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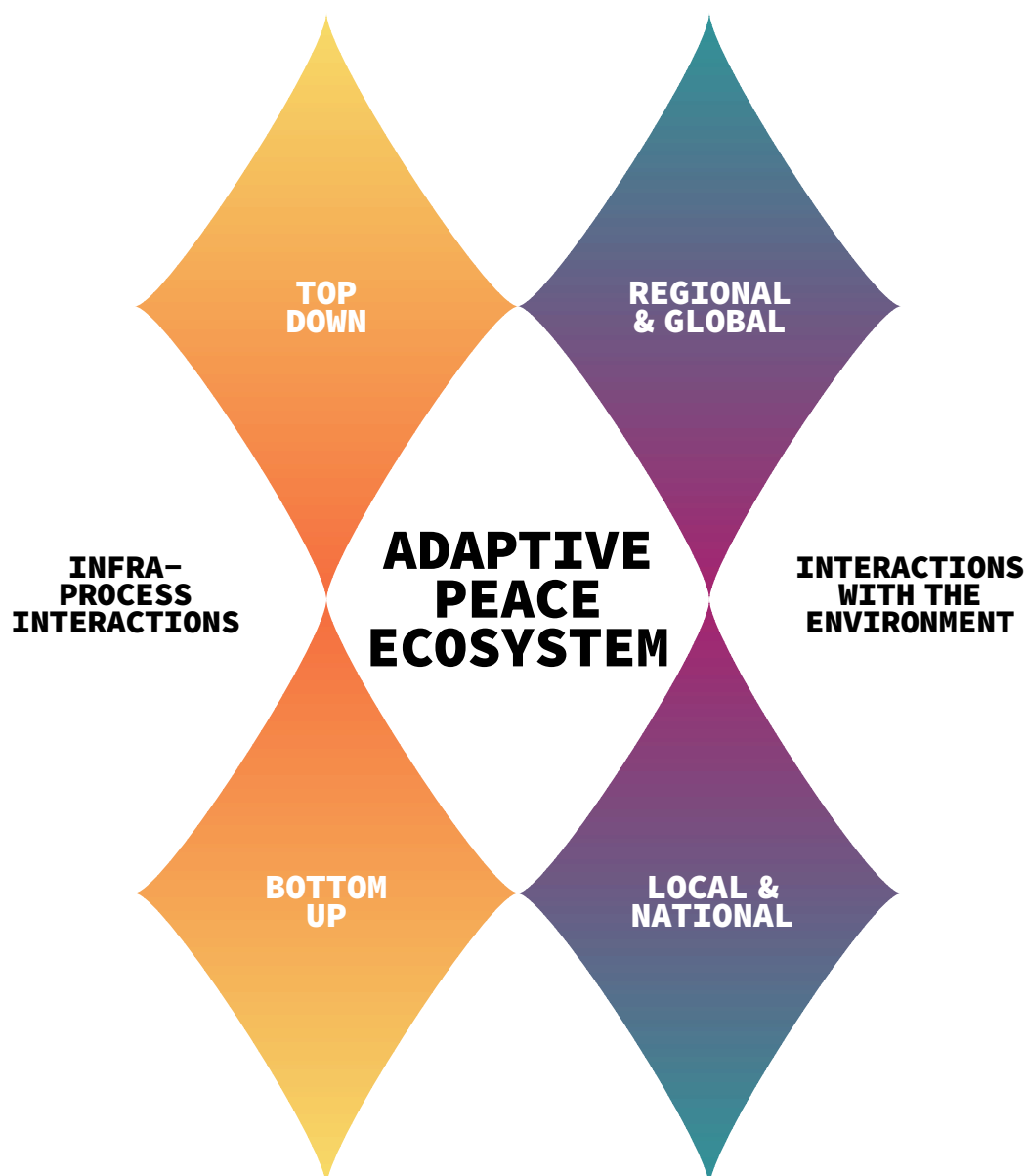
INSIGHTS FROM MULTILAYERED PEACEMAKING PEACE AS AN ADAPTIVE ECOSYSTEM

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Peacemaking is often approached as a matter of top-down elite agreements. But in today's fragmented conflicts and volatile global environment, this approach is increasingly proving inadequate and ineffective. It overlooks the complexity of critical dynamics – narratives and processes, interests and capabilities – and how they co-evolve and interact across scales – from local communities to national politics, regional rivalries, and geopolitical arenas. It also misses how political, economic, and security interests become deeply intertwined, and how violence increasingly takes hybrid political-criminal forms rather than 'purely' political ones.

An alternative approach, grounded in ecosystem thinking, draws attention to these shifting interactions and how they continually reshape the field of possible action – either expanding or narrowing the space for settlement. It shows how this field of opportunities and constraints evolves across levels, emphasizing the adaptive capacities and complementarities of different actors, ideas, and practices. Bringing the often-underrepresented insights and capacities of local actors to the centre enables more grounded, adaptive, and resilient pathways to peace and protection.

In other words, peace should be approached as an adaptive ecosystem.



Insights from peacemaking processes in a range of different contexts underscore the need for a shift to ecosystem thinking and adaptive peace practice.

- In Colombia, a national peace agreement is only the starting point for building ‘territorial peace’. New [research](#) shows how this depends on practical, locally rooted initiatives – such as community-informed peace and security metrics, community-led mapping and early-warning of armed group dynamics, and territorial peace and development pilots that link protection, livelihoods, and state presence. The challenge is how local practices and ideas are incorporated, and how they interact and align across municipal, departmental, and national arenas in an environment where armed actors, state responses, and political agendas are themselves fragmented.
- Evidence from [Somalia](#) shows that sustained reductions in violence are possible when peacemaking is able to move across layers – connecting civic networks, clan actors, business interests, and administrative authorities at both local and national levels. Rather than hinging on a single settlement or a single mediator, [outcomes](#) have emerged through a wider constellation of peace-minded actors working adaptively: monitoring and feedback, continuous adjustment, and negotiation over time. These experiences highlight what an ecosystem approach implies in practice – how progress often depends on flexible, networked actors able to navigate and improvise in contexts where more rigid, bureaucratic, and risk-averse modalities tend to predominate yet struggle to respond.
- Analysis of [Afghanistan](#) highlights how the U.S.-led peacemaking process approached the conflict as a binary contest and was shaped by U.S. security interests. In doing so, it misread the interaction of local and global dynamics, and made largely invisible the wider political, social and civic configurations that conditioned both the violence and the possibilities for peace. This kind of narrow frame and approach contributed to the collapse of the process and Taliban takeover of the country.

The analytical and practical implications of these insights include:

- Peace is shaped through multiple, evolving and interacting arrangements across arenas, not a single agreement or moment. The ability to construct, amend and adjust these arrangements over time is critical.
- Approached as an ecosystem, peace depends on distributed capacities to navigate and adapt layered arrangements as conditions change.
- Peacemaking is ecosystem building. The task is to work with how conditions for peace emerge and change over time, while embedding arrangements at different levels that complement one another and enable people to live in dignity, safety, and with hope for the future.

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