Accompaniment mechanisms for peace-supporting investments: Strategic elements and lessons learned

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Highlights

Accompaniment mechanisms moderate the relationship between the investment project and the complex environment.1 These contexts tend to be regulated by informal power rather than formal laws or institutions, and therefore require their own political approaches that protects the performance of the investment.[2] Such efforts can draw on three decades of experience of peace mediation practice that can help to ensure that the investment has peace-supporting outcomes and financial return at the same time.

This paper sketches key strategic elements for accompanying mechanisms for private investments in complex environments and distils lessons learned from practical experiences.[3] Key highlights are:

- Successful accompaniment mechanisms have evolved from aligning several strategic elements, including trustworthy data, collaborative analysis, and progressively expanded coalitions for change. They also focus on the most acute risk factors of conflict and violence and opportunities for peace, and on sustained institutional support by an honest broker over longer periods of time.
- Investors can draw a multitude of instruments developed in the field of private peace diplomacy over the last three decades. These instruments include, for example, verification mechanisms, community dialogues, networks of insider mediators, brain trusts, and infrastructures for peace.
- Positive results of accompaniment mechanisms tend to emerge from stepping outside of formal, top-down approaches. They build from outreach to atypical actors, and conflict management systems and institutions that are based on the foundations of those functioning parts of society that are found in even the most fragile contexts. They also build on the recognition that the nature of the majority of conflict and violence has a strong local dimension.

By addressing conflict and violence deliberately and on their own terms in specific local contexts, accompaniment mechanisms can help manage risks and improve business environments over time.

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[1] See PDI Research Paper 1 for an analysis of the 'complex environment' and what it means for business investments.
[2] Finn Stepputat (2018). Pragmatic Peace in Emerging Governscapes. *International Affairs* 94(2) 399-416.
[3] This section builds on chapter 5 of Brian Ganson and Achim Wennmann (2016) *Business and Conflict in Fragile States: The Case for Pragmatic Solutions.* London: Routledge and IISS.

Introduction: Understanding private diplomacy

Private diplomacy (also called 'peace mediation') is a field of practice that has emerged after the Cold War when several civil wars required discreet resolution after the end of superpower competition. Private diplomacy draws on decades of conflict resolution practice between states and at the community level. It also draws on the tradition of mediation in many jurisdictions as an instrument of alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The benefits of mediation have been associated with the resolution of conflict with neither side losing face, hence preventing the creation of 'winners' and 'losers' as a basis for reconciliation or coexistence of the parties.[4]

With respect to armed conflict in the 1990s, many states realized the limits they faced to enter into direct relationships with the primarily non-state armed groups– also referred to as 'rebel groups', 'insurgents', or 'terrorist organisations' – that shaped conflict dynamics. By the late 1990s, several smaller states like Switzerland, Norway, the Netherlands, and other countries supported independent private diplomacy capacities that could engage with those actors, build relationships with them over time, and assist negotiated conflict endings. Their trademark is to have unique access to some of the most difficult contexts and actors.

Over the last three decades, private diplomacy actors have constituted a critical strategic sector of the global peace and security architecture. They involve about two dozen actors dedicated to resolve conflict and build peace.[5] The sector has undergone a significant professionalization in recent years, including highly specialized organisations servicing different steps in the process towards different types of peace agreements, involving for instance discreet engagements with non-state armed groups, process design facilitation, ceasefires talks, as well as support to more ambitious agendas such as institutional reform, new constitutions, elections and reconciliation mechanisms. In this way, private diplomacy organisations have contributed to more bilateral or multilateral negotiated agreements, and agreements that resulted from formal mediation processes. Their efforts primarily involved being the "trusted intermediary" that provides discreet supporting or catalysing role such as "some kind of liaison or shuttle diplomacy, assurances from guarantors, or some other form of indirect support by intermediaries to enable the parties to begin communicating and to come to a final agreement."[6]

The United Nations recognizes the importance of neutral assistance and how mediation support provides important expertise and plays a variety of vital roles in conflict resolution. The *United Nations Guidance on Effective Mediation* suggests that, in situations of conflict, it is necessary to help build relationships of confidence where they do not sufficiently exist among local actors

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[4] Jay Folberg and Alison Taylor (1984) *Mediation: A Comprehensive Guide to Resolving Conflicts Without Litigation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. See pp.1-17.

[5] See for instance the members of the Mediation Support Network, available at https://mediationsupportnetwork.net/member-organizations/

[6] Ian Wadley (2017) *Valuing Peace: Delivering and Demonstrating Mediation Results*, Mediation Practice Series No.7. Geneva: HD Centre, p. 8.

themselves; to facilitate the participatory analysis of conflict dynamics across a variety of actors, as well as to identify local strengths and challenges faced in dealing with them; to ensure the careful evaluation of strategic and tactical options for introducing new thinking and new modes of action for conflict prevention into the fragile environment; to provide expert support for the design, management and evaluation of conflict prevention systems; and to engage in consistent outreach to the full range of stakeholders nationally and internationally for coherent action.[7]

However, the collective know-how of the private diplomacy sector is presently not connected to the needs of investors to protect and accompany investment projects in complex environments so that these investments produce 'peace-positive' outcomes and a financial return at the same time. This paper reviews relevant practice from the broader peace mediation field as a contribution to identify strategic elements and lessons learned that can help designing accompaniment mechanisms in a specific investment context. The elements presented below include trustworthy data, collaborative analysis, progressively expanded coalitions for change, targeted interventions focusing on the most acute risk factors, and sustained institutional support by an honest broker. The paper also highlights examples of specific instruments.

1   Trust-worthy data

Effective accompaniment builds first and foremost from a precise analysis and understanding of local conflict and peace dynamics. A major research programme on the micro-dynamics of conflict, violence and development, funded by the European Commission, underlines the essentially local nature of violence and peace: "The outbreak, the continuation, the end, and the consequences of violent conflict are closely interrelated with how people behave, make choices, and interact with their immediate surroundings, and how all these factors may shape the lives and livelihoods of those exposed to conflict and violence"[8] This work underlines the fact that individuals, households, local groups and communities are central to an understanding of conflict and peace dynamics and emphasizes the importance of a *granular and localised understanding of a conflict context*.

Yet making sense of the local context and conflict dynamics is challenging in rumour-rich and information-poor environments. This is in part because data generation does not occur in a political vacuum. Controlling information is an expression of political power that in turn favours or disfavours different interest groups.

Private diplomacy actors are overcoming these barriers through the use of institutionalised mechanisms or networks for monitoring the local context. Often called *observatories*, they function to generate data, provide analysis or give advice to decision-makers to strengthen policymaking. Their primary role is to help all actors to broaden their perspectives and confront the realities of

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[7] United Nations, *Guidance on Effective Mediation* (New York, United Nations, 2012).
[8] Patricia Justino, Tilman Brück, and Philip Verwimp. (2013) 'Micro-Level Dynamics of Conflict, Violence, and Development: A New Analytical Framework', in Patricia Justino, Tilman Brück, and Philip Verwimp (edss), *A Micro-level Perspective on the Dynamics of Conflict, Violence and Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-29, at 5.

their environment. This has a technical aspect, for instance, through the application of more rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods.

Research on data science and digital technology suggests that there is a real prospect to purpose-build monitoring systems for accompaniment mechanisms that integrate human and data systems.[9] On the one hand, ***human monitoring systems*** work through collaborative processes that generate and analyse data with stakeholder communities in field operations. Such efforts can be integrated into accompaniment processes and an integral part of relevant dialogues and observatories. On the other hand, ***data science*** can enhance locally rooted efforts by expanding 'ways of seeing' (through multivariate, cross-contextual, and large-N analysis based on comparable data) and 'ways of listening' (through sentiment analysis using available textual data in media sources of social media).

Especially important for operations could be ***sentiment analysis*** that has become a leading approach in conflict analysis to measure 'conflict temperatures' by assessing the 'who' and 'what' of conflict. 'Rising temperatures' have become a leading indicator for rising or declining levels of community conflict. Sentiment analysis tools focused on 'conflict' would contribute to assessing the contribution of investments to 'negative' peace, whereas sentiment analysis focused on the quality of relationships between key stakeholders could respond to assessing 'positive peace' contributions.

The current frontier for observatories and collaborative analysis is the integration of data generated through human monitoring systems and data science instruments that expand . 'ways of seeing' and 'ways of listening'.

2   Collaborative analysis

Events organised by observatories on preliminary results of data gathering or analysis can be the first opportunity for actors from diverse sectors and perspectives to challenge each other's thinking. Moderated conversations uncover gaps in information and understanding, potentially faulty assumptions regarding cause and effect, and biases in both data collection and data reporting. Repeating such interactions over time allows stakeholders to collectively test assumptions underlying decision-making processes and strategies.

Taking collaborative approaches to data gathering and analysis to the next level can build on the growing body of practice around ***community-based monitoring systems (CBMS)***. A typical CBMS trains local researchers to collect data at a level of detail and precision difficult to match by outsider-driven assessments; in the social arena, for example, it is not uncommon for a CBMS to collect data on every household in its defined area. Such approaches have been found to increase

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[9] Brian Ganson, Withold Henisz, and Anne Soencer Jamison, (2021) Peace dividends through private investment: An assessment of the enabling tools of data science. PDI Discussion Document, 17 March.

the validity, reliability, accuracy, and legitimacy of data through its collection by those closest to it. It may also achieve real cost savings through the deployment of lower-cost local resources. And it can reduce disputes over data and analysis as different actors with a stake in a conflict and its resolution understand the approach that underlie them.

3   Progressively expanded coalitions for peace

The next level of accompaniment is the building of sufficient consensus for action that rests on the foundations of higher-quality data and analysis that is trusted by the stakeholders of a complex environment. In practice, reaching this next level of conflict management and peacebuilding means progressively enlarging the circle of actors aligned around a concrete understanding of the present or vision for the future, and ensuring that it be consensual, that it be as broadly owned as possible, and there be no major gap between the vision and the capacities of local or international stakeholders to deliver that vision.

For example, many private diplomacy actors have experience in organising or advising **national dialogue processes**, which are "negotiating mechanisms intended to expand participation in political transitions beyond the political and military elites. Their ambition is to move away from elite-level deal making by allowing diverse interests to influence the transitional negotiations".[10] Recognising that transitional mechanisms must be put in place to compensate for those of the formal government that lack sufficient legitimacy, they nurture "a shared understanding among key political actors on principles".[11] Their success rests at least in part on rigorous **stakeholder mapping**, as well as on an expanded understanding of 'who counts' in conflict resolution, or in other words, the 'inclusive-enough' coalitions for change.

Explicit consideration of political economy factors must somehow be included in the **process of building consensus** around new political institutions and vison for society. Thankfully, not every party needs to be directly at a negotiation table. Research drawing on the insights of more than 100 senior peace mediators suggests that a variety of options for inclusion are available. These range from direct representation or observation in negotiations, to consultative forums run in parallel to negotiations, to informal outreach to key stakeholders, to inclusive post-agreement mechanisms, to public participation through media events, town-hall or mass meetings, or information campaigns.[12]

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[10] Katia Papagianni, (2014) *National Dialogue Processes in Political Transition*. Geneva and Brussels: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and European Peacebuilding Liaison Office.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Thania Paffenholz (2014) 'Civil Society in Peace Negotiations: Beyond the Inclusion-Exclusion Dichotomy', *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp.69-91.

4   Targeted interventions

Systems capable of preventing the escalation of conflict or violence may take a variety of innovative forms as the integration of human-based and machine supported instruments for data generation suggests above. Such efforts have already been deployed in Kenya, for instance, where a group of technologists and civic activists built the Ushahidi platform in 2008 in response to election violence, allowing the public to report eyewitness accounts in real time and enable swifter responses. The platform has since been deployed in hundreds of different contexts around the world to support early warning. Recognising that "calls to violent action spread faster over mobile phones and the internet", local groups in Kenya counter violence using these same tools.[13]

But effective conflict resolution can be decidedly low-tech as well. Increasing numbers of initiatives draw inspiration from the insight of public health experts, who have noted that violence spreads like a disease, and that it is therefore amenable to strategic interruption points. Programmes deploy trusted members of a local community – from ex-drug runners or gang leaders to religious figures or elders – as *'violence interrupters'*.[14] These community members are trained to intervene in crises, mediate disputes between individuals, and intercede in group disputes to prevent violent events.

The experience of peace mediation similarly underlines the value of *'insider mediators'* – leaders of civil society organisations, churches, trade unions or business councils who leverage trust, respect and deep knowledge of the dynamics and context of the conflict in conjunction with a high level of legitimacy that is rooted in their social position, personality and skills. The fact that local leaders acting as mediators are connected to, and trusted by, important local constituencies has been found to build trust in processes and outcomes where the state is too weak or illegitimate to do so, de-escalating and managing conflict risks. [15]

Some processes are also accompanied by a so-called *'brain trust'* that is a group of about a dozen "'middle-tier' or 'go-between' leaders who help bridge national and community level peace processes".[16] A brain trust offers deep thinking about relevant issues that are not filtered through specific institutional or partisan interests or approaches, it cuts across sectors and institutions and brings together a collective capacity that goes beyond the limitations of individual members, and enables access to hard-to-obtain information and hard-to-access networks. There is much opportunity in exploring the usefulness of brain trust as strategic instrument for multi-dimensional approaches against informal economies.

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[13] Helena Puig Larrauri, Rodrigo Davies, Michaela Ledesma, Jennifer Welch (2015) *New Technologies: The Future of Alternative Infrastructures for Peace*. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

[14] See http://cureviolence.org/the-interrupters.

[15] Simon Mason (2019) *Insider Mediators: Exploring Their Key Role in Informal Peace Processes*. Berlin: Berghof Foundation for Peace Support.

[16] Phil Clark and Mark Freeman (2020) *Building Peace from the Middle: The Critical Work of National Brain Trusts*. Peace Science Digest (March).

5 Institutional support

The strategic elements noted so far will require ***professional and institutionalized support*** to coordinate and sustain them. Ad hoc processes convened directly by stakeholders can die from the exhaustion of planning and managing complex collaborative initiatives that are outside the core mandate or expertise of any participant; as stated the G20 High Level Panel on Infrastructure, partnerships that bring diverse actors together "require their own infrastructure".[17] Ad hoc processes may also fall prey to wrangling among the players as one or another is perceived to be manipulating the process to achieve its preferred outcome. In conflict resolution particularly, companies may face resistance from aggrieved parties until they "relinquish some measure of control over decision-making".[18] This is because communities must believe that their consent is "enduring, enforceable, and meaningful" before they move "out of their … defensive positions".[19]

The scale of the efforts undertaken also argues for independent institutional support, also called ***'backbone support organisation'***. Such an institutional support provides services such as neutral facilitation or mediation, technology and communication, data collection and reporting, and administrative support necessary for enabling a complex collaborative effort.[20]

A variety of approaches to institutionalizing conflict management and peacebuilding are often bundled under the concept of ***'Infrastructures for Peace'***.[21] While they predominantly work at the local level, they have connections and operating arrangements at the municipal, provincial, or national level. Their main objective is to promote mutual understanding, build trust, solve problems, and prevent violence.[22] Positive examples include the National Reconciliation Commission in Nicaragua and the Policing Board in Northern Ireland. At each level of the system, representatives "from within the conflict settings who as individuals enjoy the trust and confidence of one side in the conflict but who as a team provide balance and equity" analyse conflict risk factors and agree on strategies for intervention.[23]

These infrastructures for peace often draw inspiration from the experience of South Africa's National Peace Secretariat, established to supervise the implementation of the 1991 Peace Accord. It is considered "a major breakthrough that helped to create the space for parties to engage in negotiations to decide the political future of South Africa."[24] Echoing these approaches, the Niger

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[17] High Level Panel on Infrastructure, c.f. World Bank (2014) *Overcoming Constraints to the Financing of Infrastructure: Success Stories and Lessons Learned*. Washington: World Bank, p.3.
[18] Lisa J Laplante and Suzanna A. Spears (2008). Out of the Conflict Zone: The Case for Community Consent Processes in the Extractive Sector. *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal*, vol.11 (2008), pp. 69-116, at p. 115.
[19] Ibid.
[20] John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011). Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (winter), 36-41.
[21] Andries Odendaal (2013) *A Crucial Link: Local Peace Committees and National Peacebuilding* Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace. Chetan Kumar and Jos De la Haye (2011) 'Hybrid Peacemaking: Building National Infrastructures for Peace', *Global Governance*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 13-20, at p. 13.
[22] Andries Odendaal (2010) *An Architecture for Building Peace at the Local Level: A Comparative Study of Local Peace Committees*. New York: UNDP.
[23] Odendaal, *A Crucial Link*, p. 70.
[24] Chris Spies (2002) 'South Africa's National Peace Accord', in Catherine Barnes (ed.), *Owning the Process: Public Participation in Peacemaking* (London: Conciliation Resources, pp. 20-25.

Delta Development Initiative builds from its local peace and development structures to convene forums annually in the U.S., Nigeria and UK "to build common understanding of the complex security and economic challenges facing the people of the Niger Delta."[25] In doing so it enables coordinated action at a variety of levels of influence.

6 Lessons learned from accompaniment mechanisms

The strategic elements for accompaniment mechanisms described above have proven remarkably effective in preventing or de-escalating conflict in a wide range of settings. They demonstrate that by addressing conflict and violence deliberately and on their own terms in specific local contexts, accompaniment mechanisms can help manage risks and improve business environments over time. In reviewing the evidence about why such approaches work, this paper summarizes several lessons.

- ***Prioritise the prevention and reduction of violence and conflict:*** One key success factor is the relentless focus on the reduction of conflict and violence. Ongoing monitoring and actor mapping are critical ingredients for such a prioritization.
- ***Engage parties on their partisan interests:*** Successful initiatives in fragile states begin by engaging parties on the basis of their partisan interests. Knowing who the parties are, what they want and why, and how and why they change, are important elements to consider when undertaking a stakeholder mapping.
- ***Ensure vertical linkages within the conflict system:*** Partisan interests of the conflict parties play out at the various levels within socio-political systems. It is therefore necessary to create vertical linkages – that is, relationships and channels of communication between different levels in terms of geography or administrative or managerial unit. This has also shaped the experience of 'multi-level governance' approaches.[26]
- ***Work within the de-facto political economy:*** Successfully accompaniment also requires recognition of the existing social and political capital from which effective efforts can be built. The absence of functioning government institutions should not be mistaken for the absence of governance mechanisms or public service delivery, especially at sub-national levels. These need to be identified and worked with as part of a successful accompaniment for investment projects.
- ***Enable facilitation by outside actors trusted by the parties:*** Many parties trapped in conflict can become "unable to communicate with each other, unable to think of a solution that could be attractive to the other side as well as themselves, unable to conceive any side payments or enticements to turn the zero-sum conflict into a positive-sum solution, and unable to turn from commitment and a winning mentality to problem solving and solutions to grievances".[27] In such cases, facilitation by outside actors that the parties trust can help to address the narrowed perspectives and broken relationships underpinning complex investment environments.

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[25] See Niger Delta Partnership Initiative Foundation, http://ndpifoundation.org.
[26] See OECD (2010) *Multi-level Governance: A Conceptual Framework*, available at https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264091375-11-en.
[27] Zartman, I. W. (1995) Dynamics and constraints in negotiations in internal conflict, In I. W. Zartman (ed). *Elusive peace: Negotiating an end to civil wars*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institutions, 3-29, at 20.

Conclusion: Towards multi-dimensional approaches

Finding operational answers for engagement in complex environments point to the need of ***multi-dimensional approaches***. Such approaches underline the need for combining the know-how and instruments from different sectors and institutions that are often isolated by silo-mentalities as well as lacking mechanisms to facilitate exchanges. While multi-dimensional approaches might be hard to manage in contexts with a chronic lack of capacities, they nevertheless expand the entry-points for constructive engagements and expand the potential partnership base to nurture peace-supporting investments.

A key operational element of multi-dimensional approaches is ***co-production***. The rising complexity of countries exiting from and still experiencing violent conflict is shaping a shift from 'implementation' to 'co-production' as underlying operational paradigm. Rather than executing a planned, fully resourced solution from the top downwards, co-production reflects more iterative process designs through which relevant partnership solve one problem after the other. While top-down implementation approaches remain popular with larger organisations and autocratic states, they have faced operational limits in resource poor environments. Co-production also shapes broader ownership to establish lasting and sustainable outcomes.

A second element is ***coordination***. No single actor operating in a complex environment can achieve peace-supporting outcomes on its own. This fact emphasizes the need for partnerships between different actors having different skills and capabilities and playing different roles. As a result, coordination of different roles and tools becomes an important element for these to unfold their peace-enhancing potential.

Finally, ***embracing adaptation*** is key for actors operating in complex environments, which in turn requires a granular understanding of the operations setting. This is often a problem for large international actors who operate on the basis of specific rationales and associated tools that often externally impose ways of working that are unsuitable for a specific context.

With the outlook of more turbulence in many markets due to the impact of climate change, technological innovation and geopolitical shifts, there is no time to lose to forge new partnerships that aim to achieve peace, profit, and prosperity through new ways of working.