The Role of Narrative in Managing Conflict and Supporting Peace

In countries with histories of political crisis, polarisation or violent conflict, social groups often have different stories about what happened in the past, why it happened and what it will take to create a lasting peace that benefits their group and larger society. These established narratives together form a narrative 'landscape' that is specific to each context, which can either deepen or mitigate divisions.

Introducing the analogy of the '[narrative tree]', this discussion paper draws on the expertise and experience of IFIT's [Inclusive Narratives Practice Group] to provide a framework for understanding how narratives form and function, as well as an approach for facilitating narrative enrichment at the national or subnational level. Narratives can be visualised as trees, rooted in major events and mythic stories and branching out into practices, policies and other outcomes that give each narrative tree its shape. As the narrative landscapes of polarised societies tend to be dominated by a few large trees that represent simplified narratives, this paper focuses on offering ideas for promoting the growth of many narrative trees, some with common roots and intersecting branches, which together form a more complex and diverse narrative landscape to reduce conflict.

The facilitation approach proposed in this paper includes three cyclical phases – assessment, strategic planning and implementation – with a set of process guidelines and a menu of activities and tools from which to choose. Together, they can help policymakers and stakeholders understand their own narrative biases, reduce the salience of divisive narratives and amplify constructive narratives that can gain traction at scale.
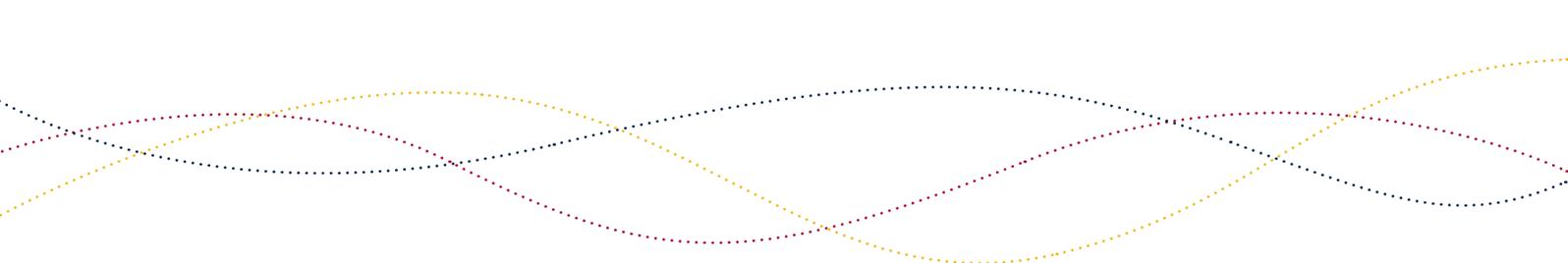
About Narrative

Before examining how to facilitate work on narrative landscapes, it is important to analyse the role of narrative in conflict and violence; simplified narratives as drivers of polarisation; and complex narratives as enablers of peace.

The Role of Narrative in Conflict and Violence

A narrative is a system of stories that helps people make sense of their experiences and create a coherent view of the world. Based on the information, events and environment we are exposed to across our lives, the narratives we subscribe to often appear as common sense. They unconsciously shape our understanding of ourselves in society, including our beliefs about identity, community, group belonging and relationships with 'others'. Narrative in turn guides how members of different social groups relate to one another and mobilise for social and political action. Depending on how they are used, narratives contribute to either deepening or mitigating the conflicts that are bound to arise among groups over time.

Conflict is a natural and even healthy part of any society. By revealing the structures and relations that underpin social norms – and by enabling cycles of re-negotiation of power dynamics, roles and institutions – it contributes to change. If managed in a constructive way, conflict can help societies address group grievances, strengthen social cohesion and improve state accountability and services, thereby facilitating sustainable peace. By contrast, if badly managed or supressed for too long, conflict can feed group grievances and weaken social trust and institutions, to the point where influential stakeholders – ranging from political, civic and business leaders to elite, non-elite and opposition groups – may see violence as the most viable option for advancing their interests.

The grievances that drive conflict tend to have deep roots. These include not only structural factors such as historical legacies, political geography and economic conditions like being landlocked or natural resource dependent, but also institutional factors such as the use and abuse of state organs by those in power, the nature of civil society and the media, and the distribution of power and wealth among regions and social groups. The ongoing effects of negative structural and institutional factors influence people's lived experience and form the foundations of group grievances, which may gradually accumulate or intensify in response to political, social and economic developments until they push a society along the pathway to violence.

Narratives are central to the formation, evolution and management of all of this. Groups and individuals have numerous and intersecting narratives about their identity and place in society, which are shaped by structural and institutional factors and affected by events. When grievances accrue, narratives provide the moral architecture that serves as the justification and impetus for people's actions. Thus, while narratives may encourage social engagement and political action to address the core issues that underpin grievances, they may also inflame them and divide societies to the point that the core issues are eclipsed.

Stakeholders use narratives to achieve their own ends, which are often determined based on a relatively short-term perspective of their interests. Social and political elites – as well as institutions such as the military, the judiciary, religious or traditional authorities, trade unions and civic associations – require their own strong narratives to bring people together for a common aim and justify their existence, goals and decisions. But whether they are used by influential individuals or institutions, narratives can acquire a life and force of their own – in the worst cases serving to deepen social divisions, increase polarisation or justify violence. This can lead countries to experience start-stop peace processes interrupted by periods of violence, which can take decades to yield positive results.

Because of the power of narratives to generate violence, policymakers and stakeholders working for peace must constantly look for windows of opportunity to engage with national and subnational narratives in order to shift a society's trajectory away from destructive forms of conflict. These windows may take myriad forms, including an election, the introduction of reforms, incidents of violence or a natural disaster. Timely and decisive action in response to such a window can amplify constructive narratives and, through them, foster new coalitions, encourage positive leadership (or discourage negative leadership) and spur institutional reforms and policies that provide a lasting resolution to group grievances, thus strengthening pathways to peace.

To help understand the way narrative works, it can be useful to visualise them as trees that together make up the narrative landscape. The **roots** of each narrative tree are a fairly constant mix of facts, stories and parables about a common collective past, which underlie people's political views, anchor their identity and history, and provide a moral foundation for their view of the world. Some of the roots are unique to a particular social group or movement, while others are likely common to several groups. The **trunk** is the hardy central framing or understanding that grows out of all or a specific bundle of shared roots, which people use to justify their worldview and actions. The **branches** are the policy preferences, actions and outcomes attached to the trunk, which are resilient but liable to change as they grow, interweave and break off – eventually affecting the shape of the whole tree (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: EXAMPLE OF A NARRATIVE TREE
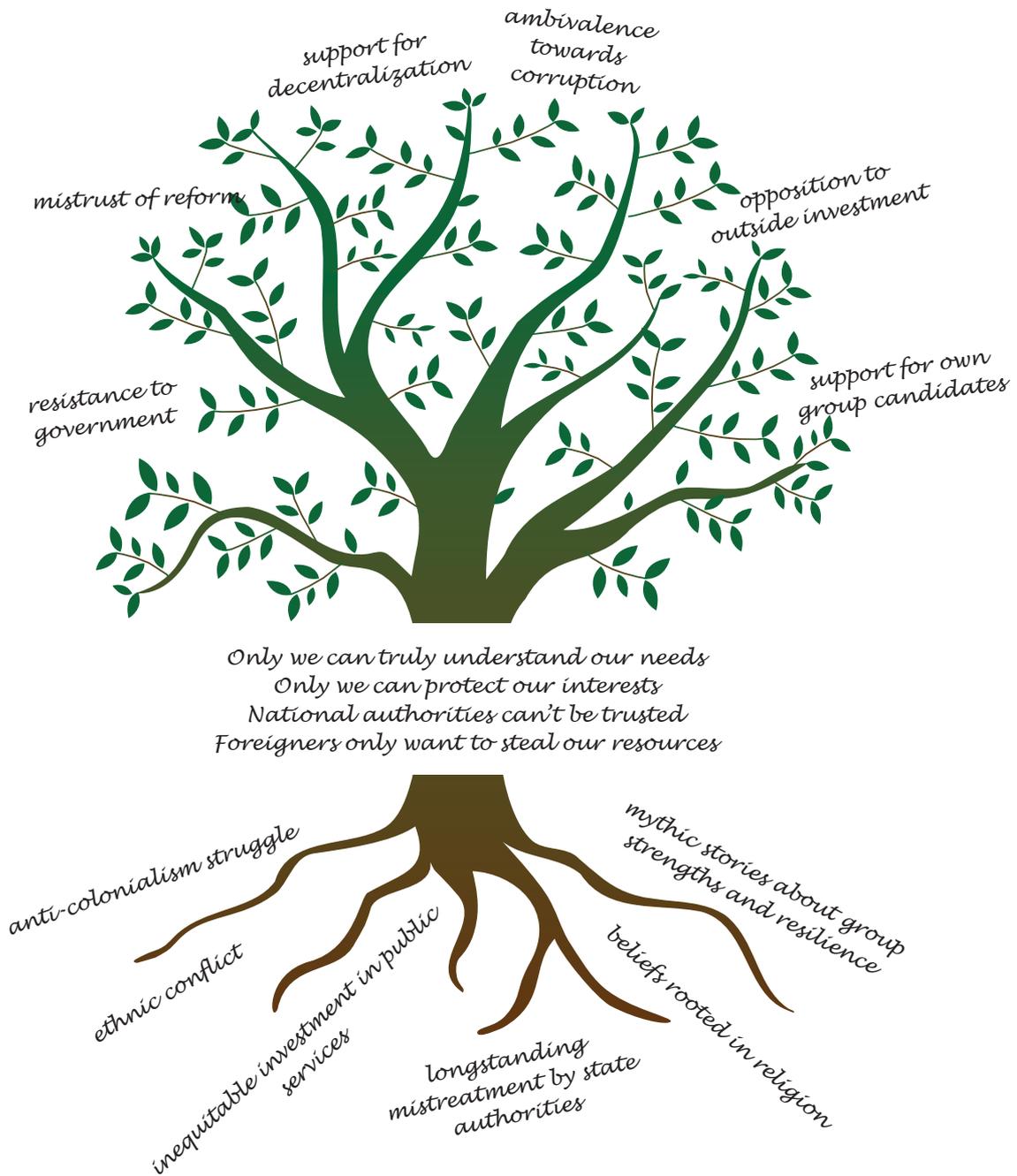
The narrative trees in a society's particular narrative landscape are part of a single eco-system, so that changes in one tree influence other trees and gradually affect the entire landscape. Understood in this way, the aim of actors working for peace is to enrich their narrative landscape, since one dominated by just a few trees is liable to produce uncon-structive conflict and complicate peace efforts.

Simplified Narratives as Drivers of Polarisation

The most problematic narrative landscapes are made up of group narratives that become increasingly simplified and self-reinforcing. In these contexts, stakeholders tell stories that highlight the validity of their group's grievances, cultivating a particular narrative while stifling others. This often entails promoting the legitimacy of their group's positions and the moral superiority of its claims, including by attributing 'good' intentions and traits to their group and 'bad' ones to other groups. Construction of these narratives tends to ignore inconvenient facts or evidence, including the mythic roots that would otherwise be shared by two groups that are in conflict.

In such an environment, previously complex group narratives shrink to simple stories with linear plots, which are supported by a particular interpretation of key events in the conflict and focus blame on 'others', who are often portrayed as victimisers. As group members and influential actors repeat and elaborate the simplified narrative, it grows into a large narrative tree with a trunk that is so stable that it is received by members of the group as a given, rather than as a choice.

These large narrative trees feed and perpetuate themselves as they grow, producing divided contexts in which people start to perceive and describe politics and society primarily via their own narrative tree. Such trees also grow apart from each other as they tower over the narrative landscape, marginalising alternative narratives and concealing the underlying complexity and plurality of stories. The result is an increase in competition between groups and zero-sum logics that undermine collaboration.

When a few large narrative trees compete with each other, individuals and organisations also tend to overlook the complex causes of the conflict (both historical and immediate) or ways to resolve it peacefully. Reciprocal de-legitimation may follow, where moderate interpretations that lie between poles are side-lined or silenced, and extreme views instead frame public debates. Polarisation can grow around narratives relating to identity, such as religion, ethnicity and race; or relating to ideology, such as left-wing and right-wing worldviews. It can also be driven by shifting collectives of individuals informed not by a specific identity or idea but by a need to unite against a common enemy – an outsider or 'other'.

When severe polarisation occurs, the risks of violence grow and it becomes difficult to see, let alone address, the structures and relations that underpin the conflict and require change. Even when severe polarisation is not a reflection of broad-based attitudes or when it is localised to events such as elections and legislative initiatives, it can reduce the willingness of large silent majorities to engage in politics, which also narrows the space for plurality in public debates.

As tensions grow, and as they provoke interventions in the political, social and economic arenas, they become more likely to inflame grievances and devolve from accusations and justifications to decreasing engagement, escalation of conflict, withdrawal from others and, finally, violence. When that occurs, a rapid hardening of opposing narratives may develop, deepening polarisation and incentivising further violence.

Complex Narratives as Enablers of Peace

When grievances accumulate and conflict arises, constructive group narratives are those that question simplification and polarisation while promoting plurality and participation. They acknowledge the complexity of the conflict, the validity of different groups' grievances and the moral values behind their claims. They incorporate more actors, events and subplots to complicate linear plots, integrating layers that thicken the story and encourage learning and reflection on different groups' responsibility in relation to the conflict – especially their shared responsibility.

Constructive narratives are evolving dialogues, which show that claims and actions are the result of a series of choices rather than a given. They acknowledge and adjust to other group narratives and individual stories, including not only dominant narratives but also alternative and marginalised ones. In this way, they contribute to a richer narrative landscape that is conducive to complexity, inclusivity and engagement, producing more and better opportunities for building peace and preventing violence. In such an environment, narrative trees are not competing with each other in a negative manner, but thriving together in their ecosystem.

Following this logic, peace is not the outcome of a 'shared narrative' where all people must tell the same story, but rather the result of a rich landscape of many different narratives – trees of different sizes and makeups – growing from some core, common or interwoven roots and branching into innovative and responsive branches (Figure 2).

Narrative enrichment cannot happen through 'marketing'. Because narratives are socially constructed through many interactions over time, hardened and divisive narratives do not respond well to new narratives from outside competing for support or throwing up challenging facts. Instead, groups and individuals must change divisive narratives from within by incorporating new elements, elaborating them and cultivating complexity where previously there were only simple, linear plots. At scale, this process involves working with and inside groups and institutions to alter their divisive narratives, and nurturing and amplifying secondary narratives that already have traction at the local level.

FIGURE 2: A RICH NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE
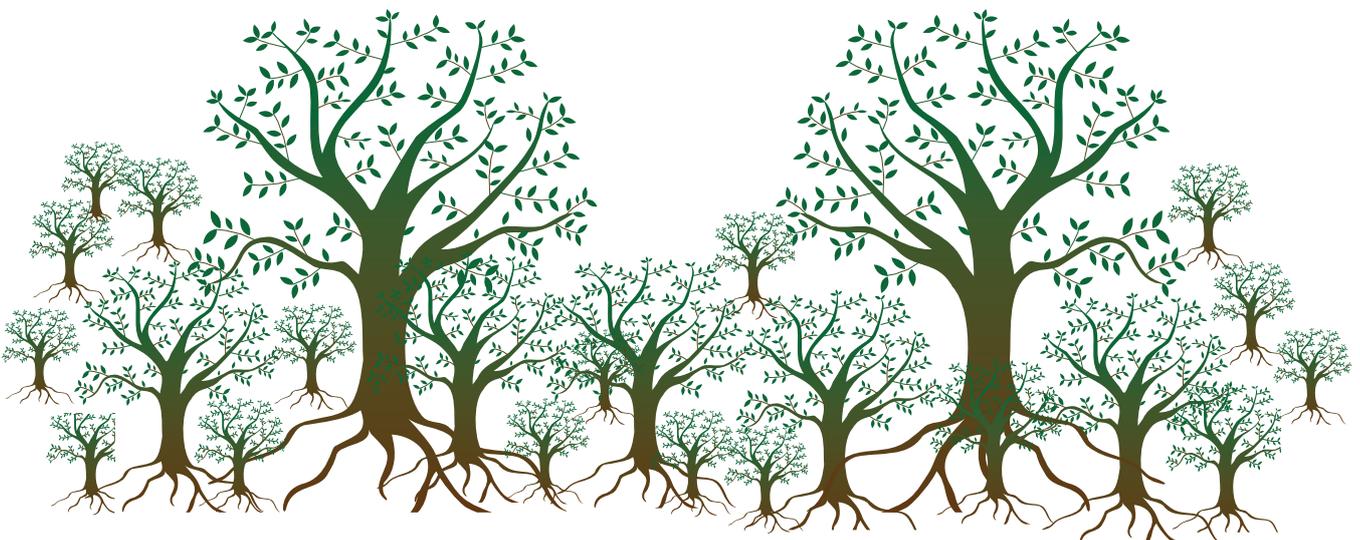
Such a process must be based on a thorough understanding of the trees in the narrative landscape, namely: the events and mythic stories at their roots; the actors and tactics that facilitated the growth of each trunk; the risks and opportunities represented by the branches; and how the trees fit into the narrative landscape. With the roots, actors working for peace should aim to provoke widespread discussion of their nature and complexity, looking beneath the political and social views people express to the events and mythic stories that have supported them over time. They should: explore sets of roots that have been ignored (looking beyond the taproot) and that may connect dominant trees to each other; feed dominant trees in a way that changes their shape from within; and strengthen the growth of secondary narrative trees. With the branches, they should seek to legitimise this new perspective on the roots and then address the structural and institutional factors it reveals through broad-based engagement, multiple narrative projects and policy change, thereby pruning and re-directing existing branches while encouraging the growth of new branches that intertwine across trees.

This kind of narrative work is central to – and ideally integrated with – broader efforts to place societies on pathways to peace. Strategic facilitation around narratives creates space for diverse groups and individuals to compare different narratives and recognise the influence of narrative on their own identity, ideas and actions. It can then enable them to voice grievances, pinpoint and mobilise around core issues, push for reforms and policies that reduce long-standing drivers of conflict, and shape the incentives of actors towards peace. In this process, the entire narrative landscape is enriched and moves towards healthy growth.
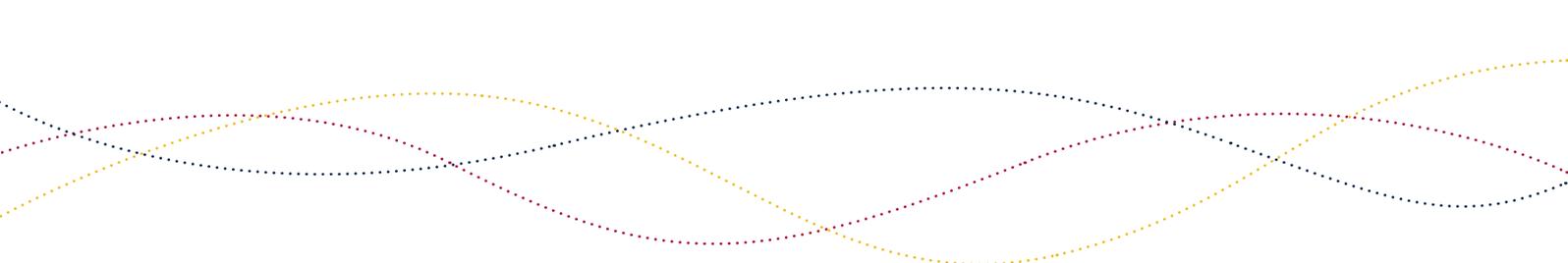
About Narrative Facilitation

Multiple tools are available for facilitating a rich narrative landscape. The work involves three interrelated phases: assessment, strategic planning and implementation.

Methods for Facilitating a Rich Narrative Landscape

Experience shows that approaching 'narrative enrichment' as a technical exercise with a linear path to results is ineffective. Narrative landscapes are complex ecosystems, not algorithms with pre-defined inputs and outputs. For this reason, narrative enrichment is a process that requires iterative learning, continual adjustment and a high level of flexibility in response to ongoing debate and developments among the actors and organisations in each context. It also requires long-term engagement and a sequence of activities aimed at social networks that can reach into key social groups, elites and institutions and take into account their diverse needs and interests.[1]

There are a number of 'theories of change' that can inform the process of narrative enrichment proposed in this paper, including:

- Augment the growth of secondary narratives (small to medium-sized trees).
- Evolve dominant narratives (the largest trees) – by nurturing change in a critical mass of key institutions, through engagement with organisations and individuals who are 'influencers', such that they rethink their own narratives and grow more open to multiple and alternative narratives.
- Cultivate complex root systems that work to bridge differences rather than accentuate them – for example, by strengthening common roots or weaving different roots around one another.
- Identify and mobilise around common roots, strengthening them in the process.
- Build new branches in the form of innovative policy options and practices that can address grievances or inspire common action and connect trees.
- Create occasions, spaces and institutions for constructive interactions among as many influential actors, groups and institutions as possible.
- Create platforms that amplify the voices of marginalised groups, which will grow their trees.
- Advocate or introduce institutional reforms and policies that deal with long-standing drivers of conflict and shape the incentives of key actors and organisations.
- Encourage the development of a healthier media landscape such that a greater variety of more complex trees can develop.

Informed by such theories, this paper proposes a facilitation approach entailing three cyclical phases: 1) assessment, involving a thorough and inclusive mapping of the narrative landscape; 2) strategic planning, for which actions at the root and branch levels of different narratives will promote a richer narrative landscape; and 3) implementation at the micro (grassroots), meso (influencer) and macro (societal) levels. These are followed by a re-assessment of the narrative landscape, which enables reflection and adaptation based on lessons learnt, allowing the cycle to begin anew.

Every phase of the narrative enrichment process requires tailored and high-quality process design. The approach proposed here is to form a facilitation team with in-depth knowledge of both the context and the tools detailed below. The team then works with a small core group of stakeholders, who meet regularly to assess the situation and adapt their strategy and activities to new developments. Knowledgeable about the conflict and situation of various groups in the country, this diverse core group would have the capacity to represent all sides of the conflict and bridge divides within and across social networks, while not being key actors in the dynamics of polarisation. The group would grow to include more stakeholders from different communities, regions and sectors of society (including outside urban centres), until the narrative enrichment process is scaled up from the local to the national level.

The work of facilitating narrative enrichment at scale is rare but critical in complementing efforts in other areas to advance peace. A narrative lens can help stakeholders stay focused on underlying dynamics – the roots, trunk and branches of important narrative trees – that shape the behaviour of various actors. The process should remain neutral and guide stakeholders towards recognising the power of narrative in conflict, articulating how narratives influence their actions, and ultimately cultivating a richer narrative landscape filled with many complex and interwoven narratives.

Phase 1: Assessment

In the assessment phase of a narrative enrichment process, the goal is to map and analyse the narrative landscape, including: 1) the roots, trunk and branches of dominant and secondary or marginalised narratives; 2) the main actors and tactics that have shaped them; and 3) alternative or emerging narratives at the local level that have the traction to impact on the landscape at the subnational or national level. By bringing diverse stakeholders into the exercise of examining the narratives in circulation, the assessment promotes engagement and ownership with regard to the narrative landscape, as well as critical reflection on who is given or denied a voice and which stories are amplified or silenced in the public sphere.

Depending on the context, the assessment can involve research as well as a series of workshops, focus groups and/or individual interviews with people from different sides of the conflict at the community, subnational or national level, while drawing on relevant literature and research. Specific steps may include:

- *Identify the narrative biases within the facilitation team, core group and additional participants*, in order to understand the influence of narratives at the personal level, encourage openness to diverse narratives and allow participants to put themselves in the shoes of stakeholders who subscribe to different narratives.

- *Convene diverse participants.* Encompass as many diverse participants as possible, including from all sides of the conflict and sectors of society. This helps demonstrate that social groups are not monolithic in their beliefs and actions, and that individual members subscribe to different narratives or shift among them depending on events. The assessment should be framed as an unbiased analysis of the situation rather than a political change process, and its stated focus can be the stories in general circulation rather than the views of the participants themselves.

- *Sketch the dominant trees in the narrative landscape, and then the secondary or marginalised ones*, with the aim of mapping 7–10 narratives and labelling their roots, trunks and branches. To minimise biased representations, the goal should be to reflect how people would label the parts of their own narrative tree, based on stories with long-term salience in their group, looking beyond political rhetoric to more foundational stories that come from people's lived experience. The resulting map can serve as an initial anchor for the rest of the assessment.

- *Assess the core issues or arenas of tension that are spurring conflict* (eg, race, violence, corruption, justice, equity). A key goal is to identify the structural and institutional factors evoking grievances through the events and stories that form the roots of political and social views.

- *Identify important actors, groups and institutions* that may or have impacted the narrative landscape at the macro, meso and micro levels (eg, not only politicians but also state institutions, civil society organisations, trade unions, social movements, the media, corporations, traditional authorities, foreign actors). The analysis should include why different stakeholders subscribe to a particular narrative; pinpointing variances in reasons for articulating and promoting the same narrative may provide ground for destabilising and evolving it and for locating similarities with stakeholders who subscribe to other narratives.

- *Differentiate among national, subnational and localised narratives*, and analyse the extent of their influence on the trees in the narrative landscape as a whole. Developing a geographic map of narratives, arenas of tension and/or other relevant factors – showing where they are concentrated, community by community, at the subnational or national level – could provide the basis for more targeted strategic planning and implementation.

- *Identify substantive entry points* for addressing narrative conflict (eg, policy issues, concrete problems experienced by the population) and *windows of opportunity* (eg, elections, negotiations) for engaging in narrative enrichment efforts in the short and medium term.

Phase 2: Strategic Planning

The goal of strategic planning is to develop an informed, coherent and iterative plan of action for the implementation phase (which may span from one to five years). It should utilise the elements already present in the narrative landscape to determine which actions at the root, trunk and branch levels of narrative trees will result in a richer narrative landscape. The planning may include the following steps:

- *Articulate diverse theories of change* using the narrative tree and narrative landscape analyses from the assessment, focusing on those that are the most appropriate and realistic for the context.
- *Identify micro, meso and macro engagements*, selecting a suitable combination of interconnected engagements that is in line with the theories of change.
- *Select the key actors and institutions* from those identified in the assessment to engage with, including all sides of the conflict. It may be most effective to start small and expand the number of actors and institutions gradually.
- *Identify existing processes into which narrative enrichment activities could be incorporated*, recognising that building on established networks and practices may be easier than starting something new.
- *Determine the sequencing and timing of engagements* at the micro, meso and macro levels. This includes selecting the best timeframes, entry points and windows of opportunity.
- *Design a monitoring and evaluation framework* in line with the theories of change, including accessible tools and indicators that will facilitate the subsequent re-assessment process (eg, the adoption of new policies, an increase in group narratives that internalise shared responsibility for conflict). The framework should promote regular reflection during the implementation phase, including accessing feedback from the field, periodic progress assessments and adjustments to the implementation plan in response to lessons learnt and new developments.

Phase 3: Implementation

Implementation occurs by working with the identified narrative landscape at three levels: *micro*, focusing on grassroots engagement; *meso*, aiming to influence leaders and major groups and institutions; and *macro*, concentrating on engagement with large segments of society. For example, implementation may combine amplifying the work of local actors, stories, practices and other factors that enable pathways to peace through transformative narratives at the micro level; enrolling influential leaders in normalising transformative narratives within and across key institutions and groups at the meso level; and bringing these narratives to the wider public through outreach programmes and policy change at the macro level.

While the three levels are interwoven in practice, separating them shows that different types of engagements are necessary to scale localised narrative enrichment up to the national or subnational level. Enough work needs to be done at the micro level to understand how narratives are internalised in communities and which narratives have traction before undertaking actions at the meso or macro level. Similarly, engaging in sustained work at the micro and macro levels to promote narrative complexity is unlikely to succeed unless some degree of backing from political and civic leaders and institutions is achieved at the meso level. Ultimately, local realities will inform the right starting point.

Micro-level Implementation

Facilitating narrative enrichment at the micro level consists mostly of engagements with people who identify with the same community or institution. These engagements mainly test which narratives have localised traction and transformative potential, and could be scaled up. They help identify which actors have influence over conflict narratives (eg, leaders, former combatants, victims/survivors); are deeply embedded in and representative of local constituencies; and can engage at the meso and macro levels. Implementation at this level can also target marginalised groups and communities in geographical areas where tensions are particularly strong or where people seem ready to alter their perspective so that it can have a multiplier effect. A workshop is the common format for this type of engagement (see box at page 14 for specific tools).

Meso-level Implementation

Facilitating narrative enrichment at the meso level involves focusing on individuals in civic, political and institutional leadership positions who have an influence on the ways narratives are shaped in key organisations, social groups, communities and the general population. These 'influencers' often need to be engaged one-on-one, in smaller groups, or through specific institutions that can open doors and bridge divides, such as professional associations. The aim is to help them rethink their roles, practices and policies from a narrative perspective and thereby help inspire new thinking among their constituents (eg, joining the branches of different narrative trees; developing secondary narrative roots, trunks and branches with communities; and amplifying transformative narratives).

Activities at this level, which are often similar to those used in peace dialogues and negotiations, may include the following:

- *Approach diverse influencers*, including non-elite ones. If influencers have a strong incentive to promote divisive narratives, particularly in the political leadership, it may be more effective to approach individuals who are lower in the ranks but still influential. To maximise buy-in, influencers should be invited to represent their organisation in open-ended narrative discussions rather than explicitly take part in a change process.

- *Develop a 'convenor' role* for influencers, shifting their role from 'polarising advocate' to 'adaptive leader'.[2] This can enable sustainable collaboration (effective management of differences) and help develop conditions in which all feel able to tell their stories.

- *Host or support dialogue processes*, including: 1) meso-level dialogues to build collaboration and trust among influencers and help evolve narratives; 2) intra-institutional dialogues on pathways to peace and influencers' roles therein; and 3) inter-institutional dialogues that allow influencers and their institutions to collaborate on the development of a new set of narrative roots that integrate their contributions to societal well-being.

- *Hold tailored trainings and workshops*, including on 1) adaptive leadership, which builds capacity for creative problem-solving, effective negotiation and collaborative planning; 2) narrative facilitation and mediation,[3] focusing on re-telling key narratives in ways that increase their complexity; and 3) scenario building, enabling diverse

influencers and their institutions to discuss alternative futures, enriching the array of choices and understandings of each possible future.

- *Encourage influencers to advocate for secondary or marginalised narratives* that advance pathways to peace; support the legitimacy of people whose stories have not been heard; and advance policy changes and practices that address key grievances.
- *Convene educational leaders* as a special category of influencer, to address the role of schooling and textbooks in polarisation and the narrative landscape.[4]

Macro-level Implementation

Facilitating narrative enrichment at the macro level involves reaching large segments of society with key messages that have the potential to influence narratives at scale. Activities and tools at this level consist mainly of communication campaigns – using the press and social media, and targeting specific issues that have a strong bearing on narrative roots, trunks and branches. The content normally emanates from the engagements at the micro and meso levels, seeking to promote recognition of the richness of the narrative landscape, mobilise influencers and the broader population, and spur institutional reforms and new policies or practices that address grievances.

Activities at this level may include the following:

- *Support the growth of constructive narratives* that are currently secondary or marginalised in order to enrich the narrative landscape. This may involve assisting the groups that support these narratives to design and run a catalytic *narrative campaign*.
- *Design or host a national dialogue* using narrative facilitation tools to build collaboration and trust across key actors, groups and institutions in ways that incorporate marginalised actors and groups.
- *Mobilise competing groups around cross-cutting issues* with an eye to enabling them to bridge broader divisions by growing narrative trunks that interweave or by braiding different narratives at the root or branch level.
- *Encourage the media to play a more constructive role* in the narrative landscape by de-emphasising polarising narratives; emphasising more diverse voices, stories and narratives; and amplifying common narrative roots.
- *Develop programmes for dealing with the past*, such as truth commissions and memorialisation processes, which can document violations, enable testimony by all sides, provide redress for victims and sensitise public opinion to past traumas. The effort could include local, subnational and national *storytelling processes* and *theatre productions* that represent the lived experiences of all sides.
- *Promote targeted policies* that address grievances (eg, decentralisation, budget reallocation) and *reforms* that make institutions more inclusive (eg, revised electoral system, curricular reform).

Tools for Narrative Work

Narrative facilitation work is primarily carried out at the local level or with relatively small groups, using one or more of the below tools. But these same tools can be used at the meso and macro levels as well.

- *Systems mapping*: Stakeholders create maps of positive and negative feedback loops for assessment and planning.

- *Narrative survey*: A data-gathering method that enables analysis of issues not as underlying attitudes but as stories that shape action.[5]

- *World Café*: A dialogue process done in multiple rounds of conversations.[6]

- *Externalisation*: A process for locating problems outside of the self, to allow people to gain some control or agency regarding the identified problems.[7]

- *Circular questions*: Questions that call for a comparison between people or time periods, in order to support the introduction of new terms and comparisons that increase narrative complexity.[8]

- *Gaming and simulation*: An experiential learning exercise involving strategic experimentation on conflict escalation and de-escalation.[9]

- *Narrative rituals*: A process of storytelling anchored by cultural and/or religious traditions.[10]

- *Developing the unique outcome*: A process of highlighting exceptions to the rules posited by the 'problem' story.[11]

- *Scaffolding*: A set of sequenced questions that enable reflection and reclaiming of agency.[12]

- *Positive connotation*: Attribution of positive intent (for self or 'other' or both) towards a more complex narrative.[13]

- *Appreciative inquiry*: Focusing on core strengths, rather than overcoming or minimising weaknesses, to promote change.[14]

- *Narrative braiding*: A process of strategically joining key braids (or kernels) of one storyline around another, while preserving the distinctiveness of each storyline.[15]

- *Public/grassroots theatre*: Depicting dramas that are allegories to experiences of conflict parties, which might display the pain and suffering within a conflict and model healing and growth.[16]

- *Small story telling*: People using small stories to construct and share their identity.[17]

- *Scenario building*: A collaborative process of building possible futures in the context of clashing perspectives.[18]

- *Immunity to change*: Processes for identifying competing commitments and overcoming resistance to change.[19]
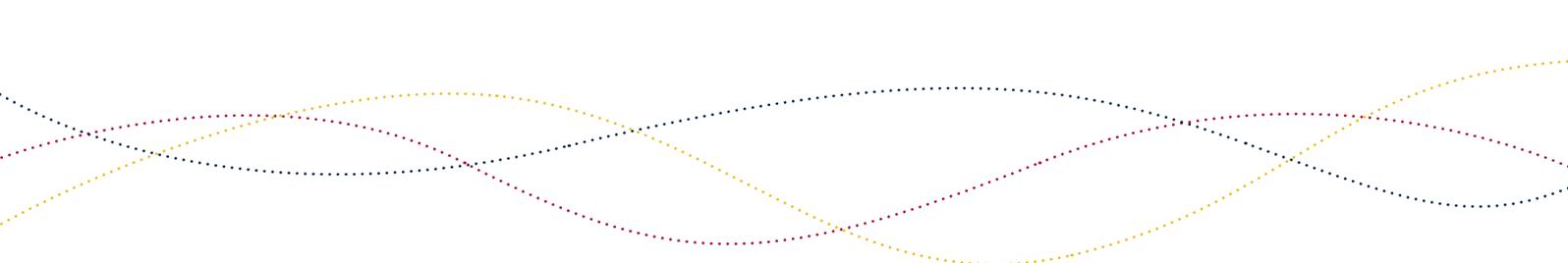
Conclusion

This discussion paper has proposed a framework for understanding how narratives work, and an approach for facilitating narrative enrichment at the national or subnational level in order to manage conflict in a constructive manner. The approach is premised on an iterative, adaptive process consisting of cycles of assessment, planning and implementation – followed by evaluation and then more of the same.

Understanding the nature and power of narrative is a complex process. Like trees, narratives have roots (created by defining facts, stories and fables), trunks (the framings or understandings created by the roots) and branches (the policy preferences that result from the framings of the trunk). And in combination, the trees form a narrative landscape – which, depending on its form, can either complicate or facilitate peace.

When this becomes a concern is the point at which narrative landscapes are reduced to a few dominant, simple narratives. In such cases, severe polarisation is common, and violence becomes more likely. As such, the goal is to enrich the narrative landscape.

In the end, lasting peace does not come from everyone holding a common narrative; instead, it emerges in environments where many diverse narratives are encouraged to thrive together.

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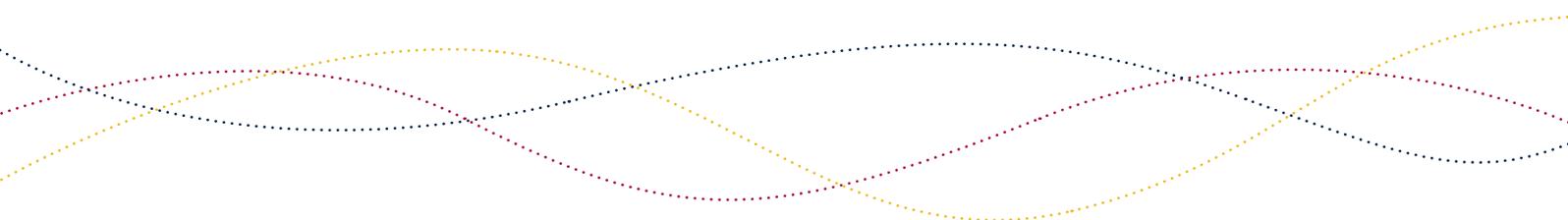
Endnotes

1. This process is similar to the practice of adaptive leadership. See Heifetz et al. (2009).

2. Ibid.

3. See https://www.mediate.com/articles/hansenT.cfm.

4. On the central role that textbooks play in the narrative construction of the past and the maintenance of social conflict, see https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781137380784.

5. Asher Shkedi, "Narrative Survey: A Methodology for Studying Multiple Populations," *Narrative Inquiry* 14 (2004): 87–111, https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.14.1.05shk.

6. See http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method.

7. This is a useful tool for people victimised by their anger, fear, sadness or any emotion that provides the basis for violent or destructive action. See White (2007) and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqMc8giEaTo.

8. See sample questions at https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:W-ZQb55dWCxcJ:https://psychologytools.com/assets/files/Circular-Questions-Systemic.doc+&cd=14&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us. For a description of them, see https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/leadership/Expanding_Questioning.pdf.

9. For an example, see https://www.peacedirect.org/us/aftershock.

10. See https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/storytelling-and-cultural-traditions.

11. John Winslade and Gerald Monk, *Practicing Narrative Mediation: Loosening the Grip of Conflict* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

12. Michael White, *Maps of Narrative Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007).

13. Ana Brígida Umbelino, "Positive Connotation," *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 14, no. 2 (2003): 13–29. https://doi.org/10.1300/J085v14n02_02.

14. See https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction.

15. See Cobb (2011).

16. See https://theatrewithoutborders.com/networking/theatre-peacebuilding.

17. On the value of small stories, see http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.735.2234&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

18. See Blum (2005) for a description of how scenarios can be used in peacebuilding. See Schwartz (1996) for a description of the process of constructing scenarios.

19. See https://hbr.org/2001/11/the-real-reason-people-wont-change.

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