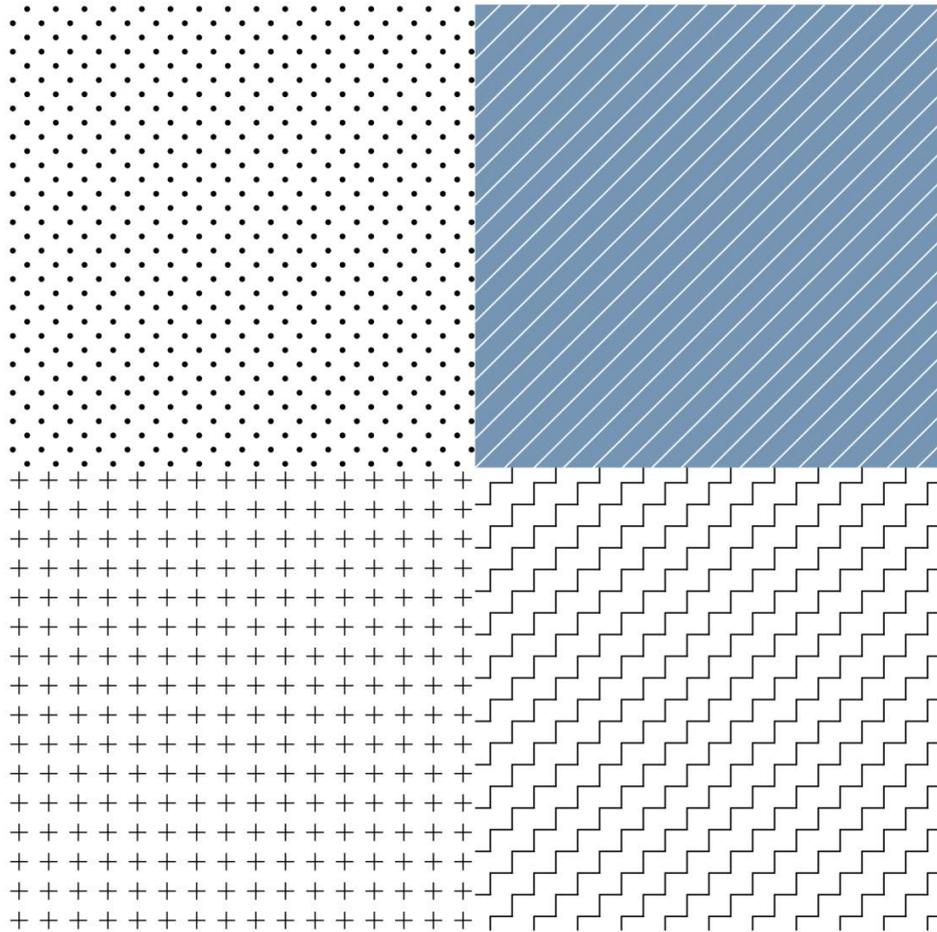


W O S C A P

ENHANCING EU PEACEBUILDING CAPABILITIES



Local Ownership Challenges in Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention

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LOCAL OWNERSHIP CHALLENGES IN PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

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THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

This report was produced as part of the project “Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding”. It analyses local ownership in terms of the EU’s ability to leverage the density and complexity of local society and build positive social capital in response to conflict. The Whole of Society perspective suggests that the promise of local ownership in international interventions is best served through identifying appropriate spaces of action within local society, and an adjustment of programming parameters to enable the EU to complement the efforts of domestic actors. The report contributes to identifying ideas and challenges for EU peacebuilding, which will require further analysis and problem-solving beyond the life of this project. Based on the research and engagement with key stakeholders, it is part of a series of reports that investigate cases of best practices and lessons learned related to several cross-cutting themes that the project focuses on.



ENHANCING EU PEACEBUILDING CAPABILITIES



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Summary

Local ownership is one of the guiding norms of contemporary peacebuilding and conflict prevention. To help advance understanding and address the shortcomings and challenges of translating this concept from policy ideal to good practice, this report adopts two perspectives. One is a problem solving perspective which examines the practical difficulties evidenced in attempts to implement local ownership policies by the European Union (EU) and other actors, which arise from a combination of conceptual confusions and process issues. The other perspective questions at a deeper level how local ownership is constructed as a practice and discourse within EU civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention policies. From this more fundamental perspective, which reflects a Whole of Society approach to EU peacebuilding and conflict prevention capabilities, local ownership is proposed as a deep engagement, and 'thick conversation' between locals and external peacebuilders, which takes account of the diversity and complexity of actors, processes and relationships and the multiple positions each constituency adopts towards the conflict.

The report analyses local ownership in terms of the EU's ability to leverage the density and complexity of local society and build positive social capital in response to conflict. It uses examples of the private sector and religious organisations as significant constituencies which are under-represented in current approaches. These examples illustrate the presence of neglected sites of local agency and provide a lens for identifying indigenous practices and networked relationships which are intrinsic to developing effective and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes. The report's main finding is that existing approaches to local ownership fail to capture – or sometimes even acknowledge – the deep-seated difficulties of aligning with the variegated and fluid nature of local society, and its creative possibilities. Based on these examples, the Whole of Society perspective suggests that the promise of local ownership in international interventions is best served through identifying appropriate spaces of action within local society, and an adjustment of programming parameters to enable the EU to complement the efforts of domestic actors.

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy and practice context

The importance of local ownership for sustainable outcomes of interventions to prevent conflict and support peacebuilding processes is recognised by most international actors engaged in the world's conflict zones. Two recent substantial reviews of civilian capacity for peacebuilding performed by major global actors – the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) – illustrate this. In 2015, a review of the UN 10-year-old peacebuilding architecture, including peace operations, peacebuilding and the implementation of the Security Council Resolution on women, peace and security concluded that national ownership is of critical importance for the organization's objective of 'sustaining peace' in conflict zones (Boutellis and Suilleabhain 2016: 5-6; Report of the High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 2015). The emphasis on ownership in this latest comprehensive assessment of the UN civilian capacity reflects a long-standing traction local ownership enjoys in the UN's peacebuilding discourse and its operational practices. The Report of the Secretary General, Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict (A/68/696-S/2014/5: 9) affirms a fundamental principle of national (sic) ownership as an 'imperative' of peacebuilding. Furthermore, the independent review of civilian capacity in the immediate aftermath of conflict proposed ownership as one of four key principles coined in an acronym: OPEN (ownership, participation, expertise and nimbleness) whose applications are expected to provide "more responsive, timely and effective support to nationally owned and led plans and institution building efforts" (Hearn 2015: 4).

The shift in the UN's thinking on the role of local ownership in peacebuilding towards a more encompassing notion of 'sustaining peace' as a unifying framework for UN engagement is important both conceptually as well as in setting out broader parameters for practical engagement which facilitates and supports local agency. It recognises that including broad sections of the population and mobilising local capacities is necessary for effective and sustainable interventions which better correspond to local needs and the changing local context (Report of the High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations, 2015).¹ Given the UN's status as a major global peacebuilding actor and its normative role, this shift in understanding local ownership in peacebuilding interventions and a restated commitment to promote it, will undoubtedly echo across the international peacebuilding community, including the EU.

The EU, almost concurrently with the UN peace and security reviews, conducted an exercise with a somewhat similar purpose, albeit a narrower thematic scope. It involved an evaluation of its support to security and justice reform in post-conflict countries between 2001-2016. This identified lack of ownership as one of the key weaknesses affecting the effectiveness and efficiency of EU support to security sector reform (European Commission SWD (2016) 221 final). Besides emphasising local ownership as one of the key principles for SSR actions, the concept is also endorsed more broadly by the Commission in all peacebuilding

¹ Most donors and international organisations have over the last ten years or so invested in developing policies to support local actors and initiatives (Paffenholz 2015: 867).

and conflict management operations.² The EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy presented in June 2016, also recognises the importance of 'locally owned approaches' for the effectiveness of the EU's engagement in third countries in appreciation of the fact that a "positive change can only be home grown" (The EU Global Strategy 2016: 26-27).

Challenges of implementation

Operationalizing ownership in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is however difficult and challenging on different levels. Working contextually implies being able to adjust international aid apparatuses to different political, security and cultural environments in all their diversity, and to respond to fluidity and change in the local as well as the international context. Practising inclusivity requires appropriate judgment of who are the stakeholders in the process, both 'insiders' and 'externals'. Whom to involve, how and in what time frame, and how to coordinate among different levels and forms of interactions between the external and domestic actors, are all critical questions external actors have to address (McCann 2015; Mccandless et al. 2015). The pursuit of local ownership implies building various types of partnerships which requires time, commitment and funding that often go beyond the typical external aid frameworks. It also involves striking a balance between foreign intrusiveness and responsible self-governance, a task made more intricate by aid conditionality (Nartens 2009; Paris and Sisk 2009). Grappling with those challenges, external actors in practice often consign local ownership to a second-order issue, which is regarded as too difficult and complex, despite rhetoric to the contrary.

1.2 Definition debates

The foremost cause of operational difficulties in implementing local ownership in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is its vagueness and imprecision. Critics insist local ownership is used first and foremost as a rhetorical device, and a 'buzz-word' deployed by the external actors in their endeavour to legitimise interventions and to ensure local 'buy in' (Yong Lee and Ozerdem 2015; McCann 2014; de Coning 2013; Scheye and Peake 2005; Lemay-Hebert and Kappler 2016). Using local ownership to denote a trajectory of intervention and an end point at which external actors can withdraw has added to the definitional imprecision and is also controversial in practice, undermining the aim of local ownership in achieving the support and buy-in of the target populations (Martin and Moser 2012). Especially in protracted external interventions, there is a tendency to use local ownership to justify the drawdown of an international presence regardless of the level of progress in achieving peace and stability. Actors and organizations working at grass roots level tend to frame local ownership as synonymous with hybrid forms of peace which occur at the interface and interaction between liberal peacebuilding interventions and local values, worldviews and practices (Mac Ginty and Sanghara 2012). While there is a clear focus here on bottom-up and local agency local ownership is still understood in different ways by local and international actors (Poulligny 2006; Pickering 2007). Academic debates on hybrid peace have been criticised for their lack of comprehensive engagement with the question of local agency in peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2015).

² Council conclusions on the EU's comprehensive approach. Foreign Affairs Council meeting. (2014). Available from: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/142552.pdf

Since the middle of 2000s, academic discourse has shifted away from concerns of ontology and epistemology, towards the operationalization of local ownership, coinciding with practitioner views. In particular, a process-centred, relational perspective on local ownership emphasising the relational dynamics among multiple peacebuilding actors as critical to social change, has gained ground (Richmond 2012; Reich 2006; Chadwick at all. 2013; Furnari 2015). Chadwick at all (2013:14) argues this is because relationships are “increasingly considered necessary for the realization of program objectives and goals.” Empirical evidence provided by the evaluations of international practices such as the Reflecting on Peace Practices project implemented by the Collaboration for Democratic Action³ corroborates this argument.

Attempts to bridge the theory-practice gap on local ownership use ‘attachment’ as a category within the analysis of relationships. Lemay-Hebert and Kappler (2016) posit that many peacebuilding interventions fail to deliver sustainable peace because locals do not develop attachment to the ideals and goals of international interventions which offer a version of peace that seems distant from the reality of everyday life at the local level. This implies a warning that rebuilding social foundations is not solely about providing a range of services rather it requires a change in a mind-set, not only among the local actors but also among other stakeholders (Furnari, *ibid*). In this sense, the quality of relations among a myriad of actors engaged in peacebuilding and conflict prevention goes to the heart of the ownership question and hence provides a promising lens through which to explore the possibilities and challenges of local ownership in international interventions in this report.

1.3 Report methodology

The report has two purposes: firstly, to provide a perspective on how local ownership is approached in the practice of peacebuilding and conflict prevention by looking at the implementation challenge of local ownership, assessing what actors in addition to the EU do to achieve this normative goal, and investigating practice beyond the four countries covered by the WOSCAP project. In this respect, the report serves to complement the findings of case studies of specific EU interventions undertaken as part of WP3 of the WOSCAP project, and should be read in conjunction with the country reports on Ukraine, Georgia, Yemen and Mali.

In addition to desk top research which encompassed academic literature, policy reports produced by the international organisations, think tanks, and documents circulated by the major international organisations the report draws on a Community of Practice event among experts and policy makers in London which discussed comparative perspectives on local ownership in external interventions.

The report’s second purpose is to review the practice of local ownership through the prism of a Whole of Society Approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In substantiating the proposal that a critical-constructive analysis using a Whole of Society approach reveals fundamental problems with the way the EU tackles its engagement with local actors, which go beyond instrumental/ implementation difficulties, the report draws on

³ For more information, see: <http://cdacollaborative.org/publication/confronting-war-critical-lessons-for-peace-practitioners/>. In response to the findings from the field, some international non-governmental organisations and initiatives such as Local first have taken to developing more systematically relation-based approaches such as dialogue (Pinnington 2014).

fieldwork conducted in Ukraine and the Community of Practice roundtable discussion held in Kiev among practitioner, policy-making and academic representatives. The field work consisted of semi-structured interviews with representatives of local NGOs, think tanks, informal groups providing humanitarian aid to occupied territories, religious organisations, businessmen, and academics. We have sought to supplement this with evidence from other locations including examples of the salience of overlooked constituencies among the private sector and religious organisations as essential stakeholders in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

1.4 Research themes

In the next section we build on the developing trajectory of scholarship about local ownership and some of the key issues which have emerged in practitioner and academic literature. We elaborate two perspectives on local ownership which we believe are critical to understanding and addressing the shortcomings and challenges of translating this concept from policy ideal to good practice.

The first concerns the practical difficulties evidenced in attempts to implement local ownership policies by the EU and other actors, which arise from a combination of conceptual confusions and process issues. This perspective, which we classify as a problem-solving perspective (Cox 1981) is a strong feature of the academic literature on local ownership, and was particularly evident from the expert roundtable and bilateral interviews we conducted among practitioners and policy-makers as part of the report's methodology. This perspective leads us to focus on identifying and attempting to fix specific difficulties encountered in practice, as well as introducing processes which might address gaps which practitioners have experienced, in trying to achieve the broad ideal of local ownership of peacebuilding interventions.

The second perspective is situated within critical theory, in contrast to the problem-solving perspective (Cox 1981, Krause and Williams 1997; Booth 2004). In applying a 'Whole of Society' lens to the problematic of local ownership, we focus on significant 'missing pieces' or gaps in current approaches, which are likely to undermine efforts in engaging and working with local populations in peacebuilding interventions. This perspective is more foundational than the problem-solving perspective. It questions, at a deeper level, the way in which local ownership is constructed as a practice and discourse within EU civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention policies. Rather than viewing local ownership in instrumental terms by one side to bring about greater engagement with and by local actors, we have sought to analyse local ownership as the **capability to leverage positive social capital within external-local relations in a context of conflict and post-conflict**. Where the existing practice of local ownership sees it as an imprecise combination of process and goal orientated strategies this perspective led us to investigate both social relationships and connections within interventions and indigenous capacities for action. Plural constituencies in the conflict space mean a diversity of attitudes to the conflict, different expectations regarding outcomes to the conflict and the anticipated results of external intervention, and multiple opportunities for conflict responses.

Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 119). In

peacebuilding terms, it emanates within group interactions and co-operation initiatives and the engagements between external and local constituencies, for example where the EU or other entities fund, enable and empower local actors, providing the “glue which facilitates co-operation, exchange and innovation” (Puttnam 2001, OECD 2007). Social capital suggests dynamic linkages between any combination of actors while not excluding the possibility that these linkages might develop in negative as well as positive ways: for example, a perverse relationship between local elites and grass roots might result in inhibiting the participation of certain local groups, and adversely affect the development of effective and sustainable peacebuilding initiatives.

Another way of looking at this is to suggest that rather than aiming for a ‘thin’ communication with local society, external actors could foresee ‘thick’ dialogues which draw on a “rich fabric of different life worlds and cultures”. As Dallmayr proposes: “The appeal in such exchanges is no longer merely to the rational, cognitive capacity of participants, but rather to the full range of their situated humanity, including their hopes, aspirations, moral or spiritual convictions, as well as their agonies and frustrations. In this respect, thick dialogue remains closely attentive to the ‘sufferings of vulnerable creatures” (Dallmayr 2001: 346).

From these starting points we were able to view local ownership in terms of the EU’s capacity to take account and leverage the density and complexity of the local. One indication is how the EU engages with the variegated nature of local constituencies beyond what might be termed ‘the usual suspects’ of civil society organisations.⁴ In this report we draw attention to two constituencies, the private sector and religious organisations, which provide examples of significant social groups which are missing from a ‘Whole of Society’ approach to local ownership. Although these constituencies are not marginalised in the usual sense of the term as representing powerless or stigmatised individuals and groups, and indeed may command significant resources and deploy multiple forms of power within the local context, they are poorly represented or excluded from mainstream peacebuilding and conflict prevention policies. Conceptually we have drawn on the idea of ‘forgotten’ and inactive ‘publics’ (Brunk 2005; Hallahan 2000) in sociological and communications studies, and the discussion in these literatures of the means by which they may be better mobilised. These groups merit investigation as neglected sites of local agency and they also provide a lens for identifying indigenous practices and networked relationships which are part of the development of positive social capital in response to conflict, and peacebuilding outcomes which are effective and sustainable in the local context. By highlighting these examples of both overlooked actors, their networked partners and the kinds of processes they engage in, we seek to reveal openings for shifts in how the EU addresses the problematic of local ownership.

⁴ Between 2001-2010, European Commission disbursed €928million or 12% of its total funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding to civil society organisations (Paffenholz 2015: 867).

2. Research findings

2.1 Practice gaps and problems

As part of the WOSCAP project methodology to establish a local ownership community of practice, a roundtable with practitioners and policy experts was convened to debate current trends in integrating local communities to make external interventions more attuned to local needs, and thus more effective and sustainable. The discussion during the meeting highlighted a number of practical challenges in implementing local ownership which overall reflect the observations noted in the policy and academic publications summarised above. In particular, the participants pointed to the following issues:

- The local ownership conceptual gap
- The partial participatory process
- Difficulty in identifying local stakeholders and developing flexible modalities of engagement
- Tension between efficiency and meaningful engagement
- Donors internal accountability as a disincentive to local ownership.

The participants of the roundtable shared a view that the concept of local ownership is poorly articulated both among the local as well as international actors. This in turn limits its relevance in day-to-day operations, while missions and policies contain no specific guidance on how to implement engagement practices or achieve this goal. As an illustration, it was pointed out that while it is often possible to reach a degree of consensus on the nature of a given problem and identify appropriate responses between external actors and local political elites as their prime interlocutors, this consensus breaks down lower down the local governance chain, where policy agreement evaporates, adversely undermining the outcomes of a particular intervention. For example, this was the case of Boma consultation process in the CAR, and the peace agreement in Guatemala. The other inter-related issue concerns local capacity building approaches, which like local ownership itself, are lacking practical guidance. In a context of multi-actor international interventions and diversity of approaches, despite the trainings, workshop, technical advice, etc. provided by international organizations, the capacity and practical skills for promoting local ownership is inadequate.

A tendency to engage with a limited circle of local actors during the course of intervention is believed to be only partly caused by resource constraints. In the practitioners' view a general disinclination among international actors to become involved in rebuilding state-society relationships within conflict and crisis-affected states is equally important. This leads to overtly technical and managerial interpretation of the mandates and ultimately, compromises the objective of local ownership. An instrumental approach is also at odds with the perceptions and expectations of local communities regarding the aims of the international assistance in conflict and crisis-affected contexts beyond short-term relief effort. The fact that in many conflict-affected areas it may be difficult to reach affected communities – say for reasons of damaged infrastructure or land mines (Mali was given as an example) – contributes to a partial participation process.

Failure to properly understand the local cultural and socio-political context is identified as a major problem at the operational level. As a consequence, external actors encounter difficulties to identify appropriate local partners. Furthermore, there are no automatic templates for this kind of engagement as the form and quality of relationships between international organisations and local counterparts and with other external stakeholders varies according to the local and donor contexts, and the types of donors involved. For example, in Somaliland, outsiders were hardly involved in the implementation of the peace agreement; in Mozambique they stayed for a short time while in Kenya local peacebuilding initiatives were already underway prior to donors' engagement, which had implications for the kind of local actors mobilised in each context and the mode of their engagement (Hayman 2010). In Somaliland a lack of international funding to the government opened space for the private sector engagement in fostering political reconciliation (Hayman *ibid*).

Practitioners identified as a major structural obstacle a lack of flexibility on the interveners' side in responding to context changes, including the emergence of 'new owners' over the course of an intervention. Implementing agencies work according to the predetermined mandates and terms of reference agreed with donors, so that this becomes a more dominant imperative than concerns about working contextually and developing effective relationships with local counterparts. This creates tensions and responses that ultimately compromise the substance of local ownership.

Some donors are more flexible in their approach to fostering local ownership: for example, Danish development agency DANIDA supported 15 civil society organisations (CSOs) in Kenya – a combination of religious-based and development organisations – which in turn decided which activities were most appropriate for local security needs. The CSOs were also able to decide on partnerships including for example armed youth, mosque preachers and terror suspects, many of which would have been excluded in a typical donor programme (Pinnington 2014). In another example, the UK's Department of International Development (DfID) decided to shift from its traditional donor/funder role to that of a facilitator in Nigeria when it supported the State Accountability and Voice Initiative. The initiative is a model of facilitated multi-stakeholder engagement which builds the capacity of civil society, media and parliament to work with the government on issues concerning local communities.

Another aspect of choosing local counterparts is the pressure to partner with those organisations which have the capacity to implement the programs and which 'speak the same language' as donors. This tends to privilege established, urban based non-governmental organisations, which do not necessarily enjoy the trust of the local population or of other actors, or whose actions may ultimately work at cross purpose with the peacebuilding objectives. The EU also tends to follow such an approach in its support for established NGOs. In so doing, the potentially much stronger impact that engagement with local groups and organisations embedded in dense local networks could have on mobilising local resources in support of peacebuilding and conflict prevention is foregone.

From the ownership perspective, the timing of intervention and local engagement is of particular importance; there is some evidence of international actors, mostly non-governmental organisations such as IVK Pax Christi in DRC, engaging in building network infrastructure prior to the start of the program which allegedly contributed to good partnership in project

implementation (Pishchikova 2014).⁵ Another process-related obstacle to inclusion of the local actors and perspectives arises out of the dynamic of the decision making processes whereby there are long periods during which no local input is required compared to incidence of major decisions which require consultation with large number of actors.

Donors' internal monitoring and evaluation procedures also work against promoting local ownership as a 'variable' that is intangible, and hard to measure, particularly given the limited timeframe of most interventions. Peacebuilding and conflict interventions are often too short to assess the extent to which they achieved their goals in terms of impact and sustainability, and the metrics applied are often inappropriate. Although many donors and implementing organizations tend to run surveys to assess the effects of their activities on local communities, there are problems with the format of some surveys and their content. The point was made that findings of 'impact' surveys are insufficiently used to address the problems captured by such exercise (the problem of ineffective feedback mechanisms). The practitioners also expressed a view that among some major organizations working on peacebuilding and conflict prevention, there is no real interest in regular monitoring through large surveys. At best, in some cases, this amounts to a formal procedure and not as establishing an evidence base to adjust the programs and their instruments. Many interventions take place without baseline surveys in place against which to assess progress. Safeworld is an example of good practice in conducting community-based surveys, independent of local authorities and by identifying target groups through a systematic scoping process, which are then used to inform the design of its programs.

2.2 Local ownership seen through the lens of a Whole-of-Society approach

Research among the local beneficiaries of external peacebuilding interventions provided a different perspective on the challenge of operationalising a norm of local ownership. In this perspective our interest was to understand foremost the nature of local society, rather than simply analyse conceptual and process questions about 'ownership' and how it can be achieved, particularly as these emanate principally as challenges from external rather than local stakeholders, thus potentially providing an uneven picture of the problems associated with the practice of local ownership. In unpacking the local, we sought to identify groups and sites of agency with the potential to influence civilian peacebuilding outcomes, over both short and longer time frames; to understand how their perceptions of the conflict shaped the development of the conflict space; examine the methods and means they use in responding to the conflict; and their expectations towards external actors.

Our first observation was that external peacebuilding tends to focus on and privilege a relatively narrow group of locals, which can be characterised as government and non-government elites, while marginalising important constituencies which are outside these

⁵ Prior to the start of the project to support the Community-based Security Dialogue Commissions, IKV Pax Christi launched a network of local NGOs, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church to provide training to local community leaders and raise local people's awareness of security issues, so that when the actual programme commenced, there was already local partner familiar with the program and in possession of skills and knowledge for its implementation (ibid: 18-19).

categories. This is reinforced by the use of capacity building as a key policy component in EU intervention which focuses on government officials and the NGO sector, and delimits target beneficiaries to those who are able to apply for and implement external donor programmes. This finding is consistent with comments by external practitioners that the identification of local partners is problematic and tends to favour a small elite group of CSOs. Our research identified two types of groups in particular which are under-acknowledged by external interventions, yet are significant in terms of representing an important aspect of agency in the conflict space, in their abilities to mobilise other social groups, and in generating particular conflict responses, which may be outside the parameters of external peacebuilding. The WOSCAP paper 'Multi-stakeholder coherence in EU peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts' also problematizes this aspect of EU peacebuilding from a different, complementary perspective of how failure to engage with these important stakeholders impedes implementation of the Comprehensive Approach (Simon and Benrais, 2016).

2.2.1 Business and faith groups

The private sector's role in peacebuilding was first explicitly mentioned in the UN 2012 annual peace report, some 20 years after peacebuilding was articulated as part of the UN mandate in the context of the UN's "An Agenda for Peace". From the perspective of local ownership as part of a Whole of Society approach, three factors behind the low profile of the private sector merit particular attention. The first is how private business is perceived by other social actors. There is a general view that private business occupies a distinctive and delimited social space, in relation to both the state and to local communities. It arouses scepticism and mistrust based on a belief that it is an actor principally concerned with the protection and advancement of its self-interest. The marginalisation of private business in peacebuilding also has to do with how business views its own role, and its preference to avoid engaging with broader efforts to stabilise society under the pretext of preserving its apolitical status. This is reinforced by the competition ethos and the tendency of private companies to operate in silos, disconnected from each other. A third reason is that peacebuilding interventions see business as having a narrow remit of generating economic growth, and providing jobs and livelihoods to the local population. Although EU-supported policy reforms aim to encourage economic growth as a fundamental aspect of peacebuilding, through improving the business environment and stimulating investment, they do not seek a more comprehensive involvement of business in processes of social, justice and governance reform.

A growing body of scholarship on conflict and peacebuilding has questioned many of the misconceptions, biases and voids regarding the role of private sector in peacebuilding. What emerges from this literature is that the private sector is uniquely embedded in local society, with links across all levels of society which can be harnessed for peacebuilding goals in a variety of ways, while recognising that they can equally be deployed in the pursuit of particularistic interests and undermine peace (Killick at all, 2005:5-6; Ganson and Wennmann 2016; Ballentine and Nitzschke 2005). Conflicts and crisis entail processes of social change shaped by contextual idiosyncrasies, of which the private sector is an integral part (Duffield 2007, Sexsmith 2009). It needs to be recognised that companies are often in the front line of security provision during both hot conflict and its aftermath. Oil company Total gave the example in Yemen that the only international representative on the ground after the Arab

Spring were the security officials from oil companies. This creates huge expectations on the part of local communities not only in relation to continued employment but other forms of protection.⁶

Although colloquial use of the term 'sector' suggests a unity of purpose and interests, in reality the private sector is highly diverse and harbours different agendas which are ignored by the external actors' blanket approach to supporting economic development and growth. The experience of contemporary conflict worldwide demonstrates that sub-national level is often a site where private sector plays a more versatile role and cooperates with other actors, particularly local governments and civil society. Among international organisations, UNDP and UNESCO in particular focus their work on local area development which in a conflict context provides a framework for more effective mobilisation of resources that are available at the local level towards peacebuilding. European Commission followed a similar (and in a local context innovative) approach in support of local peace initiative in Colombia in the form of Peace Laboratories as part of the program of development and peace. Peace Laboratories, which came as a response to strong lobbying by local civil society, work through cooperation with business community and combine development, humanitarian support, service provision and training (Castaneda 2014).

⁶ Presentation Hubert de Bremond, Total, Civil Society Dialogue Network, "*Private Sector and Conflict*", 29 October 2012, Brussels.

Private sector in Ukraine

In Ukraine's conflict, the private sector is fulfilling a number of roles which are critical to the broad agenda of governance reform, mitigation of insecurity and development. The conflict has triggered a backlash against the oligarchs who dominated the economy and new forms of activism among business actors have emerged. The Ukraine Business Association is working on improving governance standards and countering the country's reputation for corruption, as part of a broad agenda of national renewal outlined in the New Vision Statement, which emerged in response to the Maidan revolution. The Association draws on support from diaspora, has expanded its international contacts and collaboration, and thereby strengthened its standing with government. Businessmen were among the leading figures of the Maidan, leading to a dual identity as both commercial and social/political actors as well as having a capacity to forge networks across business and other societal domains. At present the links between business and communities and civil society organisations are only partially developed. In the government controlled territories in western Ukraine, there is some interest in collaborating with the civil society organisations working on employment of internally displaced people (IDPs). Companies are important in providing employment for IDP's, many take advantage of a government scheme giving them tax relief with an emphasis on providing jobs for women IDPs. In the separatist territories, larger businesses including a number of international companies, provide a lifeline to populations by maintaining production and continuing to pay wages. There is a common concern among business on both sides of the de-facto border over rising criminality in response to the disruption of the legal economy, a problem with potential for long lasting consequences on governance and economic development. The European Business Association, representing 900 companies has received support from the EU Delegation and works on trying to resolve many of the operational difficulties caused by the conflict, with companies displaced from the east suffering cash flow problems and re-registration difficulties. However the Association has had little opportunity to participate in the dialogue for the resolution of the crisis in Ukraine⁷ Smaller companies and those located in peripheral areas of the country remain even more marginalised from organised peacebuilding initiatives.

Religious organisations share some of the characteristics of the private sector in terms of their relevance to improving the quality of interaction between external peacebuilding and local society. Religion, like business, tends to be framed predominantly in terms of a conflict driver, rather than treating religious groups as a discrete category of political actor with agency in some of the key processes and components of conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Hertog 2010; Coward and Smith 2004). In this vein, a study of the Orthodox church in Georgia and Ukraine emphasised the politicisation of the Moscow patriarchate, and cited the behaviour of key church officials in disputed territories such as South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Donbas in terms of conflict analysis, while largely overlooking how church operations shape ongoing responses to the conflicts (Zdioruk and Haran 2012).

Although faith groups often command a public profile in formal (and informal) processes of multi-track diplomacy, they are less visible in other areas of comprehensive approaches such as SSR and governance reform. Despite an increasing vein of scholarship and practitioner

⁷ The Association conducted a survey in 2016 among its members as evidence to the government about the difficulties the companies face because of the conflict.

literature on religious peacebuilding (Kulska 2015; Hayward Cox & Philpott 2003; Johnston & Sampson 1994), many authors have remarked on the untapped potential of religious organisations in the conflict space as a 'reservoir' of opportunities, and remarking on the 'unrecognised, ridiculed, reduced or ignored' role of all faith structures in rebuilding conflict affected societies (Hertog 2010; Simon and Benrais 2016).

In contrast to the 'universalist' and secular tone which characterises external peacebuilding interventions, and indeed the official position of government and civil society as secular in many countries (see the example of Mali in Silvestri and Mayall 2015), spiritual and confessional orientations are significant within the local population and may be critical in determining local attitudes and behaviour. In Mali, similar to many other conflict-affected countries, despite an official position of state secularism, public space has become increasingly confessionalised with the growth of religious associations, schools and organisations, an increase in media coverage and the use of media for religious messages, the participation of religious leaders in political debates, and a more active role of women in religious life (Sommerfeldt, Hatloy and Jesnes 2016).

Religious affiliation may be synonymous with a sense of duty to community and is therefore a valuable building block in initiatives from reconciliation to security sector reform and the development of good governance (Hertog 2010:13). The example of EU support for the peace and development programmes in Colombia showed the significance of working with the church as a stable institution which mirrored local society to create a channel independent of the state, and which challenged the idea of the unitary state in favour of working with component including regional parts of Colombian society (Castaneda 2014: 160).

It is important to distinguish between initiatives which focus on the juxtaposition of faith and conflict and those which leverage the civil authority of faith groups. Here there are notable examples of European Catholic groups such as Pax Christi and Sant'Egidio organising local religious groups in Uganda and Mozambique (Haynes 2009; Simon and Benrais 2016), and authors who have drawn attention to the comparative advantage of religious leaders in conducting conflict mediation (Johnston and Sampson 2004).

Another common feature between the private sector and faith groups is that both complain of the poor quality of dialogue with their own government. In Ukraine, while Ukrainian Council of Churches is an established interlocutor of government, it also regulates access to political decision-making. It has not accepted new members in 10 years. Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist organisations have been repeatedly blocked from joining by existing members of the Council, so feel their voice is not being heard. This includes the Islamic community, with more than 1.5 million followers, being refused permission by the Ministry of Defence for its chaplains to provide spiritual assistance to the army on the ground that it is not a member of the Council. In this way, inclusive peacebuilding also depends on the complex relations within local society, problems of representativeness of local political institutions and persistent power struggles between local groups.⁸

⁸ Interview, Said Ismagilov, Mufti of Muslims of Ukraine, Kiev 8 September, 2016.

2.2.2 Practice patterns of local peacebuilders

Similarly, to the private sector, religion can be seen as a site of significant social practice. In the case of religious groups, in addition to the confessional and associative dimension of their presence, their related activities also mean they deploy additional leverage over life at the grass roots. The Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine controls 10,500 priests and deacons, schools and 400 print and electronic media. The church has an estimated annual income of over \$750m cash from sources as diverse as agriculture, tourism, construction (Zdioruk and Haran 2012: 60).

Religious groups constitute an integral part of social capital. In the case of Ukraine this is evidenced by the emergence of volunteer brigades, drawn from churchgoers, which have played an important role in addressing human security needs in eastern Ukraine. 'Save Ukraine' is a fusion of religiously and nationally motivated individuals, which was formed in 2015 to distribute humanitarian assistance, and which is able to bridge the de facto political boundary between the disputed territories under the control of separatist groups, and the rest of Ukraine. According to director Igor Webava: "We go where the pain is to proclaim the truth of God and restore what is damage. Our activity is based on Christian moral values".⁹ The brigade has grown from 30 volunteers to over 120 in 24 locations. Volunteers are all ages, many of them are those who have previously been displaced from the disputed territories.

The volunteer phenomenon is not only present among religious groups, but stems from civic mobilisation around the Maidan Euro-revolution of 2014, and the passion with which all sectors of Ukrainian society want to express their national identity. Technology and particularly social media have provided the means to connect these groups in real-time, and it is this connectivity and mobilisation which has become a powerful social force within responses to the conflict.

This leads to our second finding, that local society in the context of conflict and post-conflict is highly mobile and fluid. It is empowered by modern communications to create ad hoc coalitions, which shift according to circumstance. It responds to conflict in immediate ways, and is quickly able to also adapt its responses, meaning that funding and strategic priorities have a relatively short life-cycle. In this they are often at odds with the donor schedules of external actors including the EU. Local groups expressed frustration at funding parameters which tend to favour medium term programmes rather than initiatives which are more in synch with the rapid evolution of events on the ground. Small and short-term projects which target specific groups, for example older women, disabled former combatants or those traumatised by conflict and requiring psychological help to re-enter the workforce, often do not conform to the indicators foreign donors apply to programming. Similarly, there appears to be a gap in addressing the variable geography of conflict-related issues – social justice, human rights and opportunities may be more problematic in small towns and villages than in larger population centres.

On the other hand, local activists look to the EU and other international organisations for high-level political support to endorse their initiatives and underpin their ability to raise funding from a variety of sources, rather than wanting the EU itself to set programme priorities and modalities. An example is the Employment Center for IDPs established by a group of

⁹ Interview Kiev, 8 September, 2016.

Maidan activists, which began as a Facebook page. The Center worked with ECHO and received financial support from the EU, but mostly appreciated the EU's political backing for its work in Crimea due to the strategic sensitivities of the situation there. Center staff said that it was important to have EU Delegation support and advocacy. At the same time these activists were concerned that EU donor priorities, in common with other external actors, 'missed the point' of the conflict by focusing on reconciliation issues, which are seen by locals as 'artificial', and targeting eastern Ukraine at the expense of supporting IDPs across the country.¹⁰

The fluid and highly connective nature of local activism not only shapes the universe of local counterparties, including the emergence of 'new' actors. It also has a bearing on the type of practices in the conflict space. Drawing on the example of Ukraine, the volunteer brigades began by providing food aid but, inspired by their religious beliefs, they also offer moral and spiritual support. Responding to the trauma experienced by IDPs and those still trapped in border areas, the volunteers expanded their service to give practical advice about relocation, and an outlet for stories and psychological counselling to displaced people. As well as demonstrating an ethics of care, it has political ramifications. The volunteers see it as their mission to change mind-sets and counter public attitudes which demonise people from east as Russian supporters. This kind of local response bridges between humanitarian aid and emergency response and longer term peacebuilding. The volunteer brigade is also looking at how to create jobs, and how to adapt to a prolongation of the conflict in terms of (re)training people and developing alternative livelihoods. Particularly in cases where there are huge movements of population – such as in Georgia, Ukraine and Yemen as a result of the conflict, the challenges of engaging with rapidly changing demographics as well as being adaptable to a constantly shifting reality on the ground is an important aspect of local ownership in practice, which determines the effectiveness of traditional interventions by the EU and other actors. For example, the task of holding elections in eastern Ukraine is hampered by the organisational problem of 70,000 unregistered voters and over 100,000 registered voters who are now on the Russian side of the border.

Unofficial and ad hoc coalitions between different groups increase the possibilities for penetrating remote locations and areas where access is difficult and communications fluctuate, either as a result of 'hot' conflict or because of cultural barriers around marginalised groups, who could be designated as 'aware but inactive publics' in the context of civilian peacebuilding. The EU has fewer strategies to deal with these publics whose characteristics are a mix of high knowledge, reticence, potential influence, and low involvement (cf Hallahan 2000:510). This is exacerbated by the fact that EU presence in sites of conflict tends to be restricted to the capital city and there is often reluctance to establish field offices or staff remote outposts. This reduces the chance to access not only reliable sources of information about constantly changing events on the ground, but build systems of 'proxies' who can mediate between inactive publics and externally determined policy pathways. Given the nature of contemporary conflicts we examined in Ukraine, Georgia, DRC, Mali and Colombia, where active conflict is confined to particular parts of the country, while the capital may be relatively stable, this physical and affective 'distance' between external practitioners and conflict affected populations limits the possibilities for building effective social capital around the peacebuilding process.

¹⁰ Focus group interview members of Employment Center, Kiev 8 September 2016.

Another finding from the field is that outlier groups of local activists, whatever their motivation (for example religious or business), provide effective bridging activities between humanitarian assistance at the sharp end of active conflict and underlying reforms to embed peace; between medium and longer-term assistance. The issue of sequencing of civilian peacebuilding has long been identified as a key policy and practice challenge (Moore 2013; Bryden, Donais and Hanggi 2005). Small local actors are well placed to implement transitional activities. Typically mobilised initially around humanitarian and emergency assistance, which underpins their credibility and access to groups with extreme human security needs, they subsequently adapt their activities and services through their proximate knowledge of next steps required. They are not only examples of pragmatic sequencing, their activities also reflect the interlinked nature of threats to conflict-affected populations (food insecurity, lack of livelihood, lack of dignity, potential for corrupt behaviour), and as such are an important sounding board for international peacebuilders. In the case of religious groups in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which suffer persistent human rights harassment by the local Russian-backed authorities, they also serve as early warning posts for sites of growing confrontation and social tension.

3. Conclusions

A Whole of Society perspective suggests that local ownership could be reframed as a deep engagement or thick dialogue between locals and external peacebuilders which takes account of the multiple positions each constituency adopts towards the conflict, including the presence of perverse and conflictual relationships between local peacebuilding actors, and in turn seeks to leverage this complexity as a form of social capital of peacebuilding. In this report we question how effectively EU policies map onto this local diversity, and complexity and how they chime with local response mechanisms. The dynamics and relations between local actors continually mold and reshape the conflict environment presenting a more fundamental challenge for the EU and other externally led initiatives than just developing more effective processes of consultation, participation and accountability with selected civil society and policy constituencies.

While not suggesting that it is practical or possible for external peacebuilders to include and encompass every individual group or faction in local society, by focusing on the examples of the private sector and religious organisations, we have shown the presence and significance of a dense and complex local ecology of conflict responses, conflict perceptions and expectations, which currently is not reflected in EU interventions in areas like multi-track diplomacy or governance and capacity building. The examples of these two marginalised groups of local actors, also demonstrate that it is important to recognise not only proximate actors in the conflict space such as NGOs and government elites, but also mid-range actors who can bridge between grassroots and elite levels, provide different kind of information about the conflict, alongside more variegated and adaptable responses.

Our Whole of Society perspective does not assume that the transformation of all elements of society is either possible or necessary. Such an assumption is bound to lead to failure as Castaneda points out in the example of Colombia (Castaneda 2014:7). Each stakeholder approaches the conflict and adopts a strategy in relation to peace, depending on context specific objectives, the availability of means and their relationship to other actors. Neither is a Whole of Society approach necessarily about seeking the consensus and reconciliation of different and opposing interests, rather finding frameworks which acknowledge these, particularly in situations where local politics and government fail to do so.

The diversity and the fluid nature of the local context pose a challenge to fixed parameter programming with large-scale objectives and benchmarks. Hence existing approaches to local ownership fail to capture – or sometimes even acknowledge – not only the deep-seated difficulties of aligning with local society, but also ignore its creative possibilities.

What a deeper engagement with local society can do is look for appropriate and effective spaces of action (Castañeda 2014:2)¹¹ in which more constructive and dynamic interactions between locals and externals can occur, and which provide room for the imagination of local populations towards their own future (Castañeda 2014:16; Lederach 1997).

¹¹ Reich has made a related argument in proposing 'learning sites'. (Reich 2006)

Among the challenges for a Whole of Society approach to local ownership is that extending the range of local counterparties with whom the EU works may raise other issues and ethical dilemmas, as also highlighted by Simon and Benrais. For example, the patriarchal imprint of most religions whose leaders tend to be men could exclude by default women and other important segments of the population. Similarly, in dealing with the private sector, complex issues of trust, impartiality and credibility arise.

A Whole of Society approach also has to recognise that local stakeholders may engage in 'low definition' but high instrumentalisation' meaning that they will act upon their perceptions and needs in relation to the conflict without necessarily articulating or analysing these perceptions, thus short-circuiting more in-depth and reflexive peacebuilding initiatives

In sum, the Whole of Society perspective suggests that the promise of local ownership in international interventions is best served when engagement with beneficiary populations recognises a diversity of views, perceptions and expectations, seeks ways to mobilise the versatile resources and capabilities existing in domestic societies, and complements them. This requires frameworks that allow each party to work to the best of its capacity and which in turn are contingent on regular, meaningful and sustained interaction in which the values of mutuality, trust, dialogue and accountability are respected by all those involved.

4. Recommendations

- Greater contextual awareness through ongoing 'real-time' analysis based on continuous strong local knowledge inputs.
- Systematic and ongoing mapping of local stakeholders and local capacities as part of the design of peacebuilding projects/initiatives.
- A review of mechanisms for supporting local stakeholders, and facilitating their cooperation.
- Facilitating spaces (physical and virtual) for systematic participation.
- Enforcement of the principle of accountability for all stakeholders and improvements to context- and process-specific indicators.
- Improve channels of communication, paying attention to the content and language of information circulated among different constituencies.

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