A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN NATIONAL DIALOGUES AS MECHANISMS OF NATION-BUILDING IN UGANDA AND RWANDA

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A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN NATIONAL DIALOGUES AS MECHANISMS OF NATION-BUILDING IN UGANDA AND RWANDA

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This working paper argues that, while the state is a key actor in facilitating national dialogues as mechanisms of nation-building in post-colonial contexts, it can also co-opt these processes to entrench the status quo and undermine genuine dialogue and nation-building objectives. As a process built on solidarity, relationship-building, and "open-endedness" with indeterminate and subjective results, nation-building can be used as a pretext to depoliticize and control national dialogues and offer the illusion of change while evading any real challenge to the status quo. This paper shows the ways in which this applies to Uganda and Rwanda, where state-controlled national dialogues have been open-ended, long-term processes that have played a double-edged role as facilitators and inhibitors of meaningful dialogue. In the absence of effectively organized, empowered, and credible non-state actors to counter its dominant discourse, the national dialogues in these contexts are likely to operate on the terms and interests of elites who wield state power. This is because they fall short on the requirements of "a credible convener" and "inclusive participation" necessary for genuine dialogue. Moreover, even where the dialogues are dubbed "citizen-led" as is the case in Uganda, they are still infused with dominant elite interests that seek to maintain the status quo.

INTRODUCTION

Many post-colonial African countries are gripped by social tensions and steeped in mistrust between various ethnic groups that have been forced to coexist in modern state boundaries. Ani and others argue that for many African states, including those in East Africa, long-term investment and strategy may be unavoidable if sustainable conflict prevention and peace are to be achieved.[1]

Competition for control of state power and resources, which is often drawn on ethnic lines, in many cases erupts into violent conflict, and sometimes results in genocide. Uganda experienced over two decades of armed conflict rooted in the marginalization of the northern region from the national ethos.[2] In Rwanda, ethnic-based political and social animosity culminated in a genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group in 1994, resulting in one million civilian deaths, while in Burundi, ethnic violence between the Hutu and Tutsi in the aftermath of independence resulted in many deaths on both sides.[3] The 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya, which also involved inter-ethnic clashes, left more than one thousand people dead,[4] and in South Sudan, an ethnic-based civil war that broke out in 2013 resulted in the death of over 300,000 people.[5]

While preventing violent conflict does require addressing such immediate crises, peace is unlikely to last if political actors trade in long-term interventions for short-term ones or adopt a stance of crisis management towards conflict.[6] However, long-term nation-building processes must occur within the very same artificial state structures in which diverse ethnic groups coexist and compete for resources. As a key site for inter-ethnic and political competition, this poses a challenge for the role of the state in nation-building processes. Whereas the state can and has been a central vehicle for nation-building in many post-colonial African countries,[7] it has also been mobilized toward more divisive and competitive roles which have resulted into violent conflict in the examples stated above. This duality of the state's potential role as both a nation-building entity and a site of conflict has been explored by some scholars of peacebuilding who advocate a careful balance between strong state roles and competing interests during peacebuilding process.[8] In the wake of the many failures of militarized solutions, which usually involve foreign interventions, national dialogues are gaining popularity as peacebuilding mechanisms where states' complex roles come in to play.[9] Literature is replete with examples of national dialogues as peacebuilding mechanisms in post-conflict transition contexts where states' roles might be weakened. However, it is limited in relation to national dialogues in non-transitional contexts where states face no direct violent opposition and ruling governments drive and control the dialogue processes. Recent developments in Uganda and Rwanda point to such state-led or state-backed dialogue initiatives. However, outside of a context of political transition or peacebuilding, national dialogues may also be used to entrench state power. This paper argues that, in the absence of effectively organized, empowered, and credible non-state actors to counter the state, the national dialogues initiated in Uganda and Rwanda operate in the interests of state power and are not genuine dialogue processes. In particular, they do not meet the standard requirements of "a credible convener" and "inclusive participation."

The paper combines insights from existing literature and fieldwork findings to make this argument in six parts. The first three parts consist of the introduction, the conceptual framework, and the research methodology. In part four, the paper examines national dialogue processes in Uganda and Rwanda in relation to the key aspects of credible convener and participation. This is followed by a critical examination of the role of non-state actors in these national dialogues as they relate to nation-building processes, while part six provides the conclusion, recommendations for deepening national dialogue, and a mechanism for cohesive nation-building.

NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND NATION-BUILDING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is no universal definition for dialogue or national dialogue,[10] as the term is still evolving.[11] However, national dialogues have been defined as nationally-owned political processes whose aim is to generate consensus among a broad range of stakeholders during deep political crises, post-war situations, or in contexts of far-reaching political transitions.[12] Papagianni[13] defines national dialogues in both narrow and broad terms as follows:

> "...they are essentially inclusive negotiation processes designed to expand participation in political transitions beyond the incumbent elites to a wide array of political, military and, in some cases, civil society groups. In broad terms, 'national dialogues' refer to relatively large gatherings, of at least a couple of hundred people, which bring together diverse constituencies to discuss issues related to the effort to end a conflict and launch a political transition. These gatherings are mandated by the country's parliament and/or government, or by agreements among national leaders."

Both definitions refer to national dialogues as mechanisms of conflict resolution and political transition. Understood this way, national dialogues serve as means to manage a crisis and may not be necessary once the crisis has been resolved or a transition achieved. They also involve real challenges to political power and often result in political compromises. However, and more relevant for this paper, national dialogues may also be designed to simply serve as a process of national catharsis, recognition, and relationship-building.[14] They have also been defined as processes that assume continuity and are aimed at resolving conflicts as they emerge while mitigating tensions created by the past, present, and future.[15] This approach envisages national dialogues as sustained engagements and as mechanisms of long-term and open-ended processes which may

not necessarily involve specific conflict resolution agendas, power-sharing ne-gotiations, or political transition. One example may be nation-building process-es. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines the concept of nation-building as:

> Actions undertaken, usually by national actors, to forge a sense of common nationhood, usually in order to overcome ethnic, sectarian, or communal dif-ferences; usually to counter alternate sources of identity and loyalty; and usually to mobilize a population behind a parallel state-building project.[16]

The logic of nation-building can be more clearly understood when contrasted with the concept of state-building. While state-building and nation-building are often used interchangeably,[17] the two processes are distinct in terms of logic and dynamics.[18] State building is close-ended, materialist, and fits within the planning and control mode of development partners who favor institution-build-ing and cost-benefit analyses. Nation-building, on the other hand, is process-led as opposed to results-led, self-referential in the sense that "only the people in-volved in the process can decide what the meaning is of their sense of belonging and their shared identity, " and can take generations with no predefined results. It also deals with very subjective issues such as "ethnic identity, religion, or feel-ings and aspirations of minorities.[19] It is concerned with 'social cohesion', 'moral conscious', 'spiritual principles', 'love' and 'transcends the state.'"[20] As a con-cept, nation-building is imprecise and its meaning is often assumed rather than defined.[21] Moreover, there is no blueprint for successful nation-building process.[22]

The subjective and open-ended nature of nation-building brings into question the role of state power and the capacity of non-state actors to check state power during such processes. Given that nation-building is based on solidarity and is not result-oriented or prone to power-sharing, nation-building outside of po-litical transition can be depoliticized and its emotive mass appeal exploited to create the illusion of change without posing any real challenge to the status quo.

Literature on nation-building makes limited reference to national dialogues. While there have been studies on nation-building in Africa, these have tended to focus broadly on its challenges with little to no reference to national dialogue.[23] Other studies have focused on nation-building processes that are program-ori-ented, including development, education and language,[24] but not on national di-alogues as platforms for nation-building.

On the other hand, literature on national dialogues more readily identifies na-tion-building as one of its end goals. Even when some academics and practitioners

acknowledge the importance of national dialogues to nation-building, they do so only in relation to contexts of crisis management, political transitions, and power-sharing.[25] While this paper acknowledges that there appears to be a gap in the literature on the complexity of the relationship between national dialogue and nation-building, particularly in non-transitional contexts, it does not purport to fill the gap. Instead, it accepts the complex and myriad approaches to nation-building including symbolism and imagery and chooses to focus on two examples of national dialogues as highly participatory processes being used to achieve nation-building and the pitfalls in the process. There are some factors which have been identified to facilitate nation-building including: democratic processes, elite consensus, and the inclusion of symbolic institutions, among others.[26] Similar factors have been identified for national dialogues to be successful including the principles of inclusion, transparency, public participation, a far-reaching agenda, a credible convener, appropriate and clear rules of procedure, and an implementation plan. Without these, national dialogues and nation-building processes stand the risk of being appropriated by leaders to consolidate power and reinforce the status quo.[27] The paper draws from the existing frameworks to analyze the on-going processes in Rwanda and Uganda and uses the study's findings to contribute to the existing understandings and practices of nation-building.

Conflict and national dialogues in the histories of Rwanda and Uganda

National dialogues have been traced back in history to four global waves of political transition, namely: the breakdown of communism in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989, Francophone Africa countries' national conferences of the early 1990s to address the growing gap between the ruling elite and citizens, the 1990s consensus-based constitution-making processes in Latin America, and the Arab Spring-related national dialogues in Middle East and North Africa region.[28] Other scholars trace the concept as far back as the 1787 United States Constitutional Convention and the 1789 Estates General in France.[29] In contemporary times, national dialogues continue to be of great relevance and are in increasing demand by countries dealing with persistent conflict.[30] Countries including Yemen, South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Tunisia, Senegal, Lebanon, Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe, among others, have in the past decade embraced national dialogue as a means to counter violent conflict with varying levels of success. Kenya's national dialogue following the 2007 post-election violence, for example, successfully resulted in a power-sharing agreement and a new constitution.[31] Kenya's success despite minimal levels of national participation has been attributed in part

to the active role of a well-organized civil society with decades of experience in advocacy and a private sector which exerted pressure on the state to hold the dialogue and influenced the process towards a settlement that reflected national interest.[32] By comparison, the Central African Republic's Bangui Forum of 2015 faced obstacles when it came to the implementation of the resulting Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation, and Reconstruction, despite high national participation. The implementing committee had no policy on which to ground its activities and it suffered from inadequate funding and lack of support from the post transition government.[33] These two examples offer a glimpse into the importance both state and non-state actors in successful dialogue processes. Without the support of the state and the structures of state institutions, implementation of dialogue outcomes might be a challenge and without the pressure of civil society and private actors, states might wish to maintain the status quo and avoid dialogue all together.

These dynamics have played out in the history of national dialogues in Uganda and Rwanda. Both countries have dealt with entrenched cycles of ethnic-based political violence and attempted to use various means of dialogue to resolve them and build peace. Uganda's history is replete with conflict and dialogues aimed at conflict resolution, power-sharing, and wealth and resource redistribution. Several wars and coups demonstrate the country's fragile political foundations. From the 1966 attack on Mengo, to the Idi Amin military coup of 1971, the 1972 invasion by Obote to overthrow Idi Amin, the war between Uganda and Tanzania in 1978, the 1980-86 war to overthrow Milton Obote, to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency which began in 1987, all conflicts have so far not been resolved through national dialogue or led to political settlement and sustainable peace.[34] Jjuuko and Tindifa note that of all attempts at dialogue through Uganda's history, none were genuine as they were either imposed, fraudulent, not inclusive, or based on unequal bargaining power.[35] Key among these dialogues were the Moshi Conference and the Juba Peace talks. The 1979 Moshi Conference followed a failed anti-Idi Amin coup in 1972 led by the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) under Milton Obote in alliance with Front for National Salvation (FRONASA). The invasion which was launched from Tanzanian soil was intended to oust the Idi Amin military dictatorship but was repelled that same year.[36] The Moshi Conference sought to bring together exiled Ugandans of different political ideologies to map out a unified and emancipatory post-Idi Amin political agenda for Uganda. While some view the conference as the closest Uganda ever came to an inclusive and genuine national dialogue,[37] others criticize it as a failure that was largely driven by Julius Nyerere—the President of Tanzania at the time—to push for his own political alliance with UPC's Milton

Obote, who himself had presided over a violent Presidency before Idi Amin's military coup overthrew him in 1971.[38] The Moshi conference left unresolved critical questions of governance for Uganda and it is little wonder that armed conflicts continued to break out even after Idi Amin's ouster and the need for genuine national dialogue remained an unfulfilled quest for sustainable peace in Uganda. One such opportunity presented itself with the Juba Peace talks, which commenced in 2006. They were aimed at resolving the twenty-year armed conflict between Yoweri Museveni's government and the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony. However, a key agenda item demanded by the LRA during the talks was ignored: dialogue on the exclusion and oppression felt by northern Ugandans, which had catalyzed the LRA's rebellion in the first place. This grievance was ignored by President Museveni, who did not believe in a broad and inclusive political settlement and was only keen on securing the LRA's surrender. This, among other factors, led to the failure of the Juba Peace Talks and some of the major grievances behind the LRA rebellion, including the north-south divide persist to date.[39] Other opportunities for national dialogue in Uganda, such as during the 1995 Constitutional Assembly consultations, were dominated by the national Resistance Movement (NRM) under President Yoweri Museveni, who did not allow opposition political parties to field delegates. It has been defined as a monologue rather than a dialogue.[40] The foregoing failures demonstrate the grim prospects for genuine national dialogue processes in Uganda. However, they also invite a close examination of the country's renewed efforts at national dialogue as a mechanism of nation-building outside of a context of violent conflict or political transition and what opportunities or pitfalls these could portend for sustainable peace.

Rwanda's experiences with violent conflict provide a similar indication of its political fragility and the need for sustained dialogue, which the country has already embraced as part of its nation-building project. Conflict in Rwanda has been historically defined by intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic division and reprisals. This is evident from the 1959-1961 revolution, which saw a Hutu led rebellion against Belgian colonial power and the Tutsi elite, to the 1963 Bugesera invasion by Tutsi militia against a Hutu led government and the subsequent reprisal killings of an estimated 10,000 Tutsi civilians leading to more Tutsi refugees, to the 1973 coup d'état by a northern Hutu against a Southern-based Hutu President,[41] to the 1990 attack on Rwanda by the Tutsi led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the continued reprisal attacks against the Tutsi through the 1990s, and eventually a renewed 1993 RPF offensive against a Hutu led government, which culminated in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi and a subsequent attack by the RPF that same year which helped to end the genocide. Newbury traces this

history and identifies a common driving factor behind the cycle of violence in Rwanda's history as the 'corporatized view of ethnicity.' According to her, it is this same corporate view of ethnicity that saw the spate of en masse reprisals against Hutu refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the years following the 1994 genocide on accusations that, as Hutus, they were to blame for the genocide against the Tutsi. This same corporate view of ethnicity that has throughout Rwanda's history driven the indiscriminate reprisals against Tutsi civilians for attacks by armed Tutsi militia against the Hutu in post-independence governments.[42] In this cycle of attacks and counter-attacks, there was a complete silencing of political moderates in the Hutu and Tutsi populations in the 1950s and 1960s who were advocating for good governance, access to resources, and services for all Rwandans regardless of ethnicity.[43] There was one prominent attempt at peace through the Arusha Peace Accords of 1993, which were signed between President Habyarimana and the leadership of the RPF at the time. They were aimed at ending the three years of civil war between the Hutu government and Tutsi Militia groups.[44] The peace talks which were overseen during a four-year period and aimed at achieving a ceasefire, a power-sharing deal between the RPF and Habyarimana regimes, and a new era of rule of law, national unity, and respect for human rights among others. Specifically, the accords pushed for reconciliation of all warring sides, the repatriation of refugees, and a post-war reconstruction.[45] Unfortunately, the Rwandan government did not support the accord, as it felt too much power had been given to the RPF at President Habyarimana's detriment. Moreover, with the exclusion of the critical government actors such as the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), which the RPF accused of Hutu supremacy, the Arusha accords failed to include a more radical and violent force necessary for the success of the agreement. The Arusha peace accords have been described as a failure because the ceasefire they brokered eventually could not prevent the genocide which started in 1994 soon after the death of President Habyarimana.[46]

Rwanda's constitution today recognizes this turbulent history and centers the "constant quest for solutions through dialogue and consensus" as a fundamental constitutional principle and home-grown solution to its internal nation-building challenges.[47] One manifestation of this principle are Rwanda's diverse national dialogue frameworks such as Umushyikirano, Umuganda, and NdiUmunyarwanda.

National dialogues are instrumental for conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and long-term and sustainable peacebuilding.[48] They are also, as stated above, instrumental for nation-building, which in turn is complimentary to peacebuilding and vice versa. The nature of dialogues is such that it involves

"criticism and self-criticism," "listening and respecting each side of the divide," and "fostering synergy and complementarity."[49] National dialogues can be used to heal wounds, reconcile groups, build confidence and trust in institutions, and all other objectives of nation-building.[50]

However, while national dialogues may be used to secure the foregoing peace objectives, they also stand the risk of being used by those in power to consolidate the status quo through co-opting the opposition and "placating critics under the guise of consultation and inclusion."[51] This is especially likely when national dialogues are used in non-transitional contexts for open ended, indeterminate, "love and solidarity driven" processes such as nation-building, which do not present a real challenge to political power and the status quo. Whereas Rwanda has already institutionalized sustained national dialogue frameworks as mechanisms for nation-building and Uganda has initiated a similar process, both countries have yet to learn from their past failed dialogue processes, particularly as they pertain to inclusivity and credibility, to facilitate genuine dialogue processes. In Rwanda, the state has embarked on a nation-building strategy which embraces the concept of a single national identity. It acknowledges that the results of the strategy cannot be longitudinally assessed but posits that this approach, coupled with its national dialogue mechanisms, are—in the absence of evidence to the contrary—making a contribution to the country's social cohesiveness.[52] However, some findings from this study suggest that the national dialogue and nation-building project could be reformed to be more open and robust in order to make more progress in the nation-building process. This is critical as the Rwandan government itself admits its national cohesion is still burdened with fears of resurgence of ethnic-based conflict.[53] In the case of Uganda, there is no clear indication of national cohesiveness as a result of nation-building or national dialogue. What is clear is that the country's flailing economy, high levels of corruption, youth unemployment, and militarization are driving it to ethnic-based tensions and political fragility, which calls for an inclusive national dialogue and nation-building process.[54] These aspects are explored below in the analysis of the national dialogue process that was commenced in Uganda in 2016 and the constitutionally entrenched Umushyikirano annual meeting in Rwanda, which was established over a decade ago.

METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on data gathered through qualitative research using interviews and literature review between September 2020 and April 2021. A total of sixty

respondents were interviewed in Uganda and twenty respondents in Rwanda. In both countries, respondents were selected using purposive sampling, targeting participants related to the national dialogue processes as organizers, observers or, participants. In Uganda, sampling targeted four academics and opinion leaders who have been following the dialogue processes in both countries and could form objective views on how they are evolving. Fifteen face-to-face meetings and ten Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) were held with respondents, including members of the working group of seven state and non-state actors involved in the initial stages of the national dialogue process. These included respondents from the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (ICRU), The Elders' Forum (TEFU), the Women's Situation Room (WSR), the Inter-Party Organization for Dialogue (IPOD), Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU), Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), and the Office of the Prime Minister. These respondents were critical in offering insights into the inner competitions, political maneuvers, and concessions that unfolded between the state, the political opposition, civil society, and the donor community in order for the national dialogue in Uganda to receive a Presidential sanction in the first place, and the subsequent bargaining, infighting, and negotiations that affected the pace of the dialogue.

In Rwanda, the targeted respondents included participants at previous Umushyikirano meetings, including local leaders, participants, observers from academia, media, and a member of parliament who is from an opposition political party. It was necessary to deliberately select respondents with critical views—especially from the media, politics, and civil society—in order to capture a diverse range of views that might otherwise be missed through the respondents' self-censorship. Field trips in Uganda covered the central region, western, northern, and eastern regions.[55] The field trips involved Focus Group Discussions with respondents, including religious leaders, cultural leaders, youth, politicians, opinion leaders, and others who had participated in the pilot phased of the national dialogue that had been rolled out in those districts. In Rwanda, field trips were held in Kimironko and Nyagatovu villages with a few meetings in Kigali. Participants at the FDGs had previously participated in the Umushyikirano. The size of each FDG ranged from 5 to 10 in order to comply with national Covid-19 regulations in both countries. As a major limitation, the data gathered relies on considerably small sample sizes due to Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings in both Rwanda and Uganda. However, the paper does not purport to use the data for quantitative analysis or to draw scientific conclusions, thereby minimizing the import of the limitation.

The literature review involved an analysis of the historical and contemporary roles of national dialogues in peacebuilding and nation-building. It considered

the history of conflict in Uganda and Rwanda and how national dialogues have been used unsuccessfully as an avenue for peace. Literature consolidating the linkages between nation-building, national dialogue, and peace is disjointed. As explained above, this paper does not seek to address this gap. Rather, it examines how existing mechanisms by Rwanda and Uganda, although imperfect, are undertaking renewed attempts to use national dialogue as a vehicle for nation-building and ultimately as a pathway toward sustainable peace while avoiding the pitfalls in the process.

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: STATE AND NATIONAL DIALOGUES IN UGANDA AND RWANDA

In Uganda and Rwanda, state-led and state-backed processes of national dialogue have been initiated under informal and formal frameworks. In Rwanda, the Umushyikirano, Ndi Umunyarwanda, and Umuganda are formalized and institutionalized dialogue platforms which are entrenched by the constitutional principle of "constant quest for solutions through dialogue and consensus."[56] Umushyikirano provides an annual opportunity for the President of Rwanda and Rwandan citizens' representatives to debate national issues and to promote national unity, Ndi Umunyarwanda is a program aimed at building a national identity based on trust and dignity through dialogue on what it means to be Rwandan, and Umuganda is an avenue for community-level cohesion.[57] This paper focuses on Umushyikirano as the dialogue framework where the state plays the most prominent role compared to the other two. By contrast, Uganda's state-backed national dialogue is an informal process initiated after the 2016 Presidential election by civil society organizations with the Inter-Religious Council (IRC) and The Elders' Forum taking the lead. The initiative is not backed by law but rather a Communique which was adopted on December 18th, 2018 by the Government of Uganda and a working group of seven members comprising of both government actors and civil society organizations.[2] The Communique was reportedly a culmination of about three years of work involving nationwide consultations on the need for a national dialogue. The main purpose of the dialogue process is to advance state and societal engagement on national transformation and to promote national unity.[58] Whereas the national dialogue process in Uganda was stalled due to the 2021 Presidential elections,[59] pilot dialogues had already been completed in some parts of the country and findings after the 2021 elections indicate that the 2018 Communique is still being used as a political reference to lobby for a continuation of the national dialogue process.[60]

While the foregoing initiatives differ in genesis, framework, and implementation processes and are located in different countries, they have objectives allegedly aimed at consensus building, promoting state-societal relations, and national unity through dialogue. However, such initiatives have also been met with some level of skepticism, with some suspecting them to be state ploys for ethnic and political domination as well as further curtailment of democracy and rights by incumbent regimes.[61] There is currently limited academic literature which extensively interrogates these discourses or explores the dual role of the state as a collaborative and competitive actor in these nation-building processes. Responses from the interviews indicate that in both Uganda and Rwanda there is a clear sense that national dialogues are necessary for nation-building and for long-term peacebuilding.[62] While in both countries, all but one respondent had a critical view, respondents also acknowledged the importance of the state in this process and recognized that the state can be wielded to preserve the status quo. These concerns were most clearly expressed through perspectives on the credibility of the convener, on the participant selection, and nature of participation in the dialogue processes.

Credible convener: The pervasive state and the dilemma of trust

The convener of a national dialogue is central to the success and facilitation of the process. This convener may be an individual or a body and acts as a powerful signal of what is to be expected from the dialogue. It is also through the convener that legitimacy of the dialogue may be established. As such, the neutrality and independence of the convener are key. Conveners with legitimacy often are representatives of religious institutions, community leaders, or established institutions.[63] In Sudan, the national dialogue failed in part because, from the very onset, the President appointed himself the convener, which posed a major challenge for neutrality and legitimacy.[64] While the state may have a critical role to play in grounding and facilitating the dialogue, this also positions it as a convener of the dialogue which can present legitimacy challenges. This duality of roles manifests in contestations around budgeting, funding, legislating for the national dialogue, and the implementation of dialogue resolutions.

Legislation and funding

State institutions and structures such as the legislature and national fund are critical for grounding dialogue and providing a national framework. In both Rwanda and Uganda, this positive role of the state in nation-building was acknowledged

by all respondents except for one respondent in Uganda who felt there was no need for the state at all in genuine nation-building processes. In particular, the Rwandan state has entrenched the dialogue processes of Umushyikirano in the Constitution (Art. 140). This ensures that budgeting and funding for the dialogue are available annually when the dialogue is conducted. Some respondents who participated in past Umushyikirano sessions, however, were doubtful that civil society could sustain the planning and funding of the dialogue process on this scale and on an open-ended basis.[65] In Uganda, the importance of the state's legislative role emerged clearly when failure to enact a law to ground the national dialogue process contributed to stagnation, uncertainties, and ultimately created doubt over the legitimacy of the process.[66]

In Uganda, some co-conveners of the national dialogue stated that, in their country's context, a critical issue of contention was the source of funding to facilitate the process. The predominant view among respondents who co-convened the dialogue was that the state wanted to fund the process in order to control it. However, such a view was also met with the challenge that the state's role as central revenue collector and overseer of the national coffers positioned it as the most obvious source of funding for such an open-ended and large-scale process. Indeed, it was on this very basis that the state opposed a suggestion made by non-state co-conveners to fundraise money for the national dialogue from the population with each adult citizen contributing as little as 1000 Ugandan shillings (27 cents). According to one respondent, the rejection of this proposal was unfounded, as the organizers' initial assessment of public opinion was that a considerable number of citizens were willing to make the contribution and many members of the public were willing to make non-monetary contributions in the form of venues for meetings, transportation to and from the countryside, accommodation, food, and beverages.[67] Another suggestion that the funds could be raised through foreign donations was also strongly rejected by both the state and some non-state actors who felt that this would diminish the country's sovereignty over the process.[68] In order to manage these concerns of state control, some actors suggested that the budgeting process go through rigorous parliamentary debate and oversight in order to ensure that it was truly owned by the public. However, this argument was rejected, due to the pervasive view in Uganda that money from the consolidated fund still originates in the government or ruling party.[69]

In any event, even after the government promised to fund the national dialogue, it never delivered on the promise and has yet to do so, citing the 2021 general elections for the delay. This failure to provide funds even after signing the December 2018 Communique committing itself to the dialogue process created the

impression that the state has kept the national dialogue in abeyance in order to resurrect it if the 2021 post-election context warrants it.[70]

By contrast, the prevailing view among FDG respondents in Rwanda was that funding the national dialogue frameworks and processes was the constitutional obligation of the government. There were some respondents from civil society and an opposition political party, however, who felt that citizen contribution to the process might encourage citizens' ownership of the dialogue processes and limit the emerging perception that the Umushyikirano is a government process and, in particular, a process for the ruling party.[71] Some of these concerns are further explored below.

The Head of State as the convening authority

When states or state actors play the significant role of convener, there are bound to be legitimacy concerns. In Rwanda, where the national dialogue process of Umushyikirano is state-led and driven, neutrality and legitimacy concerns emerged from some respondents in civil society and political circles around having the Head of State as the convening authority. Under the Rwandan Constitution, the President convenes and presides over the National Umushyikirano council and determines who can participate in it (Art. 140). This has pre-empted some views that the dialogue is, in fact, an affair of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), which the President leads.[72] In Uganda, where the national dialogue process has been led by citizens, concerns emerged from some respondents in civil society about the role of the Head of State and the relationship non-state conveners have with the state, specifically the Head of State.[73]

The dialogue as an avenue for presidential legitimacy

Some prominent respondents from civil society observed that the national dialogue in Uganda was a platform for the Head of State to consolidate his legitimacy, as the process occurred on the heels of a widely disputed 2016 election. The period was marked by a lot of tension and Kiiza Besigye the lead opposition candidate decided to leave the results in the court of public opinion. As there was real fear that the tensions would degenerate into violent conflict, President Museveni was open to the idea of dialogue as a way to decompress the political pressure. On the other hand, as the political opposition perceived the dialogue as an opportunity to discuss a political transition, it became imperative for the state to exercise control over the dialogue process and ensure its own political survival.[74] As was observed by another key respondent, in Uganda there is a

fusion between the state and the party in power: The National Resistance Movement (NRM). As the party was increasingly relying on force and militarization to meet its legitimacy deficit, a national dialogue where the state has central convening power would be perceived as an avenue for the ruling party to gain some legitimacy without using forceful means.[75] Indeed, as one prominent member of The Elders' Forum (TEFU) observed, perhaps those concerned about the political transition question were actually concerned the current Head of State might use the national dialogue to entrench himself in power. In the respondent's view, this only meant that even more pressure had to be put on the process to ensure it is truly open, participatory, and free from manipulation and co-optation.[76]

According to another respondent who was a member of the working groups of seven, the Ugandan government feared that political opponents were preparing to use the dialogue to usurp the reigning party. It is little wonder, therefore, that the state initially resisted the concept of a "citizen-led" dialogue. The suspicion was that this framework for the national dialogue process might permit civil disobedience in the event that resolutions were not reached according to "citizens" interests. In order to allay the state's fears, civil society conveners had to arrange "talks within talks" to assure the ruling party that they were not going to be dispossessed or thrown out of power.[77] Another respondent from the working group of seven indicated that, in the initial planning stages, it had been the intention of one of the non-state actors to have the main principle (Head of State) as the convener of the national dialogue as it would allay fears of a coup. By contrast, the later approach adopted by the mobilizers which decentered the president in favor of CSOs or a "citizen-led" dialogue seemed to escalate these fears.[78]

In any event, it was strategic to have both the state and civil society as co-conveners as the state could provide the framework and sustainability required for the dialogue while civil society provided objectivity and power checks to the process. However, the question arises whether civil society is itself immune from the pervasive state.

Civil society and the state as co-conveners in Uganda

Uganda's national dialogue process had a 7-member technical working group: The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (ICRU), The Elders' Forum (TEFU), the Women's Situation Room (WSR), The Inter-Party Organization for Dialogue (IPOD), Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU), Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), and the Office of the Prime Minister.

According to one co-convening respondent, the composition of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) was deliberate in order to ensure a representative group of religious, gender, age, and political interests. The CSOs also complemented each other. The WSR and UWONET were expected to represent the views of women, with the latter perceived to be an umbrella organization for women's interests, while TEFU and IRCU were to use their convening power and moral leadership, with the latter viewed as a network of faith-based organizations. The CCEDU, which has a membership of about five hundred Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), was expected to use its citizen mobilization capacity. The representatives from civil society felt that, with this representative composition, they could sufficiently describe the national dialogue as citizen-led. In their view, the high numbers of participation were testament to this fact.[79]

In particular, there was a compelling case made for the role of the IRCU as a credible convener. As a network of religious groups, it had garnered a good reputation over the years as an impartial arbiter and key peacemaker. It had a previous record of bringing different political actors to the same table for dialogue. Indeed, while the IRCU faced some resistance from the Ugandan public for mixing religion and politics, it worked to convince the public that they had a role to play in molding national values and national conscience. According to one respondent, who is also a religious leader, the IRCU were the neutral, independent, and trusted body that the country needed to convene the national dialogue. Moreover, there is a church or mosque on every street corner in the country, with the majority of Ugandans identifying as religious or having trust in their religious leaders. However, he cautioned that even then, there needed to be other structures in place to ensure the institution was not compromised throughout the process.[80] This cautioning was not without cause, as several respondents in the FDGs pointed out that the IRCU receives financial support from the state and sometimes its leaders receive direct monetary benefits from the Head of State, which compromises their credibility as conveners. According to one FDG respondent, there was a perception among some sections of the public that the Head of State summons members of this institution to the State House and gives them instructions. As TEFU are affiliates of IRCU, this perception extends to their credibility as well.[81]

Fused class and state interests in Uganda

According to criticism from a respondent in academia, none of the CSOs in the working group of seven under Uganda's national dialogue process can purport to be acting on behalf of Ugandan citizens' interests. According to this respondent,

TEFU and IRCU are part of the state bureaucracy. Their conception as elders as well as their experience are fused with the interest of the state. They have deep political and economic linkages with state institutions, such as the Uganda Investment Authority where one of the TEFU members holds a top leadership position, while some members are former ambassadors.[82] Other respondents claimed that 98% of all the conveners of the national dialogue were the face of the government in one way or another. To quote one respondent:

> *"They were the face of the 1986 victors when the ruling party came to power and are the dominant face of Uganda, not its neutral face."*

According to these skeptical perspectives, with this identity of the current state, the leadership of the national dialogue are only trying to use the dialogue to re-brand the state and set an agenda on how to patronize the country for the next fifty years.[83]

Other clear anomalies were pointed out in the generational gap between the conveners and the population's demographics. Some respondents from the FDGs observed that, as the largest demographic in Uganda, the youth are increasingly mobilizing along political lines, with some adopting violent tenets. The fact that there is no evident role for them as conveners of Uganda's national dialogue process sets the current conveners up for a well-founded credibility challenge.[84]

Respondents also offered further criticism of civil society as conveners of the national dialogue in Uganda, citing that they are foreign-funded entities and, in reality, merely a softer version of the state—especially in the wake of the World Bank's structural adjustment policies. In general, this criticism strips the dialogue of its nature as a genuinely "citizen-led" initiative and recasts it as an actual initiative of the state and state-allied interests on account of the state's pervasive political, class, and economic linkages with the co-conveners of the process. According to this respondent, the conditions of struggle and organization necessary for genuine citizen-led dialogue and change have not yet occurred in Uganda and any claim of genuine dialogue is simply the state's management of a crisis which it has created itself.[85]

The foregoing findings demonstrate the challenge of the state's function as facilitator and convener of national dialogue processes as a means of nation-building. Although the state is critical to legislating, anchoring, funding, and setting the dialogue process in motion, this role also gives it significant control over the dialogue process. In both Uganda and Rwanda, this has been the basis for fears that the state will co-opt the dialogue process for the political ends of the

ruling parties. Moreover, even where the dialogue is purportedly led by citizens or non-state actors, the pervasive nature of state interests among non-state actors is still a cause for legitimacy and status quo concerns as highlighted by the findings from Uganda.

Agenda-setting and participation

Like the credibility of the convener, setting the agenda and selecting participants for a national dialogue are critical to the legitimacy of the process. The agenda-setting process identifies the content of what will be discussed during the dialogue, which is driven by the overall aim of the convener. National dialogues which seek to achieve fundamental change or long-term change such as nation-building will have broader themes than those aimed at resolving specific conflicts.[86] As a key consideration, agenda-setting should serve as a "trust-building" exercise, meaning they must be transparent and inclusive in order to commit all participants to it.[87] This phase of the dialogue has also been referred to as a "mini-negotiation" where excluded parties will reject discussions on topics agreed upon by others during the dialogue and thereby pose a challenge for consensus building.[88]

Participation and the selection of participants for a national dialogue process involve considerations regarding the size of the participant group, the overall goal, and the themes of the dialogue. In this sense, it is related to the agenda-setting process. National dialogues whose agendas are broad, such as reforming the social contract between the people and the state, require broader participation that is representative of the wider society. At the same time, however, the efficiency of the dialogue process must not be compromised by participant size considerations. Ultimately, participant selection, just like agenda-setting, must be inclusive and transparent and must identify key stakeholders according to the key agenda issues. As observed by Anderson:

> *"work with More People is not enough if it does not reach Key People, and work with Key People is not enough if it does not reach More People."*[89]

State control over agenda-setting and participant selection

Respondents in both Rwanda and Uganda indicate that the agenda-setting and participant selection processes for the national dialogues are neither transparent nor inclusive and present ways in which the state uses its convening authority to

determine the agenda and the nature of participation.

In Rwanda, as already indicated above, the Head of State is constitutionally mandated as the convener of the Umushyikirano council and determines who can participate as well.[90] According to some respondents, representatives of different interest groups participate physically while the rest of the public may participate via various media forums.[91] A considerable number of high-level respondents observed that the Umushyikirano was an opportunity for ordinary citizens to meet with their head of state and contribute solutions to the building of their nation. They further noted that this event particularly allowed the participation of a wide range of categories of actors, including the diaspora, civil society, and religious-based organizations, among others.[92]

However, one of the participants, an elected local leader, also pointed out that he attended Umushyikirano as a state invited participant but had never bothered to consult people from his constituency, who he was supposedly "representing" at the Umushyikirano. This meant that he took his own ideas to the dialogue.

In his own words:

> *"But also the thing is; when we meet, do we talk? Do the views that we share come from the electorate?... We need structures that allow views to climb up and with checks that fail any effort to stifle a different version of thinking."*[93]

This also demonstrates that the nature of participant selection is top-down and offers limited opportunity and time for the citizens to share and discuss all their views. There was general consensus among the FDG respondents that the Umushyikirano process needed some fine-tuning, particularly by increasing citizen consultations to allow the flow of ideas from the grassroots to the top and making the process biannual to exhaust the issues at hand.[94]

Moreover, while all political parties and opposition politicians operating in the country are invited to the Umushyikirano, those that operate outside the country are excluded. As a result, the country misses out on alternative constructive views. According to one of the interviewees from a political party, Umushyikirano wrongly assumes that the country has achieved a political settlement and that there is nothing to discuss about improving political space.[95]

Selective participation in Rwanda is further demonstrated by the nature of other non-state actors' participation. For civil society participation, some rights activists believe that since the invitation to Umushyikirano goes to the Rwanda Civil

Society Platform, the umbrella arm of civil society organizations, not all CSOs are invited. Rwanda Civil Society Platform does not represent all CSOs because it is not mandatory to be a member of the Platform. As one respondent pointed out:

> "...before the big meeting I think the platform should consult with CSOs so that the views carried are those of CSOs not the Platform."

In other words, although some CSOs are represented, they are not able to share their views ahead of the meeting. From some critical CSO respondents in Rwanda, there is a perception that only "pro-government" CSOs and political parties are invited to the Umushyikirano.[97]

While the media is invited to cover stories, journalists are not directly involved in the discussion. One interviewee from the media observed that the media at times indirectly influences Umushyikirano discussions. Some journalists seek out the views of different players in the economy such as the civil society, political parties, and private sector operators among others about what they think should be discussed. When these views are published in local newspapers or aired on radio and television, the central government takes note. However, there is no guarantee that what is reported is put on the Umushyikirano agenda.[98]

On agenda-setting, the agenda for the Umushyikirano is set by the office of the Prime Minister who may also invite some members of the public or civil society to participate in the dialogue. However, this selection is based on the "relevance" of the civil society organization and the criteria for meeting this "relevance" are determined by the state.[99] From the interviews, it emerged that there are no public consultations on the agenda topics to be discussed at the Umushyikirano and not many of the respondents who had taken part in Umushyikirano knew how the agenda of the dialogue was set, despite the fact that they were high-level representatives from civil society and media. Some of the interviewees believed that the process of formulating the agenda is not inclusive as civil society, religious-based organizations, and political parties are not consulted.

According to one respondent:

> "Of late, President Paul Kagame, who convenes and chairs the meetings, uses the platform to deliver his annual state of the nation address. His opening speech is also the state of the nation address."[100]

Some respondents from civil society and media cited, as one of the weaknesses of Umushyikirano, the fact that the agenda is set by the central government. According to them, it demonstrates that there are some issues that are left out of

the agenda. Some respondents also argued that the process is not transparent, and participants tend to spend a lot of time complaining to the President about their local leaders. As a result, there is an emerging perception that Umushyikirano is a program of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF)—the ruling party.

One politician commented that:

> *"We are at 3rd stage of decentralization but still many regard Umushyikirano as a Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) affair."*[101]

Another respondent at an FDG proposed that Umushyikirano adopt the Catholic Church mode of consultations where matters/issues are identified from cell-level up to the parish and then diocese. According to this respondent:

> *"Yes, structures exist in government but are not efficient; collection of views about the issues to discuss during Umushyikirano should begin from the grassroots level."*

> *"Up-down is working, but bottom-up is not working."*[102]

One respondent revealed that the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda had sent a position paper to the central government, detailing proposals through which Umushyikirano could be improved. Among the proposals it had submitted was that Umushyikirano should be chaired by another high-ranking official rather than the President. Their argument was that when the President chairs the meeting, people tend to concentrate on less critical issues like appreciation of past achievements. The meeting also tends to be tense and people cannot express themselves freely.[103] This echoes concerns around a credible convener and highlights how the state plays a restrictive role on freedom of speech during state-led national dialogues. The respondent further noted the Party had also proposed that consultations for the agenda be conducted at the village level, then the sector and district level. According to one representative of the party: *"That will give us a chance to know what exactly is happening in the country."*[104]

Thus, in general, respondents in Rwanda acknowledged that Umushyikirano should continue and is a significant avenue for nation-building. It was described as the only homegrown solution that gives all Rwandans, within and outside the country, direct access to their President.[105] However, some critical views also acknowledged that there was still room to make Umushyikirano a more open platform for dialogue than it is today, specifically by allowing diversity in the choice of topics set on the agenda, more decentralized participation in the

agenda-setting, diversifying the nature of participation and the selection of participants, and selecting a more neutral convener than the Head of State.[106]

Uganda: using the public to obscure the agenda?

In Uganda, according to one CSO actor who was a co-convener of the national dialogue process, as CSOs courted the state for partnership in the initial stages of the dialogue, the government was suspicious of their agenda and thought they were working with the political opposition. On the other side, the political opposition suspected the CSOs of working with the government. Thus, to manage the trust issues from both sides, the CSOs invited different stakeholders to make an input into the agenda including participation by the Senior Presidential Advisor. After consultations, they came up with eight dialogue issues: the need for a national values consensus, diversity consensus, constitutionalism and rule of law, quality service delivery, an economy that works for all, the need for a political consensus, and an implementation consensus. It was these items that were presented to the state for negotiating a partnership.

However, one respondent, also part of the working group of seven, argued that the state used the public's participation in agenda-setting to obscure the critical issues necessary for dialogue in Uganda. He contended that the language of the eight dialogue issues was the result of a process of public consultations demanded by the state but aimed at de-politicizing and neutralizing the agenda items. According to the respondent, once the state became heavily invested in the national dialogue, it insisted that the agenda for the dialogue could not be set in Kampala. It therefore requested that the agenda be "thrown back to the people." In the respondent's view, by sending the issues "back to the people," the state hoped that this would be an opportunity to "dilute" some of the themes up for discussion. This was because some of the agenda items that had been crafted by the technical team in Kampala prior to consultation listed items such as discussing a "political transition" and the "relevance of elections." The state described these as "elitist and prescriptive" agendas. The state also argued that there was nothing in Uganda's political environment which warranted discussions of a political transition and that putting this on the agenda would be forcing the issue and unconstitutional. In the state's view, as well as that of its allies, political transitions were effectively conducted through constitutionally mandated elections. Yet for the non-state actors not allied with the state, the very credibility and integrity of these elections and processes warranted national debate and dialogue. In any event, contestation over these agenda items was

eventually won by the state. Thus, by referring the agenda back to the general public, the state hoped such "extreme" language would be softened or "diluted" and it succeeded. According to the respondent, this also was because the state was aware that the nature of the Ugandan public, particularly in the rural areas, was gullible and less critical of the NRM, the party in power. He explained that: But even then, this apparent concern by the state for broader "participation" in

> *"For instance, views around rioting do not reflect similarly across the country. While city-based youth may feel that President Museveni must go by any means necessary, the more rural-based populations may feel that this is too reckless and unnecessary, even dangerous. The state knew this and deliberately pushed for the nation-wide participation at the agenda-setting stage for its own benefit and interests, even when concern for broad participation might be otherwise legitimate."[107]*

agenda-setting can hardly be said to be genuine considering views by some academics that this would not be "organized participation" and the state was aware of the advantage this presented for its hegemony. In this argument, the state is well aware that unorganized masses cannot have full participation in terms of agenda-setting and in the whole dialogue process for that matter. According to some of the academics, what occurred at this stage was merely a consultation but not actual participation, as a national dialogue is not about consultation but participation. They argued, as detailed further below, that to effectively participate in Uganda's governance, people must be self-organized around their concrete interests in the form of grassroots movements tied to economic interests, cooperatives, trade unions, professionals, peasants, among others.[108]

Indeed, after "throwing the agenda back to the people" following the state's purported concerns with elitism and participation, the key agenda issues remained the same, but the phrasing changed: For instance, instead of focusing on "political violence," the public felt the focus should be on "peace and security." This new language thus was aimed at removing the "combative" tone from the agenda to set the stage for a dialogue. In one critical respondent's view, to this extent the "softer" language probably enriched the process. However, the respondent also did not seem convinced that the state was entirely well-intentioned, hence the feeling that the result of the public consultations was actually a "watering down" or de-politicization of the agenda. According to him, the state wanted to "demystify" some of the agenda items, in particular to ensure there was no real threat to the ruling party's hold on power and this was achieved to a considerable extent after these "public consultations."[109]

However, another key respondent who was a co-convener of the dialogue argued that under Uganda's national dialogue process it was critical to rephrase the language of the agenda in order to make it neutral. In his view:

> *"Language is a big issue and one cannot be stark naked with it. Instead of talking about "militarization" of institutions, it might be better to phrase the agenda issue as "building state institutions that work for us."*

In the respondent's opinion, sometimes there is solace in ambiguity, and it might be the only way to cover all the sensitive topics successfully in a national dialogue. According to the respondent, over-emphasizing the volatile issues openly inflames sharp views on both sides and antagonizes the parties to the detriment of the process. Thus, in his view, the volatile question of political transition was indirectly covered under the agenda item on "constitutionalism and rule of law." The diversity and ethnicity question was covered under the agenda item on "celebrating the richness of our various cultures."[110]

Yet the suspicion persisted among some key stakeholders that the exclusion of an express agenda item on the political transition was indicative that the dialogue process was not genuine. In their view, the question of political transition could not be separated from the national dialogue, and this was the most anticipated topic for the dialogue. Thus, it should have been expressly indicated as such in the national dialogue agenda.[111]

Excluding key actors and disregarding local embeddedness in Uganda

While the idea behind the national dialogue in Uganda was to involve a wide range of participants at various social and political leadership levels, traditional leaders as a key constituency in Uganda were not adequately engaged at the national dialogue's agenda-setting phase. According to one representative of a major kingdom, the Kingdom did not contribute to any of the agenda items. The national dialogue conveners came in to engage it with a predetermined agenda. Accordingly, the Kingdom seems to have no confidence in the national dialogue due to its lack of input in the preliminary and planning stages, including questions around funding, conveners, and the agenda. In the respondent's view, the dialogue's objectives seemed cosmetic and could not be trusted. Regarding whether legal impediments could have informed the exclusion of the Kingdoms' participation, the respondent explained that, although Ugandan law does not permit cultural institutions' participation in partisan politics, the dialogue process was not a partisan activity and thus not political. According to him:

"It is about reconciliation, statecraft, and nation-building, among others. If the dialogue does not involve kingdoms and cultural institutions, it is unlikely to achieve much because the ordinary people listen more to their Kings. This is because they do not think their traditional leaders have vested interests."[112]

One reason for this apparent side-lining of traditional institutions seems to lie in the fear by the state that some of the institutions are clamoring for political autonomy, which would present a fundamental challenge to Uganda as a whole. Moreover, the issues of some cultural institutions' status were still largely unsettled, particularly on the question of their geographical boundaries.[113]

This skepticism notwithstanding, some respondents strongly recommended the use of traditional and cultural systems such as clans to effectively mobilize citizens to engage with the state. Some made the case that clan structures remain the most basic unit of social and economic organization in many communities in Uganda. Moreover, many societies that mobilize on the basis of clans have considerable success in social and economic progress. While these have been greatly weakened since colonialism, some respondents argued that their deficits can still be corrected, and the system can be made to work in a genuine national dialogue and nation-building process.[114]

Respondents also made some general observations regarding the elitism of the national dialogue process which reflected the state superstructure and dismissed the voices of Uganda's grassroots people. Some FGD respondents noted that the Kampala delegations that went to implement the pilot dialogues in rural regions of the country conducted the proceedings with a show of power and clear separation from the people. The dialogues were conducted like lectures, were not participatory, and lacked local embeddedness.[115]

Nature of participation: freedom of speech

Due to the politicized nature of the national dialogue process in Uganda, some state officials avoided the dialogue, while others who showed up avoided discussions on topics where the state was implicated, such as elections, political violence, and ethnic-based discrimination. It was, however, pointed out by one respondent that this was usually the case in smaller meetings, but that in the field and sessions led by CSOs there was evidently more freedom and open dialogue. It was also quite evident that there was broader multi-party participation for sessions organized by CSOs as compared to those organized by the state.[116]

This corresponds with the observation of the state-controlled Umushyikirano in Rwanda where, as noted by a respondent, the participation of the President as convener and the state as the agenda-setter rendered the dialogue atmosphere tense and restricted free speech.

However, this does not mean the Ugandan context is better than the Rwandan one with reference to freedom of speech during the national dialogue process. As one Ugandan respondent pointed out, there is great irony in expecting free speech to thrive during the dialogue in the context of a highly militarized state like Uganda where government critics had been known to disappear.[117]

ASSESSING THE BALANCING ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS

From the foregoing sections, it emerges that the dialogue frameworks in Rwanda and Uganda carve out a role for non-state actors although in varying degrees. While the role of non-state actors in Rwanda's Umushyikirano is almost insignificant, there is evidence of attempts by media, political parties, and civil society organizations to mobilize more non-state participation and influence over the process. This, however, remains largely an attempt whose results are yet to be seen. In Uganda, with the national dialogue is dubbed as a "citizen-led" process still in its early stages, the role of non-state actors is more significant and prominent. However, this also presents challenges and exposes some fundamental weaknesses among the non-state actors. According to one respondent, although there was and is considerable collaboration between the state and non-state actors, there is also deep-rooted suspicion from the state which perceives the non-state actors or CSOs as competitors for legitimacy. For this reason, the non-state actors had to work really hard to ensure government buy-in to the dialogue process. However, even then they had to remain vigilant to check the state for any excesses and co-optation of the process and of themselves.[118]

Another major challenge and weakness which was exploited by the state in some cases was the competition and mistrust among Ugandan non-state actors themselves. This especially emerged over the question of funding and funds allocation for the national dialogue process. According to one respondent, self-interest and individual CSO agendas and work plans dominated discussions around this subject, which ultimately contributed to the failure to make a clear decision on the source and distribution of funds for the national dialogue process. While some CSO actors wanted to have oversight of the budget and activity planning for the dialogue, others questioned on what basis these CSOs sought to exercise

this authority over the other non-state conveners. Such internal conflict delayed the national dialogue and weakened their moral authority to check the state which was already seeking ways to co-opt the process.[119]

But according to a more radical respondent, the non-state actors in Uganda purporting to function as a citizen-led force in the dialogue process could realistically present any significant check against the state. As the respondent had argued above, they represent state and class interests which do not align with the fundamental needs of the majority of the peasant population in Uganda. More importantly, according to the respondent, a genuine national dialogue could not occur unless there was a situation of equal power or mutual fear between the state and citizens. As the dialogue now stands in Uganda—open-ended, within the current status quo and an unorganized citizenry—it was only an exercise in futility. In such a context, if non-state actors are to present any meaningful force to check the state, there was a need for them to go through a process of political conscientization and organize along clear economic and social interests, which would then provide the vantage points for negotiations with the state. In fact, in this respondent's perspective, the whole idea about a national dialogue was actually to pause the state and decide whether to continue with it or reform it. In order for this to happen, the non-state actors need to be fundamentally different from the state and its interests, which was not the case in Uganda.

Indeed, some of the critical interests for the national dialogue agenda in Uganda are so fundamental to the survival of the obtaining regime that it was impractical to expect any genuine dialogue on them without a sufficiently conscious and organized force of non-state actors. The two key institutions—the character of the national army and parliament—hinge on the political transition question and political consensus agenda. But these institutions are so fundamental to the state's survival and the state protection they enjoy is so strong that one cannot effectively counter them without a formidable force from the non-state actors. Thus, in this skeptical respondent's view, the national dialogue in Uganda begun prematurely and should have been preceded by a period of conscientization and self-organization.[120]

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregoing findings in relation to Uganda and Rwanda demonstrate the ways in which the state might seek to wield its power as a double-edged sword to entrench the status quo while purporting to participate in national dialogues as nation-building processes. The paper has demonstrated how state interests manifest at the stages of planning and funding, selecting the convener, setting the agenda, and selecting the participants. The state interests are so pervasive that, even when dialogue processes are designed as citizen-led, they may still sustain the nature and interests of the very state they seek to reform, often to the detriment of citizens' interests. The national dialogues in both countries are described as mechanisms of nation-building. As argued above, outside of a context of political transition, this long-term and open-ended process whose logic is solidarity, patriotism, and relationship-building rather than power-sharing can be used by states to ensure that its objectives remain depoliticized while maintaining the illusion of change. National dialogues in such contexts will thus be co-opted and controlled to this end.

The experiences in Rwanda and Uganda have demonstrated how this is the case. In Rwanda, agenda-setting for Umushyikirano is entirely in the control of the Prime Minister with invitees and the broader public having no knowledge of how it is set, nor can they make meaningful contributions to it. In Uganda, the very nature of the language used to set the national dialogue's agenda was a site of contention. Uganda's example has demonstrated how the state will compete with non-state co-conveners over the tone of the national dialogue set by the choice of language where such language poses a challenge to state power. The Ugandan state and its allies felt that national agenda items to discuss the "political transition" and the "militarization of institutions" were crafted in a combative tone and preferred to adjust to the more "neutral" and "non-threatening" agendas around "constitutionalism" and "institutions that work for all." This move achieved its desired results by "taming" and blunting the political overtones of the national dialogue and bringing it "in line" with the conciliatory, solidarity, and relationship-driven logic of nation-building. Indeed, the very fact of a stand-off between the state and civil society co-conveners in Uganda over having the political transition as an agenda item magnifies the challenge of seeking to achieve political or social change through dialogue in a non-transitional context.

The findings have also demonstrated how states use their control over the national budget and revenue collection—as well as legislating powers—to co-opt

and control national dialogue processes. In Rwanda, institutionalization and streamlined state funding for the Umushyikirano consolidates the state's control and ownership of that dialogue platform, while in Uganda the state's competition with its own citizens for control of the national dialogue's funding more vividly exposed it as an avenue for control of the national dialogue process. The state's failure to release funds for the national dialogue in a timely manner and pass enabling legislation delayed its take-off and gave the state further power to postpone the national dialogue for its own political expedience.

State control over the selection of participants and the nature of participation is another way in which control over national dialogue is ensured. In Rwanda, participant selection from civil society is based on subjective criteria such as their "relevance," which the Prime Minister enjoys the preserve of defining. This way, opposing views are monitored and kept out of the dialogue processes at the Prime Minister's discretion. In Uganda, key actors such as traditional institutions and youth groups that are perceived to hold politically threatening views were excluded from the agenda-setting process, while state-allied civil society actors reproduced state interests and disregarded the importance of local views and local embeddedness in the dialogue process. In both countries, top-down and exclusionary approaches to participation were preferred and used as mechanisms of control over the national dialogues and without guarantees of freedom of speech.

The foregoing analysis paints a grim prospect for genuine dialogue processes in contexts of nation-building and outside of political transitions. However, findings from the field also indicate a variety of proposals on how these processes can be opened up for more balanced participation in order to influence the status quo.

Recommendations

As a first step, there should be more non-state actors actively and critically involved at the agenda-setting stage. This way, critical issues of concern to the public which might be threatening to the status quo are not subverted under the pretext of nation-building. National dialogue processes that are dominated by the state are likely to be monologues with no real robust impact on nation-building. This has been demonstrated in the findings on Rwanda that the Head of States convenes the Umushyikirano and the essence of the meeting is converted into a state of the nation address or praising the President on past political achievements, in which only those non-state actors deemed "relevant" and

state-aligned can participate in the dialogue while divergent views are "locked out" of the process.

Non-state actors should present a united front when negotiating with the state, particularly on those agendas that challenge its power. In Uganda, differences of opinion among the non-state co-conveners were exploited by the state to de-politicize the national dialogue. Internal negotiations emerging with a common position might have provided a stronger push against the state's move to secure its interests at the expense of genuine dialogue. Further "talks within talks" could have been held to promote the understanding that having these highly polarizing items on the agenda would not mean that they had to be immediately resolved, but that they were matters for an open-ended and sustained dialogue, which might be stretched out over a much longer period of time during the open-ended nation-building process. Once the country attains the more advanced levels and "mature" stages of dialogue, the issues might then be more calmly re-solved according to the consensus and parameters agreed upon in the dialogue.

In order for non-state co-conveners to have more influence and credibility over national dialogue processes, they should also have broader membership that embraces key sections and interests in the country. In Uganda, the exclusion of youth and traditional leadership institutions were perceived by these groups as a deliberate strategy by the co-conveners of the national dialogue in alliance with the state to secure and entrench existing power structures and sideline these groups' growing political and cultural clout. Yet having these groups on board from the outset would have given stronger momentum to critical agenda items underlying the debate on Uganda's national identity and peace prospects, including the political transition question, elections, youth unemployment, the federal system of governance, among others.

Self-funding was proposed in both Rwanda and Uganda as a means to shield the national dialogue process from state manipulation. In Uganda, as indicated in the findings, sections of the public were themselves ready to make monetary and other non-monetary contributions to the national dialogue on the understanding that they would own the process and trust that national concerns would be gen-uinely addressed without state or foreign forces' control. In Rwanda, some of the respondents also recognized the emancipatory potential such self-funding could have for ownership and self-expression within the national dialogue framework.

Finally, national dialogue processes in both countries should adopt a bottom-up ap-proach or combine the top-down and bottom-up approaches in order to optimally

represent the views of the people. This is particularly key in national dialogues applied in nation-building strategies. As indicated earlier, nation-building involves broad and open-ended questions about identity, belonging, and relationship building, among others. These questions call for as much citizen participation as possible in order for the process to be meaningful. However, as noted earlier, for this participation to be meaningful it must be organized to counter state manipulation of the public. Only through a deliberate conscientization process and self-organization along socio-economic interests can non-state actors and citizens truly present a strong front to counterbalance state interests during open-ended national dialogue processes. Without this, national dialogues are open to being co-opted by the pervasive state, which would undermine genuine nation-building processes and keep the countries vulnerable to perpetual division and instability.

Uganda and Rwanda are countries whose borders were drawn out of the violence of colonialism. They have carried this legacy of violence since independence through political and ethnic-based wars driven by competition and distrust. While both countries' previous attempts at dialogue did not deliver sustained peace, the appeal of this mechanism remains as both countries have adopted national dialogues for nation-building. However, in order to have real prospects for nation-building and sustainable peace, both states should create enabling environments for genuine dialogue, while non-state actors and citizens should organize themselves to vigorously ensure an unfettered national conversation.

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