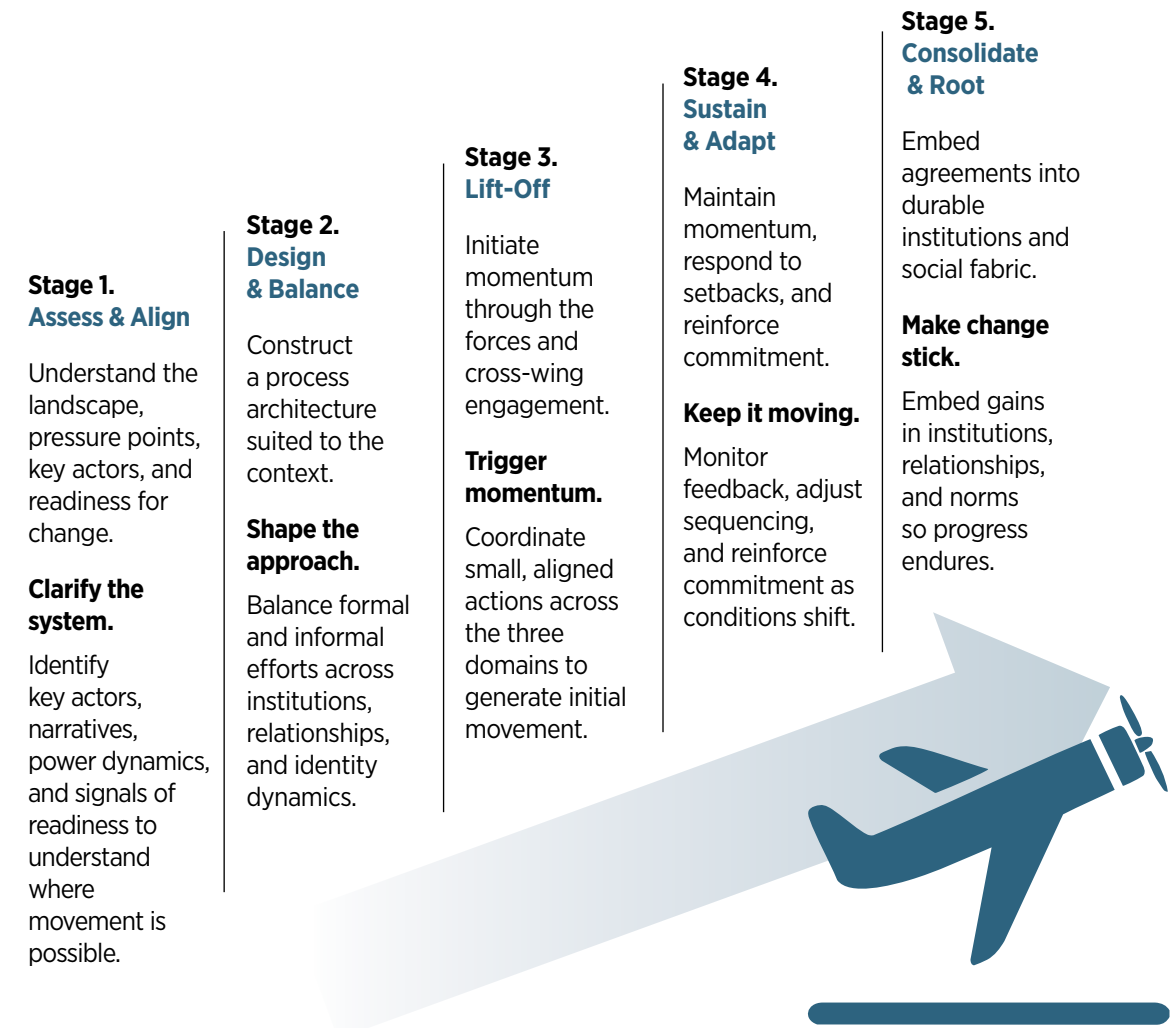
This domain focuses on processes that bring diverse actors—civil society, political factions, religious leaders, business and commerce, former combatants—into shared spaces and structured engagement. These processes reshape relationships, expand what is politically and socially plausible, and enable coordinated action.

The three forces interact continuously, creating feedback loops that can reinforce or undermine momentum. For example, inclusive governance can strengthen collaboration across groups; identity transformation can rebuild trust in institutions.



Applying The Propeller Framework in Practice

The Propeller can be applied through five stages that help practitioners assess conditions, sequence interventions, and adapt over time.



Just as a plane requires coordinated thrust for lift-off, sustained conflict transformation occurs when identity, collaboration, and governance dynamics move together. The Propeller Framework helps practitioners identify stuck points and generate the momentum needed to move from gridlock toward durable outcomes.

The Five Stages of the Journey: While change is rarely linear, these stages help practitioners clarify priorities—when to diagnose, when to design, when to act, and when to reinforce gains. Teams may move back and forth between stages as conditions shift; the value of the framework lies not in sequence, but in sustaining momentum over time.

How to Apply The Propeller Framework

The Propeller Framework gives you a step-by-step method for analyzing conflict situations and improving interventions. As you use this guide, you'll start by diagnosing the overall conflict system, then move to designing focused strategies for change. The shared language and practical tools in this framework make it easier to identify what's working, what's not, and where to adapt your approach for better results—even in highly complex situations.

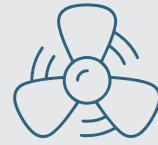
At the heart of every process is the **Hub: Conflict Dynamics**. The Hub generates the energy that drives momentum:

- **Who is involved?** Map all relevant factions, stakeholders, and leaders.
- **What issues are at stake?** Identify the core disputes—such as land, identity, or resource access.
- **What is the history?** Understand the historical and situational drivers behind the current context.
- **Where is the opportunity for change?** Assess ripeness and readiness—when are windows for breakthrough most possible?

Surrounding the Hub are three interdependent “forces,” each representing a domain that must be addressed for systemic, sustainable progress. Each Wing section in this guide provides:

- Diagnostic Questions to assess your context
- Intervention Guiding Questions to shape your actions
- Practical Lessons and Insights from real-world cases and historical situations

Northern Ireland From Diagnosis to Durable Agreement



Stage 1: Assess & Align: Early peace efforts revealed misalignment across the system—persistent distrust between Protestant and Catholic communities, governance structures lacked inclusive pathways, and collaboration was limited to narrow elites—preventing sustained momentum.

Stage 2: Design & Balance: Mediators structured talks that alternated between elite negotiations and broader consultative mechanisms—including women's platforms, interfaith networks, business associations, and civic forums.

Stage 3: Lift-Off: The design built in parallel tracks for political reform and economic regeneration. EU funding—particularly through the PEACE Program and cross-border initiatives—supported integrated business zones and joint education projects.

Stage 4: Sustain & Adapt: When talks stalled, mediators revised timelines, renegotiated participation, and introduced new confidence-building mechanisms, allowing the process to survive moments of political breakdown.

Stage 5: Consolidate & Root: Over time, agreements were embedded into institutions and everyday governance, reinforcing legitimacy and cross-community ownership despite periodic disruption.

1. Identity & Meaning

This wing focuses on the narratives, grievances, trust dynamics, and lived experiences that shape behaviors and sense of belonging—and whether change is socially sustainable.

When to use: Where mistrust, historical grievances, or exclusionary narratives are central obstacles, and when identity and economic empowerment can build trust and inclusion.

How it works: Use diagnostic tools to identify fault lines and narratives. Select intervention strategies—such as dialogue, shared identity building, and economic inclusion—for creating new social fabrics.

Toolkit instructions: Use the field-tested tools and case lessons to design dialogue, recognition, and community-based interventions suited to your context.

2. Collaboration & Engagement

This wing focuses on coalitions, networks, and engagement processes that enable coordination across groups and sectors.

When to use: For building broad-based coalitions and networks, sustaining grassroots energy, harnessing business leadership, and leveraging regional or economic support.

How it works: Use diagnostic guides to map stakeholder relationships and communication channels. Design interventions to engage new groups, amplify civil society, or connect to regional partners.

Toolkit instructions: Implement sample strategies for cross-group engagement, partnerships and initiatives, and dialogue building, using the diagnostic and intervention questions as your action plan.

3. Governance & Procedures

This wing focuses on the rules, institutions, and formal procedures that shape legitimacy, accountability, and durable implementation.

When to use: When establishing legitimacy, sustainability, and accountability in official processes, including policies that mobilize public and private sector resources for shared goals.

How it works: Diagnose current negotiation structures, spot power imbalances or barriers, and design interventions such as inclusive negotiations, referendums, or reforms that give voice to wide representation.

Toolkit instructions: Use provided checklists to assess stakeholder inclusion and the operational strength of governance structures. Apply lessons to adapt or build systems that work for your context.

Conflict Core

THE HUB

In this section, you will:

- Understand how The Hub generates the energy needed for systems to move.
- Diagnose ripeness by assessing urgency, alignment, and opportunity.
- Explore real-world examples where pressure, actors, and timing converged to enable situations enabling breakthroughs.

The Hub

Where energy for change is generated— and where momentum can stall.

At the center of The Propeller Framework is the Hub—the engine room of any peace or change process. The Hub captures the conditions that determine whether a system can generate momentum: urgency, opportunity, and alignment among actors with the capacity to act. It helps practitioners assess whether pressure for change exists and whether the moment is ripe for engagement.

The Hub is not a site of intervention. Rather, it functions as a diagnostic space—clarifying whether the system is ready for movement or locked in immobility—before governance reforms can take root, coalitions can be built, or identity-based work

The Hub's Core Function

The Hub helps to understand essential functions that shape the conditions for systemic progress:

1. **Map System Pressure.** What's generating urgency? Where is the tension building? This includes public unrest, elite exhaustion, civic mobilization, or economic instability.
2. **Identify Key Actors and Leverage.** Who holds power or agenda-setting capacity? Who is ready to move—and who can block progress? What coalitions are forming, fraying, or shifting?
3. **Orient Timing and Sequence.** The Hub helps us recognize moments of ripeness—when pressure, alignment, and opportunity create a window for movement—and what needs to shift before momentum is possible.

Even the best-designed interventions can fail if the conditions are not right. The Hub helps us determine when to push forward, when to adapt, and where energy is building.

Diagnosing The Hub

Use these questions to assess whether the current environment is generating energy for forward movement—or reinforcing immobility and fragmentation.

1

System & Pressure Dynamics

- What forces are pushing actors toward change? (e.g., political gridlock, economic collapse, regional isolation)
- Is there public demand for reform—or growing disengagement from civic life?
- Are there new patterns of protest, violence, or civic mobilization?

2

Stakeholder & Power Dynamics

- Who are the central actors (state, civil society, external)? Who sets the agenda?
- Are influential groups shifting their positions or signaling readiness to engage?
- Are stakeholders operating in silos—or beginning to collaborate?

3

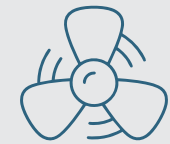
Narrative & Timing Dynamics

- What stories dominate public discourse—blame, hope, fear, dignity?
- Has there been a triggering event (e.g., leadership change, referendum, scandal, natural disaster)?
- What timing pressures or windows of opportunity are shaping behavior—and who is shaping the narrative?

Why The Hub Matters

The forces—**Identity and Meaning, Collaboration and Engagement, Governance and Procedures**—depend on energy from the Hub to function. Even the best-designed processes can stall if there's no urgency or no credible actors behind them. Conversely, when system pressure builds without pathways for resolution, volatility increases.

Practitioners often ask: *Is this the right time to act?* The Hub gives you a way to answer that question—and to design responses aligned with real-world conditions.



Angola – Diagnosing Ripeness and Readiness

1. System & Pressure Dynamics: The Angolan civil war lasted 27 years and caused over 800,000 casualties. By 2002, system pressure peaked: UN diamond sanctions choked UNITA's revenue, military losses mounted, and war exhaustion spread among elites and civilians. These pressures made continued fighting less viable and opened a window for resolution.

2. Stakeholder & Power Dynamics: Following Jonas Savimbi's death, moderate UNITA leaders emerged as credible negotiating partners. With weakened leverage and a shift in internal leadership, UNITA was positioned to re-enter political life. Meanwhile, the MPLA had consolidated military and political strength, shifting the power equation.

3. Narrative & Timing Dynamics: After repeated failed agreements, the moment became actionable not through new terms, but because conditions changed. The Luena Memorandum of Understanding succeeded where others hadn't—not because of a novel framework, but because actors and the public were ready to move forward. Conflict fatigue, leverage shifts, and credible actors created a ripeness that enabled implementation of prior agreements—leading to UNITA's demobilization, reintegration, and participation in governance.

Conflict Dynamics

IDENTITY AND MEANING

In this section, you will:

- Diagnose identity-based barriers and roots of mistrust in conflict systems.
- Explore strategies for building trust, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging transformation at individual and community levels.
- Review lessons and real-world examples from identity-driven interventions.

Identity and Meaning

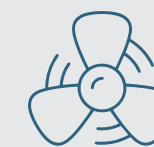
Focuses on social and identity transformation efforts to address deep-seated divisions, build trust, foster inclusivity, and support transitions from violence to peace at individual and societal levels.

This wing focuses on fostering internal identity changes that collectively can promote trust, inclusivity, and cohesive identities, essential for long-term peace. The research emphasizes building trust through dialogue, addressing historical grievances, promoting shared national identities. These efforts are aimed at creating a sustainable social fabric conducive to lasting peace.

This wing can be used:

- **For Diagnosis:** Helps identify existing mistrust and identity-based tensions. Stakeholders can map out current grievances and understand the narratives that fuel division within communities, and assess the role of advocates, and of adversaries.
- **For Intervention:** Guides practitioners in implementing strategies that foster trust and inclusivity, such as initiating dialogue, promoting shared identities, and integrating marginalized groups into peace processes to create a sustainable social fabric conducive to lasting peace.

Guatemala – Reframing National Identity



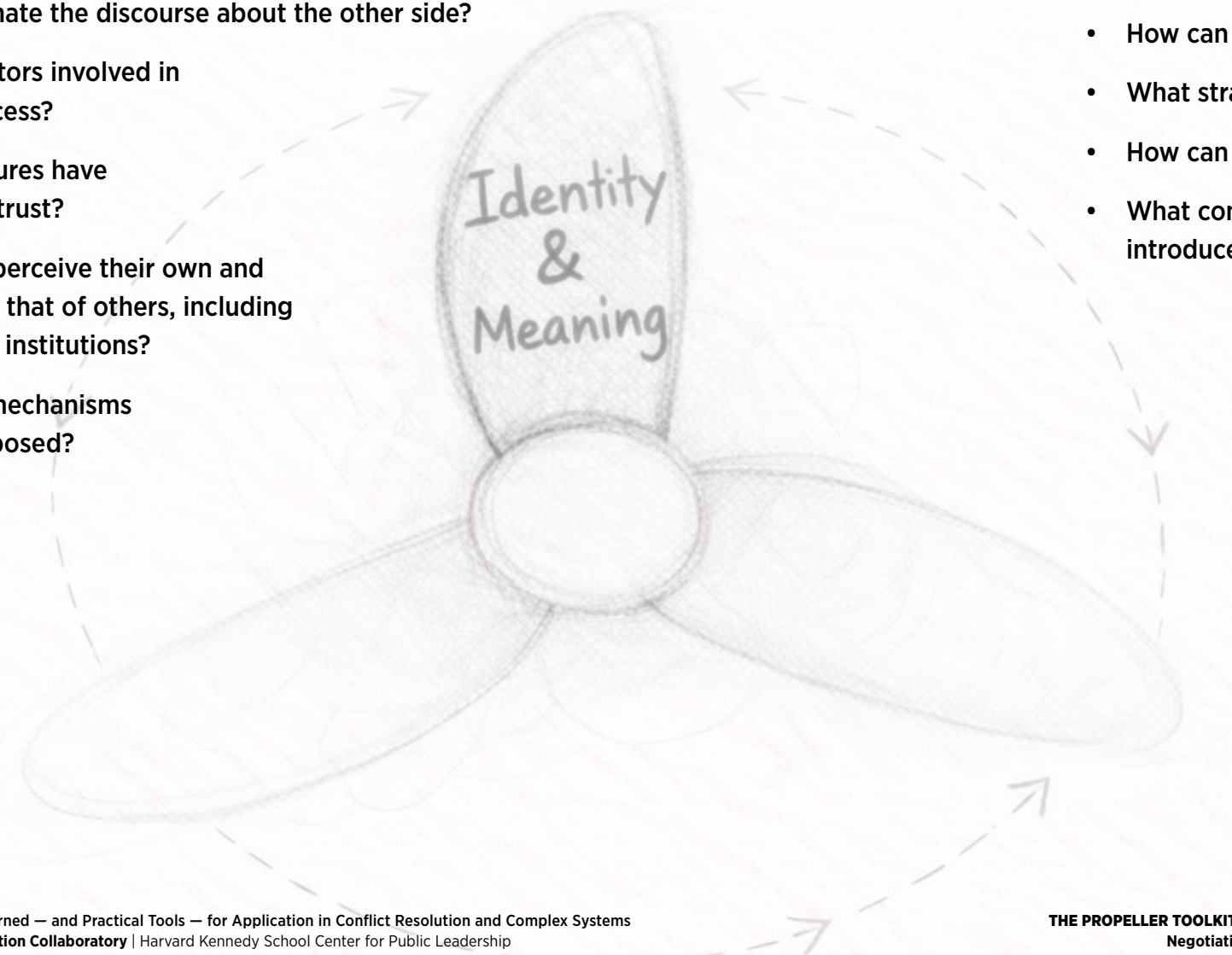
The inclusivity of the process was widely regarded as a key factor behind its success, especially in recognizing Guatemala's multiethnic identity. The process brought together civil society, political actors, and indigenous groups.

The 1996 Peace Accords in Guatemala were among the first in Latin America to explicitly recognize the country's multiethnic identity. Cultural and linguistic rights were elevated into national frameworks—though implementation lagged. The process itself modeled inclusion, with Mayan groups and women's organizations deeply engaged in reshaping national identity and supporting a transformation toward a more pluralistic state.

Diagnostic Questions: Identify Gaps in Conflict Systems

The following questions should be used to capture observations, gaps, and insights from your context.

- How do cultural and behavioral factors currently impact the conflict dynamics?
- What shared identities or values exist among the conflicting groups?
- Are there significant historical grievances affecting the parties' willingness to engage?
- How is mistrust manifested between the parties?
- What role does trauma play in sustaining the conflict?
- What narratives dominate the discourse about the other side?
- How are grassroots actors involved in the current peace process?
- What symbols or gestures have historically promoted trust?
- How do stakeholders perceive their own and other's legitimacy and that of others, including the experts and donor institutions?
- What power-sharing mechanisms exist or are being proposed?



Intervention Questions: Design Actions in Conflict Systems

The following questions should be used to design implementation strategies for transformation.

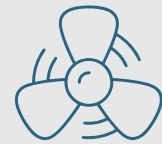
- How can shared cultural practices be leveraged for peacebuilding?
- What steps can be taken to foster identity transformation?
- How can trust-building initiatives be designed and implemented?
- What interventions can address and heal historical traumas?
- How can inclusive dialogue be expanded to include marginalized voices?
- What new norms of engagement can reduce negative stereotypes?
- How can symbolic gestures be used to signal commitment to peace?
- What strategies can ensure balanced power dynamics?
- How can youth and interfaith dialogues be utilized to sustain peace?
- What confidence-building measures can be introduced to promote trust?

Lessons from Why It Worked

Trust

- An impartial third-party mediator can reduce perceptions of procedural bias and help manage asymmetry and power imbalances at the table. But third-party involvement alone is not a reliable driver of durable peace, especially when identity-based grievances and trust deficits remain unaddressed.
- Public opinion can contribute to breakthroughs. Influenced by an upward transfer of pressure from Track 3, i.e., civil society actions.
- Successful peace agreements include a range of confidence-building initiatives in order to promote mutual trust between the parties. These measures include discussions with key leaders, interfaith dialogue, and mediation.
- Challenging the legitimacy of the parties significantly reduces the success and sustainability of peace processes. The acceptance of legitimacy of all parties involved increases the possibility of a successful peace process; denial or challenge of the legitimacy of a party significantly impedes the peace process.
- Trust between the parties can be built through engaging in conciliatory actions and measures and through agreeing to establish institutions that guaranteed both the parties' political influence and their security. Trust can also be built by the parties themselves. This usually happens when the parties are ready to make costly conciliatory measures and actions. When such concrete steps were taken and the parties clearly signaled that they were ready to challenge internal opposition for the sake of reaching a peace deal, this usually had a positive effect on trust building. Trust building in this sense had less to do with dealing with the past and more with how to organize the future. The parties have agreed to the establishment of various forms of transitional power-sharing institutions.

Northern Ireland Local Rituals of Identity Shift



Neighborhood-based efforts were employed to confront the fear and hatred embedded in divided communities.

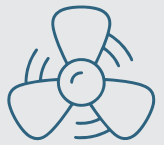
Rather than rely on high-level statements alone, identity transformation in Northern Ireland was grounded in daily, neighborhood-level efforts. From interfaith dialogues to symbolic acts of reconciliation, communities engaged in reshaping collective memory, especially among youth.

- The correlation between high levels of mistrust and failed processes. Protracted civil wars are commonly associated with high levels of mistrust between adversary communities and the leadership of the organization that seeks to represent those communities. For this reason, an important part of the negotiation process in successful cases has been to increase the level of trust between the key conflict parties. In cases where the negotiation process failed to make progress or collapsed altogether, the negotiation process was not able to overcome the divide of mistrust between the parties.
- Interfaith dialogues and symbolic gestures are linked to the development of trust as a foundation for the success of peace processes. These measures include extension of symbolic gestures and interfaith dialogues.
- Trust can be built through civil society inclusion. Civil society actors can also contribute to trust building between the negotiating parties.

Inclusion

- The inclusion of multiple sectors and actors of society and public referenda tend to increase the sustainability of a peace process. The engagement of multiple actors should include defining the negotiation agenda, participation in negotiation, and approval of the final agreement. The ownership of the final agreement can be achieved through the creation of multiple commissions representing different sectors and through public referenda. Democratic transition is critical for creating the space where the divergent interest groups could come together and deliberate shared views, increasing unity of civil society in the process of negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.
- The relation to the land of women and marginalized groups, as a central issue in the conflict, enhances the need to include these actors. Women and other marginalized groups frequently have a special relationship to the land. As a consequence, women were included at a remarkably high level in certain peace processes.

Bangladesh Cultural Sovereignty as Reconciliation



The 1997 CHT Accord foregrounded recognition of Indigenous cultural and political identity... although implementation remains uneven.

The peace process in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts recognized Adivasi cultural autonomy and language rights. This symbolic gesture of recognition, while only partially implemented, served as a landmark for state acknowledgment of Indigenous identity.

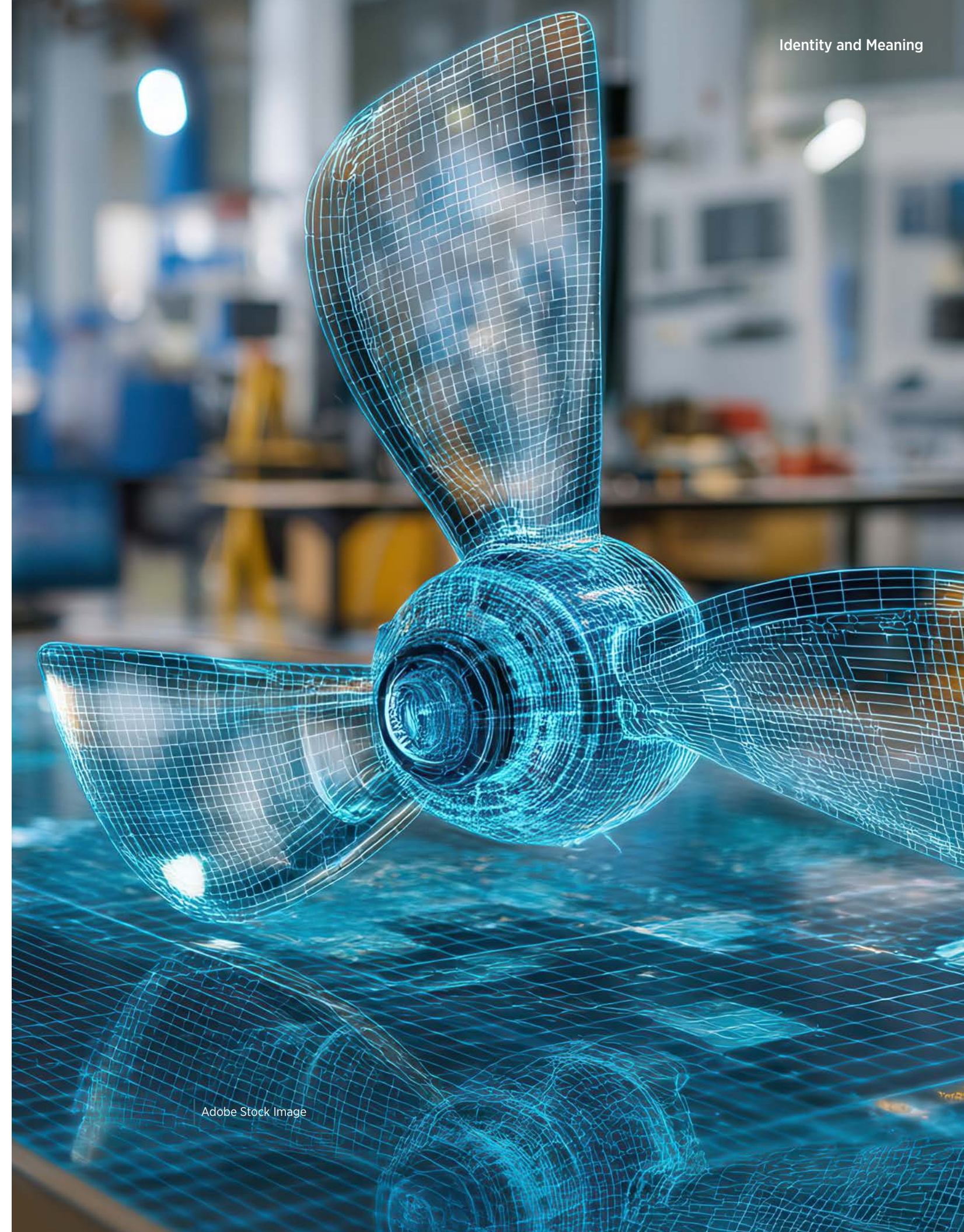
- The participation of minorities promotes a more inclusive society and reduces patterns of discrimination.
- Formation of civil society alliances helps unify diverse interests. This process of merging into a larger group helps unify the diverse interests of all minority groups.
- Civil society alliances create power bases within coalitions and the creation of new common identities. Forming civil alliances and the unification of minorities also has a positive effect by increasing the power and strengthening the position of new coalitions. The unification of minorities through the creation of a new common identity or formation of a party increases their power and enforces their position in the peace process.

Land and Ownership

- Land, as a contested resource, could influence the process design. In certain cases, physically relocating away from the contested resource can help with advancing the process.
- Land ownership was contested as a matter of distributive justice, where historic inequities needed to be overcome.
- Land ownership and control was contested based on ethnic and religious identity.

Conflict Triggers and Incentives

- Weariness of war is a trigger to incentivize peacemaking. Triggers to incentivize successful peacemaking include weariness of war/desire for personal security on the land. Weariness of war occurred sometimes for the dominant contestant, but also from the other party that can engage in unilateral ceasefire.
- Withdrawal of support for insurgents is a trigger to incentivize peacemaking.
- Mutually hurting stalemates are driven not only by military dynamics, but also other costs. Most conflict parties in the study also experienced different types of costs associated with the conflict.
- A positive view of what the future holds can bring about peaceful developments. The shift over time from conflict to negotiations was not only incentivized by the excessive costs associated with acting out the conflict on the battlefield but also by the possibilities associated with negotiations and more peaceful development.



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Conflict Dynamics

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

In this section, you will:

- Identify key groups, networks, and external actors driving collaboration.
- Learn to design inclusive dialogue processes and leverage partnerships.
- Apply diagnostic questions and practical tools for mapping and engaging stakeholders.

Collaboration and Engagement

Focuses on the diverse processes that bring together different groups, including informal dialogues, grassroots initiatives, Track 1.5/Track 2 diplomacy, and civil society efforts that facilitate collective action and shared understanding.

This wing emphasizes the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders and leveraging regional and international support to build relationships and sustain dialogue in peace processes. It highlights the role of informal discussions, the engagement of civil society, businesses, and regional players, and the strategic leverage of economic incentives. These collaborative efforts are crucial for creating a broad base of support and for addressing the multifaceted challenges faced in conflict situations.

This wing can be used:

- **For Diagnosis:** Helps map out key stakeholders and existing relationships that influence conflict dynamics. It assesses the roles and impacts of external actors and the effectiveness of informal communication channels.
- **For Intervention:** Offers practical steps to engage diverse players and harness external resources to create a broad coalition for peace, including leveraging regional dynamics, economic incentives, and fostering relationships to support dialogue and collaboration.



Bangladesh – One Civil-Society Voice

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, journalists, NGOs, and student unions convened joint forums so that when Dhaka finally opened talks, a single, coherent platform represented minority demands. Though temporary, these platforms enabled coordination among diverse groups and contributed to shaping the agenda for the 1997 Accord. The alliance neutralized spoilers, accelerated drafting of the 1997 Accord, and demonstrated that locally-brokered unity is a force-multiplier—even if later splinters emerge.

Diagnostic Questions: Identify Gaps in Conflict Systems

The following questions should be used to capture observations, gaps, and insights from your context.

- What formal and informal Track 2 mechanisms exist between conflicting parties?
- How cohesive is the current coalition of civil society actors?
- What gaps exist in communication between key groups?
- Are there existing regional partnerships influencing the conflict?
- What role do international actors currently play in facilitating dialogue?
- How inclusive is the process in involving minority groups?
- What strategies have been used to unify diverse stakeholder interests?
- Are cross-border relationships affecting the peace process?
- How are local initiatives connected to larger peace efforts?
- What challenges are evident in balancing inclusion and decision-making efficacy?



Collaboration
& Engagement

Intervention Questions: Design Actions in Conflict Systems

The following questions should be used to design implementation strategies for transformation.

- How can collaborative platforms be strengthened for Track 2 dialogues?
- What mechanisms can enhance inter-party communication?
- How can international support be tailored to local needs?
- What frameworks can ensure sustained regional cooperation?
- How can local leadership be empowered in peace efforts?
- What new alliances can be formed to strengthen civil society's voice?
- How can the negotiation agenda incorporate diverse perspectives?
- What regional initiatives could help stabilize the conflict?
- How can civil society actors be better integrated into formal processes?
- What specific roles can external mediators play to advance dialogue and promote trust?

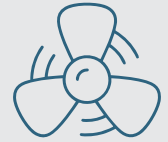
Lessons from Why It Worked

Facilitation and Mediation

- Track 2 is often, but not always, brokered by a go-between perceived as legitimate by both sides. But there is no single type of facilitator. Facilitators are crucial in bringing the parties together while individuals work towards building a functional level of trust. The transfer mechanisms from Track 2 to Track 1 often highlight the facilitator's pivotal role in conveying messages between parties.
- In Track 2, facilitators need to possess a sensitivity to the cultural uniqueness and human aspect of the conflict and are committed to the overall reconciliation process. In successful cases, initiators of talks possessed a sensitivity to the cultural uniqueness and human aspect of the conflict and were committed to the overall reconciliation process.
- Facilitators bring parties together to build trust. In Track 2, facilitators are crucial in bringing the parties together while individuals work towards building a functional level of trust.
- Facilitators' roles included shuttle dialogue. Facilitators created a trusting environment in which people in the conflict gradually felt safe enough to open themselves up to the third party and each other.
- Track 2 facilitators can fail if biased. In the beginning phase, when parties perceive a facilitator to be biased, the meeting may fail.

Process Design and Phases

- Conducting informal negotiation (Track 2), ahead of the formal negotiation set-up, helps overcoming obstacles and influences the formal talks and its outcomes. The warring parties were labeled terrorists, communists, or separatists and subjected to propaganda. Hence, any official talks may have discredited a party, often represented by the government, as weak or the one that cedes to violence. Since Track 2 processes are by nature unofficial, they help principal negotiators move a process forward without fear of criticism from their constituencies.
- When Track 2 is used to explore in detail issues that Track 1 finds politically complicated or unacceptable to negotiate officially, this stage of dialogues exhibits specific standard features from a process design perspective. The dialogue requires the following: (1) dialogue in a neutral environment, (2) significant time spent together, (3) temporality, i.e., dialogues taking place over some time, (4) equal treatment of both parties, (5) facilitation to assist the dialogue.



Sudan – Negotiating Without Unity

Failure to establish a fundamental unity based on inclusion and trust weakened the collaborative potential of the Juba Agreement.

Despite formal structures for negotiation, Sudan's peace process suffered from fragmented political leadership and low public trust. A fundamental lack of civic engagement created space for spoilers and limited the sustainability of collaborative peacebuilding.

- Track 2 serves a support function at one or more points in the conflict. When official communication has ceased, Track 2 meetings are often covert. Similarly, it is also observed that in this phase, Track 2 facilitators may find themselves beginning and continuing dialogue either unbeknownst to, or with the general disapproval, of senior Track 1 levels. Track 2 can also fall apart if a context becomes too hostile and the will for dialogue is lost, or the danger is too great.
- Emboldening the start of official processes, Track 2 can be brokered by other countries. In choosing other countries to be peace brokers, parties most often accounted for previous moral or material support and the country's neutrality.

Stakeholder Involvement

- When the process requires widening the scope, Track 2 dialogues integrate a wider range of actors with the aim of creating broader cultural and societal conditions that foster peace and resolution between the sides. These wider-focused dialogues can also pressure official actors to make resolutions. Several types of actors have been identified, including civil society, business groups, armed groups, and NGOs. These actors participate in various ways: as observers, in consultations, as part of working groups, panels, or commissions, and through collective action or direct participation.

Challenges and Risks

- Peace processes may rely on Track 2 for the management of a conflict – at the least, to help prevent it from worsening. If no resolution is found or no aim of resolution exists, the role of Track 2 as a vehicle to help the sides manage the conflict becomes an end in itself. It can contribute to ultimately prolonging a conflict by keeping fighting at a minimum acceptable level and thus removing pressure on official actors to make the hard decisions necessary to bring about concrete changes.
- There are four categories of pressures: sanctions, international context, regional developments, and domestic constraints. Groups change their opinion in favor of dialogue due to the dedicated work of facilitators, as well as international, regional, or local pressures.

Conflict Triggers and Breakthroughs

- Track 2 can engender or contribute to ripeness. Track 2 dialogues can serve as the place where breakthroughs can happen, which would not be possible by conventional diplomatic means. Often a breakthrough happens due to political shifts or ripeness brought about, in part, by Track 2 dialogues or a combination of both.
- Third parties can contribute to breakthrough moments. Track 2 dialogues serve as the place where breakthroughs can happen, which would not be possible by conventional diplomatic means.

Resources and Economic Drivers

- Land, Water, and Natural Resources could be used as tools for coercion, disrupting livelihoods and deepening mistrust. Land could arguably be said to be a weapon of war wherever attacks against them made life insecure for civilians. Water and resources could be used as weapons to punish, pressure or influence by various actors and between groups.
- Natural resources could be utilized as a source of funding for conflicts. Revenues from legal and illegal trade in minerals, agricultural products, and timber provided funding for the conflicts. Governments seeking to gain sovereignty complained that the conflicts were prolonged because of willing third-party trade partners to buy the conflict minerals, timber, and agricultural products (for illegal drugs).

- Land and resources could incentivize the international community to work to end the conflict in order to benefit from these resources. In virtually all cases, an end to conflict opens the land to business development that is risky while the conflict is ongoing. The international community could play a crucial role to incentivize, coerce, and/or facilitate peace. Nevertheless, the international community could also fund or provide safe havens for at least one of the factions.

Relationship-Building

- Relationship development in Track 2 is essential during initial phases. Track 2 dialogues focus, among other things, on relationship-building. Relationships can then become a critical factor that moves the process forward.
- A network of relationships can form away from the table, affecting the negotiations. Away-from-the-table negotiations through backchannels, bilateral negotiations, or meetings convened by third actors are crucial. It is during this phase that parties solidify their negotiation coalition. These activities reconfigure the network of relationships and ensure a negotiation architecture that is more conducive to successful peace negotiations.

Awareness and Education

- Successful peace processes concentrate on increasing intergroup awareness. Increasing intergroup awareness includes learning languages of the other group, cross-ethnic festivals, and collaborative learning.

Conflict Dynamics

GOVERNANCE AND PROCEDURES

In this section, you will:

- Analyze institutional frameworks, negotiation structures, and policy mechanisms.
- Assess gaps and opportunities for effective, inclusive governance.
- Apply intervention questions and templates to support formal processes.

Governance and Procedures

Focuses on the structures and mechanisms for formal negotiations, agreements, institutional reforms, and policy frameworks to ensure legitimacy, sustainability, and accountability in conflict resolution.

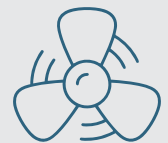
This wing addresses the structured approaches necessary for formal negotiations and policy development, ensuring effective frameworks for conflict resolution and implementation. Neutral environments, phased negotiation processes, and the strategic role of third parties are all critical for maintaining balanced and productive discussions. Successful peace agreements emerge from these structured approaches by incorporating mechanisms like referendums for public approval and the inclusion of diverse voices in political frameworks.

This wing can be used:

- **For Diagnosis:** Identifies existing negotiation structures and potential barriers to progress. It evaluates the roles of third-party actors and the inclusivity of political frameworks.
- **For Intervention:** Provides a framework for structured negotiations and policy-making that incorporate mechanisms like referendums for public approval and the inclusion of diverse voices in political frameworks, ensuring effective and equitable conflict resolution.

Angola – Tackling Structural Imbalances

Addressing structural resource governance is foundational for sustainable peace.

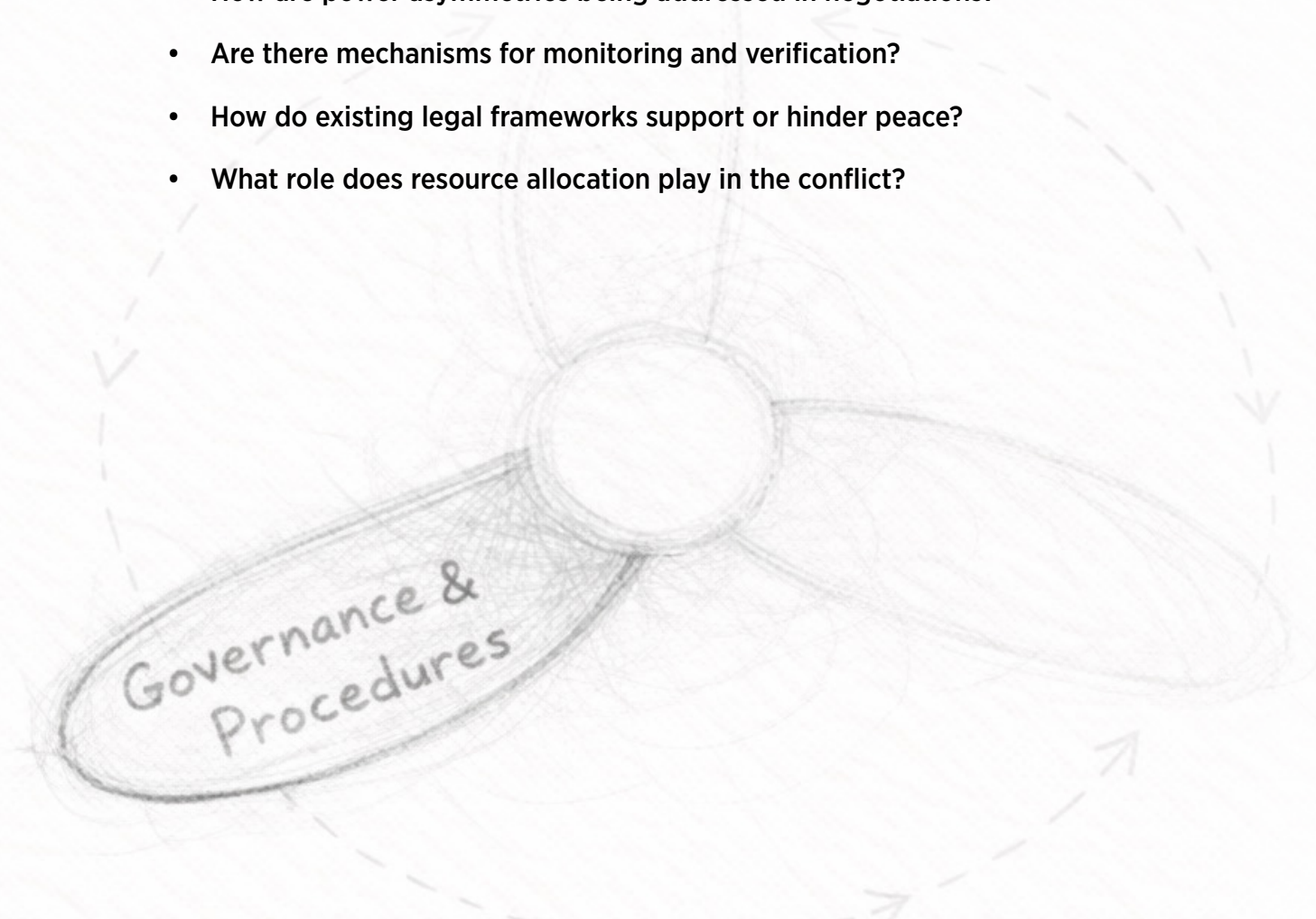


Angola's civil war revolved around control of Luanda's ministries and the sub-soil riches of oil and diamonds. Negotiators acknowledged that lasting peace would require addressing long-standing inequities. UN sanctions cut UNITA's diamond revenue, weakening its position, while the Luena Protocol introduced monitoring commissions intended to provide local oversight of revenue transfers. While their legal mandate was weak, the move signaled acknowledgment of regional grievances over resource distribution. When resource competition fuels war, those working to resolve change systems and structures around allocation.

Diagnostic Questions: Identify Gaps in Conflict Systems

The following questions should be used to capture observations, gaps, and insights from your context.

- What is the core policy, governance, and leadership issues under negotiation?
- How effective are current formal agreements in addressing root causes?
- Are all relevant stakeholders represented at the negotiation table?
- How do parties perceive the fairness of existing agreements?
- What implementation challenges have arisen in previous agreements?
- What is the current role of mediators in the process?
- How are power asymmetries being addressed in negotiations?
- Are there mechanisms for monitoring and verification?
- How do existing legal frameworks support or hinder peace?
- What role does resource allocation play in the conflict?



Intervention Questions: Design Actions in Conflict Systems

The following questions should be used to design implementation strategies for transformation.

- How can future agreements address unaddressed root causes?
- What mechanisms can ensure inclusivity in negotiations?
- How can power imbalances be rectified through formal processes?
- What implementation strategies can improve agreement sustainability?
- How can third-party mediators enhance their effectiveness?
- What new verification mechanisms can be introduced?
- How can transitional justice be embedded into formal agreements?
- What reforms can strengthen existing legal frameworks?
- How can resource distribution be made equitable?
- What measures can ensure the flexibility of agreements to adapt to new challenges and promote trust?

Lessons from Why It Worked

Process Design

- Ahead of the formal negotiations, process decisions can be made in advance. Important process choices such as determining the scope of the talks or selecting the parties to be formally included in the talks are made. This can either happen organically (with no party thinking strategically about these setup questions) or by design (with one or several parties influencing the pre-negotiation environment to get to a more favorable setup).
- Negotiations often have to be structured in a phased manner, allowing for partial agreements to be negotiated and agreed upon, but at the same time contingent on the reaching of an overall settlement. Through partial peace agreements with smaller scopes, some aspects of the complex web of issues can be regulated, even if not all disputes are resolved simultaneously.
- An important element of process design has to do with the management of time, to create a balance between patience, urgency, and momentum. Successful peace processes often require years of negotiations and inclusive deliberations. Unrealistic expectations for quick resolutions can hinder the process. At the same time, applying time pressure through deadlines can foster urgency and prevent stagnation.

Third-Party Roles and Contributions

- The presence of a third party is not a condition for peace settlements. While progress can occur without a third party, the absence of one often requires that other factors conducive to peace are present.
- Mediators bridge structural holes in negotiation networks. Leaders with cross-cluster ties can effectively connect otherwise unconnected groups, enhancing negotiation outcomes.
- Mediators are not always the same types of actors; they play multifaceted roles and use multiple strategies. Mediators in peace processes often adapt their approach based on context, playing roles such as trust-builders, facilitators of concessions, or providers of leverage.
- Third parties bring resources, leverage, economic support, and international attention. These contributions can include trust-building initiatives, good offices, monitoring and verification mechanisms, and security guarantees.
- It is less the third parties themselves but more the added value they contribute to the process that explains their positive effects. Examples of added value include international recognition for non-state actors, economic investments, and monitoring mechanisms.

Trust and Relationship-Building

- A key function of mediators is to earn the trust of the parties in order to help advance the process. Trustful relationships create better conditions for dialogue and collaboration.
- Mediators can help establish new lines of communication and reliable information exchange systems. This helps alleviate mistrust and a lack of transparency, potentially leading to breakthroughs.

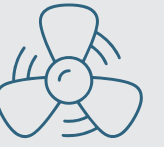
Challenges of Third-Party Involvement

- Other types of mediators, beyond trust-based mediators, are needed to help with concessions-making and advancing the process. In some situations, mediators who can apply leverage over the parties may be more effective in compelling concessions and agreements.
- Third parties can pressure the conflict parties to come to the table. When parties perceive they can no longer achieve their objectives militarily, external pressures can compel them to consider negotiations.
- When there is no formal third-party mediator, external actors can still be critical to the process in many different ways. These actors can offer leverage, economic support, or international attention to move negotiations forward.
- The asymmetry of third-party involvement can be reduced through impartial mediators or those with a vested interest in stability rather than regional dominance. Effective mediation often involves parties with motivations aligned toward achieving peace.

Inclusion and Participation

- The inclusion of multiple sectors and actors of society and public referenda tend to increase the sustainability of a peace process. Broader participation fosters legitimacy and societal buy-in, ensuring agreements are more durable.
- Inclusivity includes influence and participation. Effective inclusion involves not only allowing parties to participate but also ensuring they have genuine influence over outcomes.
- The inclusion of intransigent actors who have the power to spoil the agreement contributes to the resilience of the peace process. Excluding key stakeholders increases the risk of disruption or counter-mobilization during implementation.

Philippines Subnational Governance Matters



In the Philippines, the conflict had numerous causes—including land, identity, marginalization, and failed decentralization reforms.

The Bangsamoro peace process showed that national-level negotiation alone was not enough. The conflict was fueled in part by failures of subnational governance. The peace agreement addressed this by introducing new autonomous institutions and localized budgeting mechanisms to allow the Muslim-majority region of Mindanao more control over its affairs. Durable governance reform had to reach beyond the capital.

Triggers and Incentives

- Mutually hurting stalemates create incentives to seek a settlement. Stalemates often occur when both parties realize they can no longer achieve their goals through conflict, prompting negotiations.
- Pressures from secondary or third parties can wane over time. Short-term pressures from external actors may bring parties to the table, but the risk lies in maintaining engagement as dynamics shift.
- Outside influence based on business interests is a trigger for peacemaking. Access to natural resources and security for international investments can incentivize peace processes.

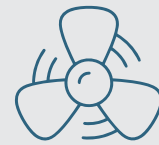
Sustainability and Implementation

- Implemented agreements lead to sustained peace. While non-implementation does not always derail peace, commitments to agreements greatly enhance the likelihood of long-term success.
- For sustainability, trans-party unity must be built in over time. Mechanisms to ensure broad political consensus across parties can safeguard peace agreements from policy reversals.
- Explicit provisions for the transformation of armed groups into political parties. These provisions create pathways for inclusive governance and diminish the likelihood of future conflict.

Land and Resource Management

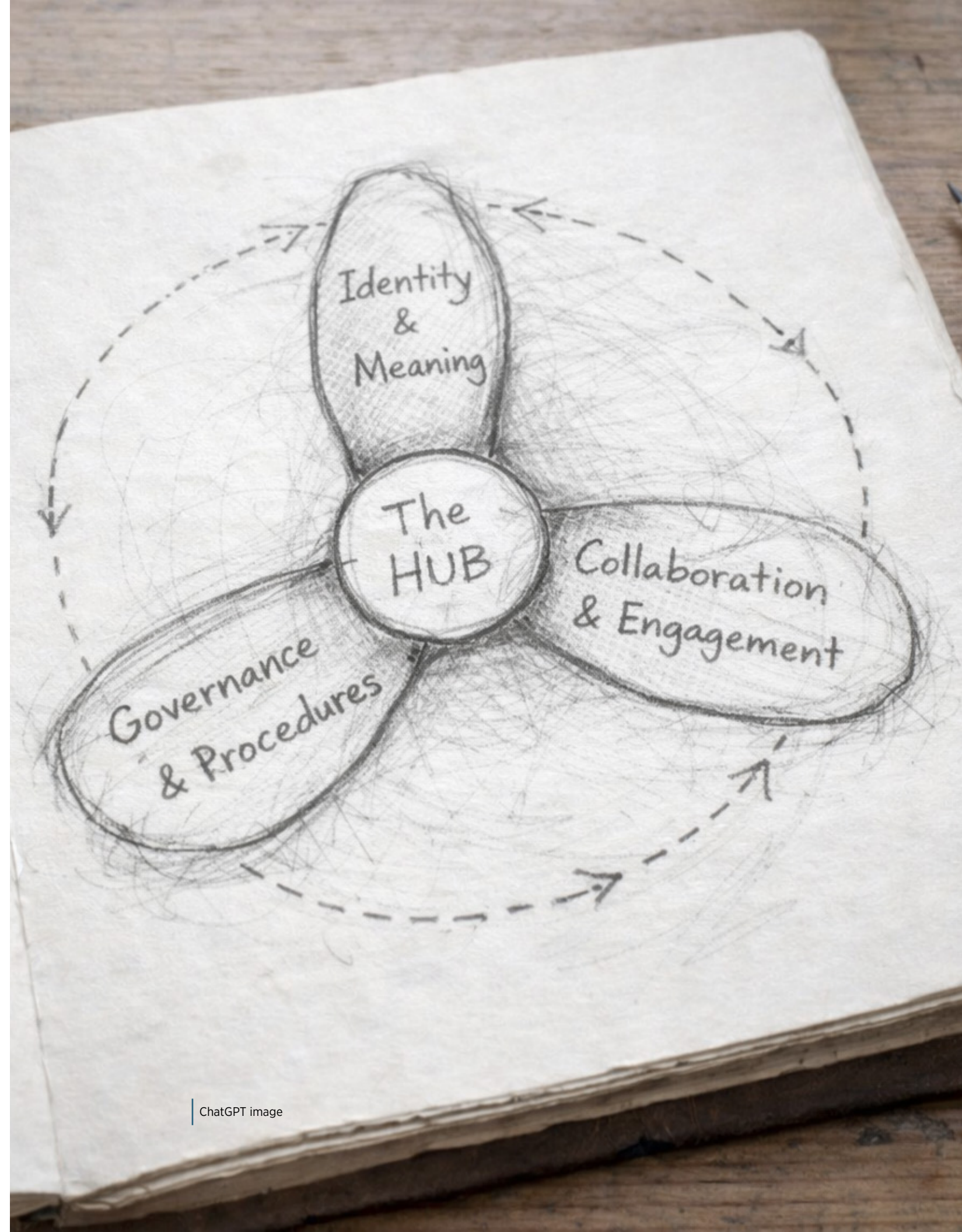
- Land, as a contested resource, could influence the process design. Relocating away from contested areas can sometimes aid in advancing negotiations.
- Land and natural resources represent central issues addressed in peace accords. Redistribution and management of these resources often become focal points of agreements, with varying levels of success.
- The use of data and transparency can play a role in compliance monitoring for land use. Technological solutions such as data sharing improve accountability in post-agreement resource management.

Northern Ireland Designing with Iteration

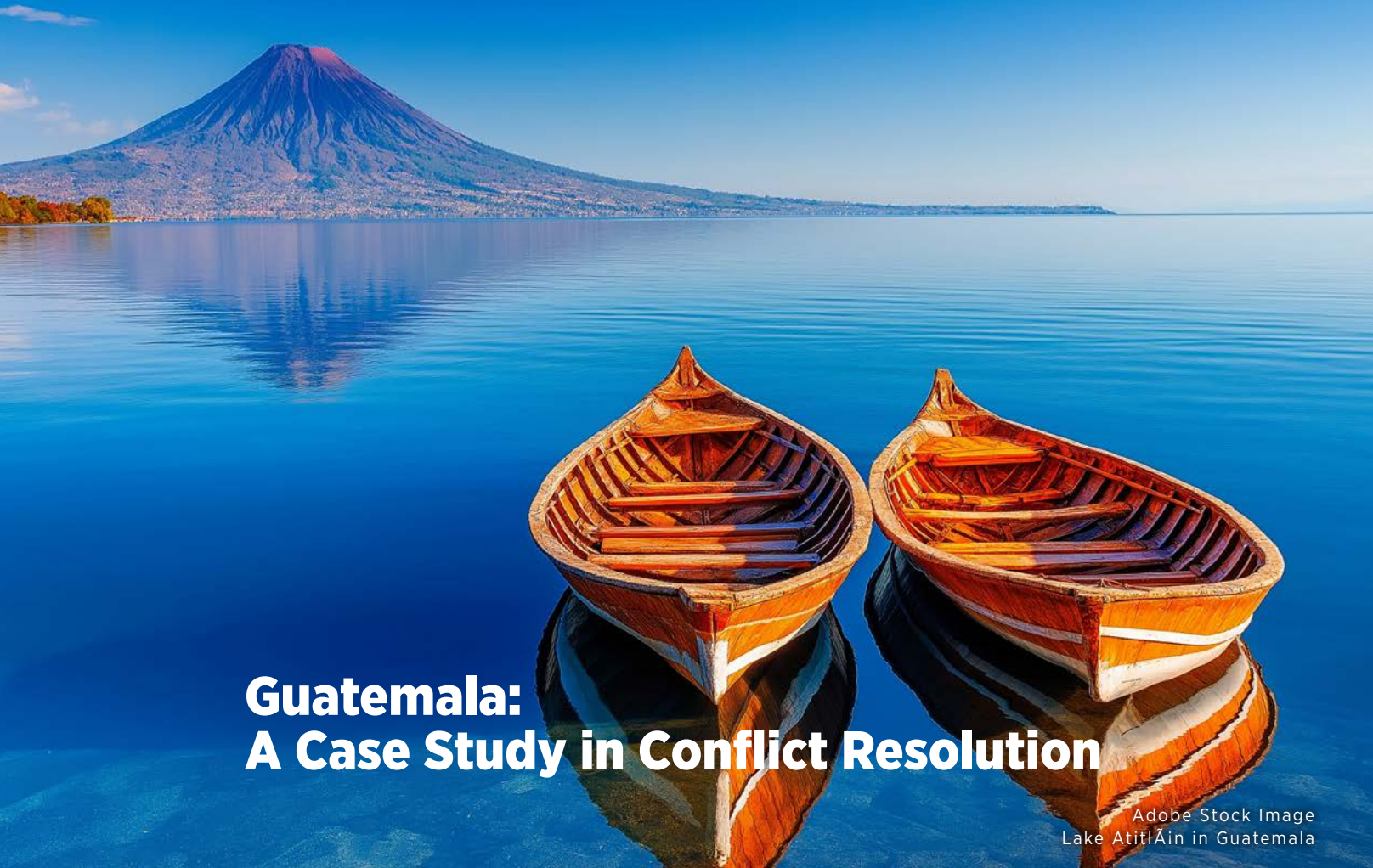


The agreement institutionalized mechanisms for power-sharing, and parties recalibrated when trust broke down.

The Good Friday Agreement created devolved power-sharing structures, a joint executive, and an independent human rights commission. But its success depended on built-in feedback loops: when trust eroded, the institutions were suspended and renegotiated. This iterative design, paired with international oversight, allowed procedural flexibility without derailing the broader accord.



ChatGPT image



Guatemala: A Case Study in Conflict Resolution

Adobe Stock Image
Lake Atitlán in Guatemala

Conflict Resolution through The Propeller Model

The Hub – Guatemala Conflict Dynamics

Guatemala's civil war (1960–1996) was rooted in the breakdown of a reformist agenda and the imposition of military rule following the 1954 coup. The ensuing decades saw escalating violence, devastating communities, and compounding grievances—particularly for the country's Indigenous Maya majority. By the early 1990s, war fatigue, shifting regional politics, and international attention created an opening for new peace initiatives. The peace process that followed is recognized for its procedural innovation, extensive civil society participation, and efforts to address longstanding structural injustices.

1. Identity & Meaning Wing

- The negotiation and accords foregrounded the recognition of Guatemala's multiethnic reality and Indigenous rights, with a dedicated "Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples." For the first time, cultural, linguistic, and legal recognition were included in national frameworks.
- The process institutionalized the acknowledgement of collective trauma, including the establishment of the Commission to Clarify Past Human Rights Violations. Civil society participation provided a forum for victims' voices.
- Challenges remained, particularly in the slow and uneven realization of new legal and cultural rights. Implementation of land, justice, and autonomy provisions encountered delays, administrative resistance, and political opposition.
- The transition from formal reform to lived transformation was partial—enduring socioeconomic inequalities and discrimination persisted in Indigenous communities, reflecting limitations in both political will and institutional capacity.

Takeaway Applications: Embedding minority and Indigenous identity recognition into peace settlements is vital, but must be supported by robust legal, administrative, and monitoring frameworks, as well as sustained donor and governmental commitment to realizing social and economic rights.

2. Collaboration & Engagement Wing

- Civil society was not an afterthought; the ASC was institutionalized as a parallel forum to the official negotiations. Groups such as the Mutual Support Group (GAM) and National Coordinator of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) advocated for victim recognition, land restitution, and historical memory.
- Informal “Track 2” diplomacy, including quiet dialogue led by religious institutions like the Catholic Archdiocese’s Human Rights Office, played an indispensable role in sustaining communication when formal processes were stalled.
- International donors and mediators, including the United Nations, directly supported national and local capacity for land dispute resolution, legal system reform, and indigenous rights advocacy. Donors were advised to focus on long-term, locally relevant interventions rather than short-term projects.
- Civil society engagement played a critical role in negotiation, but mechanisms to sustain that engagement in the face of rising post-agreement insecurity were limited. As criminal violence grew, former combatants and vulnerable communities were left without coordinated protection or response.

Takeaway Applications: Deep and ongoing civil society engagement—both formal (through assemblies with veto or deliberative power) and informal (Track 2, local mediation)—increases process legitimacy and opens space for groups historically excluded. However, sustaining peace requires continued investment in social cohesion and community protection beyond the cessation of hostilities.

3. Governance & Procedures Wing

- Negotiations were structured with a clear sequence: core political issues (such as indigenous rights, land distribution, and justice) were addressed before reaching a ceasefire and establishing security protocols. This “substance-first” approach—grounded in the belief that political solutions must come before security guarantees—distinguished the process.
- The Assembly of Civil Society (ASC) played a key role, provided a formal mechanism for over 100 civil society organizations to consult on and respond to negotiation proposals. While not a decision-making body, its recommendations shaped public expectations and exerted pressure on formal negotiators. This design mitigated elite capture of the process and gave legitimacy to the accords.
- Technical capacity-building was emphasized, with donors supporting both the formal justice sector (e.g., family courts) and informal, Indigenous systems of conflict resolution. This dual-track support included legal training on land rights, creation of rural legal aid programs, and promotion of curriculum reforms for law schools.
- Post-agreement, implementation of reforms faced resistance. A 1999 referendum to codify key constitutional changes failed, highlighting an implementation gap between negotiated principles and political realities.

Takeaway Applications: Sequencing negotiations around core issues, not just ceasefires, can enhance trust and ensure that peace settlements address the roots of conflict. Institutional reform and local capacity-building—when paired with inclusive consultation—strengthen accord legitimacy, but long-term enforcement requires embedding reforms in national law and building public consensus.

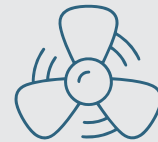


Summary for Instructors & Practitioners

The Guatemalan case demonstrates that:

- The order and inclusivity of negotiations matter: Start with core grievances, keep the process open to marginalized voices, and create formal structures for civil society input.
- Implementation cannot end with an agreement: Investment in judicial reform, legal education, and local mediation are critical to preventing a slide back into insecurity or criminal violence.
- Identity transformation is slow but essential: Symbolic recognition must be backed by practical guarantees—especially on land rights, cultural recognition, and rural development—or else reforms risk stalling at the legislative level.

Guatemala Linkages Arise with ASC



The Guatemalan peace process institutionalized civil society participation through the Assembly of Civil Society (ASC), a parallel forum that brought together over 100 organizations—including Indigenous groups, labor unions, women’s associations, and business chambers. While the ASC lacked formal negotiating power, it reviewed and responded to draft proposals, amplifying grassroots concerns around land, identity, and justice.

By sustaining pressure on negotiators and shaping public expectations, the ASC played a bridging role—connecting identity-based grievances with formal governance proposals and reinforcing collaboration across sectors. This integrative function helped legitimize the process and contributed to breaking political deadlocks during stalled talks.

Checklist for Lift-Off

Identity and Meaning

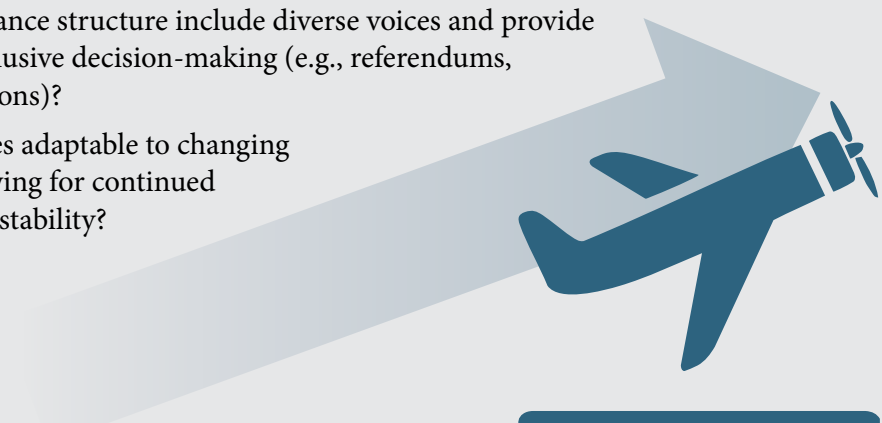
1. Are underlying identity-based grievances, fears, and narratives being actively acknowledged and addressed?
2. Have structured and safe spaces been created for intergroup dialogue, storytelling, or truth-telling to rebuild trust?
3. Are initiatives in place to promote mutual recognition, empathy, or positive contact between divided groups?
4. Does the structured approach include rituals, media reforms, or community-led projects that help reweave social cohesion?
5. Is there evidence of changing attitudes or perceptions that show readiness for a new, shared trajectory?

Collaboration and Engagement

1. Are all necessary stakeholders—including marginalized, grassroots, and civil society actors—actively engaged in the process?
2. Do effective mechanisms exist for open, transparent, and regular communication among all groups?
3. Are there structured opportunities for joint problem-solving and the building of shared goals?
4. Have tangible steps been taken to build trust and address past grievances or mistrust between parties?
5. Can collaboration efforts flexibly adapt to evolving circumstances and incorporate new voices as needed?

Governance and Procedures

1. Is the governance and political framework for negotiation clear, and does it have buy-in from all essential stakeholders?
2. Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that agreements are legitimate, sustainable, and enforceable?
3. Have power imbalances or procedural barriers in the process been identified and effectively mitigated?
4. Does the governance structure include diverse voices and provide pathways for inclusive decision-making (e.g., referendums, public consultations)?
5. Are the structures adaptable to changing conditions, allowing for continued momentum and stability?





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