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## IN CABO DELGADO BULLETIN

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE

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### CONFLICT RESOLUTION SERIES



Credits: Facebook de Egídio Vaz

## Resolving conflict in Cabo Delgado: What is Resolution Dialogue?

The situation in Cabo Delgado calls for the close examination of options to resolve conflict. This is the first in a series of briefings related to conflict resolution approaches that are applicable to the Cabo Delgado context.

### What is resolution dialogue?

**Dialogue** is focused conversation, intentionally engaged, with the aim of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and ques-

tioning thoughts and actions. It engages the heart as well as the mind. Dialogue is also a process where the participants commit to listen, reflect and question with a curious mindset in order to seek a shared understanding.

**Resolution dialogue** has the purpose of resolving conflict through dialogue. Resolution dialogue is typically hailed as a progressive way of fostering mutual understanding, establishing common interests, and resolving issues that lead to conflict.

## Resolution dialogue as a tool for peace

Since the end of the Cold War, Africa has been the theatre of numerous low-intensity conflicts fuelled by violent extremism. Though the causes for these conflicts vary greatly, they are all broadly rooted in issues of greed or grievances.<sup>1</sup>

Resolution dialogue is a powerful tool to address these conflicts and can help bring about lasting peace through interest-based negotiations that address the specific grievances

and greed of the conflict stakeholders. This approach has been used with some success in the past, bringing about lasting peace, change and stability to previously embattled regions. More recently, one can see the effects of conflict resolution in the case of the Sudanese Peace Processes of 2019-2020 which have put an end to a series of conflicts plaguing the country for the better part of two decades.

## Is conflict resolution through dialogue possible?

Though resolution dialogue can be a powerful tool for conflict resolution, it has to be part of a coherent, collaborative, and voluntary process. Conflicts rooted in greed or grievances are difficult to manage as they often appeal to issues of identity on which the parties to the conflict are not willing to compromise. This difficulty is further compounded because the conflict parties have to learn to live with each other after resolution. Therefore, to achieve long-lasting peace, it is essential to establish a solid basis of trust between all stakeholders.

To build the basis for trust stakeholders must engage in conflict resolution willingly, and without reservations. As such, the timing of resolution processes is important. A mutually hurting stalemate for all parties involved is the

ideal time to start dialogue as parties have little to gain from continuing in the path of violence. It thus dissuades those involved from half-heartedly committing to negotiations as the cost-benefit of engaging fully and transparently in the process is favourable. In essence, when all parties are in a painful deadlock, the potential rewards of peace appear significantly more appealing.

In order to build lasting peace, all parties must believe that they will profit from the cessation of hostilities. Resolution dialogue is a critical tool to achieve this, as it enlightens all parties as to their desires, aims, and expectations. The peace process, therefore, can be modelled on shared aspirations and through an interest-based approach, create value for all.

## Key stages of resolution dialogue

Suspending judgements and assumptions is essential to finding shared meaning within a dialogue between potentially conflicting stakeholders. The emphasis within the following four key stages is on nurturing stakeholders' ability to engage in collective thinking, reflection and enquiry in order

to promote meaningful relationships. In the following model, stakeholders move through four stages with the assistance of a neutral facilitator (mediator), whose aim is to motivate, empower and support the stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue, make decisions and resolve conflict together:

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<sup>1</sup> Greed is not understood in its ordinary sense here but relates to economic interest. It does not carry a pejorative association and is intended as a neutral, scholarly term widely found in the literature on conflict resolution.

### **1. Establishing a safe environment and common basis for dialogue.**

This involves clarifying the purpose of the dialogue and building a 'dialogue space' that is a safe and private environment. Within this space, meaningful issues can be discussed and explored. From the outset - and often as a result of preliminary stakeholder consultations - it is essential to develop a consensus among stakeholders as to the purpose and structure of the process.

### **2. Developing a common base of knowledge**

This is done by exploring stakeholder beliefs, perceptions and narratives, while concurrently suspending judgement. The resulting collation of stakeholder beliefs and knowledge should be explored, synthesised where possible, and a common base of knowledge established. It is essential, at this stage, to engage in relationship-building dialogue and for the mediation to ensure a basis of trust is built between parties. Developing a common base of knowledge is an excellent way to build this rapport as parties will establish facts on which they can agree, creating a small but steady basis for future collaboration and lasting commitment to peaceful dialogue.

### **3. Exploring contention and conflict.**

The dialogue needs to focus on key conflict-related issues with a view to probing and deepening discussions, while continuing the suspension of judgement. This way, curiosity and creativity are allowed to flow freely, and stakeholder interests are more likely to naturally align. The mediation may prompt discussion among stakeholders during this stage by tabling concepts and ideas.

### **4. Moving from dialogue to action.**

This involves assessing the experiences and lessons arising from the sessions of dialogue, establishing new ways for communicating to reach joint decisions together and resolve issues.



Credits: Pedro Uamba

## An 'interest-based' approach to resolution dialogue

An interest-based approach to resolution dialogue focuses on the underlying needs of the stakeholders and permits their feelings, concerns, and needs to be the basis of the dialogue. The interests of the stakeholders may include issues of power, resources, rights or financial gain, but also the less tangible issues of respect, esteem, and feelings. An interest-based process is often the best choice for stakeholders who are engaged in a power struggle or who have positioned themselves into inescapable corners.

If stakeholders are encouraged to explore their underlying interests, which are the needs that motivate any position they may have taken, they are in effect defining the problem. Thus, by exploring stakeholder interests, the problems to be solved take on new dimensions. By focusing on interests, parties

who are at an impasse may discover possible solutions to their problems, and also likely to discover shared or compatible interests. The goal of the interest-based approach is therefore to resolve conflict through actions that satisfy multiple interests.

The classic story to illustrate this describes two sisters fighting over the only orange in the family larder. Each sister must have the entire orange for herself, any less is impossible. A wise parent asks each of the girls (in private) why she wants the orange. One explains she wants to drink the juice; the other wants to use the rind to cook a pudding. What each sister wants is her position, why she wants it is her interest. In this case, the simple solution is to give the cook the rind after the juice has been squeezed for the thirsty sister - thus meeting the interests of both.



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