
Reflecting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

A summary of a global online
consultation with civil society

Organized by:

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF)
Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)
Peace Direct (PD)
United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs,
Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)

"The role of civil society in building sustainable peace is no longer debatable. The issue [of] knowing who, when, what and how to engage the wider spectrum of civil society organizations is very critical."

- Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, Tanzania, member of the group of Independent Eminent Persons selected to support the 2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture

Background

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Peace Direct and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs conducted a three-day online consultation entitled "Reflecting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace" on 2-4 June 2020. Representatives of civil society from across the world were invited to share their perspectives on peacebuilding and contribute their views and experiences.

The consultation was designed to focus in particular on what has changed since the adoption of the 2016 resolutions on the peacebuilding architecture (A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282), known informally as the 'sustaining peace' resolutions, with an emphasis on the impact of the support of the United Nations to peacebuilding at the field level. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how their peacebuilding work has been affected by COVID-19.

This discussion informed the 2020 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture and the (A/74/976–S/2020/773) review. The online consultation took place through Peace Direct's Platform4Dialogue online platform. Over 280 participants, from 97 countries logged in and engaged in a rich discussion and contributed more than 1,000 comments across three days. This report serves as a synthesis of this exchange and presents key messages and recommendations captured by the organizers.

Key messages and recommendations

Role of civil society in peacebuilding and sustaining peace:

The consultation highlighted that because of the close relationship to their communities and their sense of service, many civil society actors - including faith and community leaders, youth, academics, teachers, and volunteers - possess unique expertise that is critical to achieving peace. The role of civil society is essential to understand conflict dynamics, identify missing capacities, provide adequate peacebuilding support, and assess the impact of peacebuilding and sustaining peace. *"My country recently voted away a 22-year-old dictatorship. The country needed a transition and majority of the credit for that being possible belonged to [CSOs]. The CSOs in my country held peace building seminars and youth dialogues"* (Fatou Sarr).

For many, the strength of civil society organizations (CSOs) is in their role as *"front liners in peacebuilding, [who] have tremendous roles to play at the grass-roots where conflicts first sparks"* (Clement Iornongu). For a number of participants, a particularly important role for civil society is ensuring that all parts of communities are able to play a part in building peace - *"CSOs play a wide range of roles, some of which include facilitating dialogue on issues relevant to peacebuilding and peace, building capacity of local actors and communities in conflict prevention and conflict resolution, establishing and/or supporting community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, setting up and operating early warning systems, implementing advocacy initiatives with policy-makers and decision-makers, undertaking research and conflict analysis to inform the design of programs and interventions, ensuring the issues and priorities of marginalized and vulnerable segments of communities are addressed"* (Abdel-Rahman El Mahdi).

The message was conveyed that peace is more sustainable when peacebuilding is locally owned, led and implemented. *"I am convinced that the UN and local governments where these grassroots operate need not be privileged over local efforts. There is a danger in 'institutionalizing hierarchy', that is, when we think the UN and governments are the 'top' architects of peacebuilding"* (Eddah Mutua).

The participants also highlighted the need and the benefit brought by the establishment of inclusive platforms for dialogue to undertake joint analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict, while prioritising a people-centred response. *"We also have the Peace Architecture Dialogue platforms that bring all stakeholders from community leaders, local vigilante groups, youth and women leaders, community development associations, all security agencies and government representatives on the table to facilitate common understanding of the security challenges, conflict issues and collectively proffer solutions for the challenges"* (Chrisantus Lapang).

Recommendation: The United Nations should ensure that it consistently includes civil society experiences and expertise at all levels of work and activities. This would assist international actors to more accurately and effectively assess what risk and resilience factors need to be addressed, who are the actors best-positioned to do so at the local, national, regional, and international levels, and what complementary role the UN can play to support their efforts.

Impact of COVID-19 on peacebuilding and sustaining peace:

Participants expressed concern about the serious impact of the pandemic on peacebuilding, including restrictions to freedom of movement that are affecting peacebuilding efforts especially at the local level. *"The impact of COVID-19 on my peace building work has been enormous [...] most of our activities are community-based involving community gatherings and meetings for sensitization, dialogues, mediations"* (Lokwiya Francis).

Some organizations are continuing their engagement with local communities and encouraging them to interact with one another through social media. *"COVID-19 has impacted peacebuilding work negatively. Constant interactions are some of ways to enhance and maintain peace among local communities, but the restrictions imposed to fight against the spread of COVID-19 reduced interactions between communities. However, CSOs are continuing their engagements with the local communities encouraging the communities to interact with one another through social media and some of these activities are supported by the UN local peacebuilding office in Liberia"* (D. Nyandeh Sieh).

The gendered impact of COVID-19 was also highlighted, including both gender-based violence, and the potential that peacebuilding gains led by women could be lost. The analysis of women's experiences (both qualitative and quantitative) and their integration across all work on peace and security, development and human rights could bring attention to the factors that drive conflict

"COVID-19 has come to escalate existing situation of conflict and deepen discrimination against women and girls. Domestic violence and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence including rape and assault are on the rise as a result of the restriction of movements and forced isolations" (Queeneth Tawo).

Many participants also emphasized new opportunities presented by the pandemic. *"COVID-19 presents an amazing opportunity for the UN and its partners to foster a new partnership and explore new areas of focus"* (Ruby Quantson Davis). These opportunities included listening, observing and mapping local response to the pandemic; broadening the group of actors engaged in peacebuilding; and rethinking assumptions in development and peacebuilding work, including recognizing the important role of women peacebuilders. *"COVID-19 has created opportunities both at the conceptual level, and at the level of intervention and action. Conceptually, we need to re-think the human rights paradigm. It has shown us that civil, cultural, economic, environmental, political and social rights are all important and inter-connected"* (Mario Gomez).

Recommendation: International partners should "shift gears" and allow organizations to adapt existing programmes to respond to new needs emerging from the pandemic. Responses should not only focus on health and humanitarian aid but also on creating self-sufficiency and resilience. They need to be designed in a way that is conflict sensitive and will contribute to peace.

Recommendation: Enhance collaboration with national, regional and international stakeholders leading a COVID-19 response and fully support them in addressing community concerns, including domestic violence and gender-based violence which are reportedly increasing as a result of COVID-19.

Mental health:

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) were highlighted as important aspects of peacebuilding that need to be prioritized: *"People who are not well, are unlikely to contribute effectively and sincerely to the wellbeing of their community. CSOs know this. They are at the heart of linking PB and [mental health and psycho-social services] MHPSS"* (Friderike Bubenzer). Mental health was identified as of even greater concern as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: *"COVID-19 crisis has further highlighted the need for attention to -- and integration of -- mental health and psycho-social services into peacebuilding as a contributing factor to mitigating the displacement of aggression, contributing to collective (rather than just individual) transformative resilience, and to the sustaining peace agenda"* (Graeme Simpson).

Promoting mental health and psychosocial support services are crucial to the building and maintenance of peace. Communities and individuals are affected in different ways based on history, culture, gender, age, displacement, denial of rights, gender-based violence and more. Therefore, interventions need to be conceived in multi-disciplinary, conflict-sensitive, and culturally appropriate ways and implemented through capacity building and other technical support to local NGOs with expertise and experience at community and national levels.

Recommendation: Increase peacebuilding programming that includes mental health and psycho-social services and trauma healing outcomes. The United Nations could support funding for pilot projects to provide more substantive evidence in this key area.

Recommendation: Integrate mental health and psycho-social support into all peacebuilding efforts and ensure that they are contextually appropriate to the diverse needs of affected populations.

Recommendation: The United Nations could take leadership in signaling the importance of MHPSS as part of peacebuilding and integral to sustaining peace and could initiate new activities to build momentum for an international policy dialogue around the issue.

United Nations Support to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace:

Participants reflected on the ability of the United Nations to bring actors together, push for comprehensive solutions that include cross-pillar coherence, and support peace agreements and peace processes. The United Nations' authority and convening power can create spaces where both government and civil society actors are involved. Many participants saw value in the support of the UN to "high-level" activities, such as peace negotiations, humanitarian aid, or government-support, while also valuing UN approaches that benefited local actors, for example, supporting peaceful transition in The Gambia. *"[The] UN as an international actor has played role ensuring the sustainability of peace in countries. However, there is need for direct approach to the grassroots levels"* (Mable Chawinga). The consultation, however, highlighted that while the commitment to involve civil society in consultations and the steps undertaken by the United Nations to reform its approach are greatly appreciated, the engagement with local actors, in some contexts, remains limited and steps should be taken to ensure a more diverse range of voices are heard.

Recommendation: More consideration should be given to sustainability of local civil society organizations, including longer-term and more flexible funding.

Recommendation: Additional support is needed to advance education for peace, especially in insecure and conflict-affected countries.

Global policy frameworks:

In discussing the use of global policy frameworks, participants highlighted the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325 and 1820), Youth Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs 1, 4, 5, 10, and especially 16) as particularly useful in their work, including in programme design and in advocacy/sensitization activities. However, some said that the global policy frameworks found little resonance in their communities due to lack of knowledge or awareness. This could be addressed by more coordination between United Nations entities in the field and at intergovernmental levels to disseminate information more coherently and collectively.

United Nations strengthened engagement with civil society:

The recommendations of the 2018 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace were viewed by participants as successful in bringing attention to local peacebuilders and supporting establishment of good practices. Participants called for more meaningful approaches to be adopted with the involvement of civil society at the goal setting stage (and not merely at the implementation stage as implementing partners). Some participants expressed concerns at a seeming lack of progress or follow-through in achieving civil society inclusion and pointed to the need for a more robust system to monitor and incentivize implementation to address this. Beyond the United Nations, peacebuilding partnerships are important at all levels, from civil society coalitions at the local level to international partnerships and are an essential part of successful peacebuilding - *"Civil society tends to work in silos. Exploring greater collaboration and partnerships across different thematic areas [...] would add momentum to change"* (Mario Gomez).

Among the challenges was the complexity of the United Nations and wider global governance system, with many participants describing the difficulty they face in understanding how to meaningfully engage with the United Nations. This complexity is exacerbated by what many participants saw as excessive bureaucracy and red tape that "makes relations with civil society very difficult even at the national levels" (Luis Alvarado Bruzual). Many participants shared examples of the United Nations' successes in supporting peacebuilding in their contexts and highlighted specific areas where the United Nations played a positive role.

Recommendation: Partnerships should be built around the work that local peacebuilders are already doing in the community in order to complement local efforts.

Recommendation: The United Nations should further expand its outreach to include civil society actors based outside of capitals and those less organized.

Recommendation: The United Nations should enhance its focus on conflict prevention and social cohesion at grass-roots level.

Recommendation: The United Nations should see itself as an "equal partner" with local groups, *"systematically engaging them as experts and leaders in all peacebuilding initiatives at all stages of the process. [...] A good example is the development and publication of the UN's System-wide Community Engagement Guidelines for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace (CEG) [...]. The joint Civil Society-UN Working Group to develop these guidelines has been a truly innovative and groundbreaking undertaking that allowed for unprecedented avenues for civil society inclusion in the development of internal UN documents"* (Fatemah Maraghi).

Funding for local peacebuilding work:

The issue of funding was a common topic throughout the discussion. Participants highlighted the need for more equitable access to funding that seeks to address the difficulties local CSOs have in accessing funding and that creates a more level playing field between CSOs and INGOs. Participants also suggested the need for the United Nations to ensure that its engagement creates the conditions for CSOs to continue to be effective once United Nations support ends.

"If you distribute mosquitoes treated nets to the refugees, after a week you can monitor and see that the nets are being used and in the long run you find out that malaria infections have gone down, then you say good work because you are achieving very quick results. But when you mediate or dialogue on a civil conflict like in the case of the Lord's Resistance Army, sustainable peace is likely to return in two or three years and some donors believe it is a waste of time and resources. So more financial support should be channeled for peace building. Capacities for fundraising for financial sustainability for peace building work is highly required for us the CSOs and our government in Uganda. The... skills are still lacking for the CSOs and our government to raise finances locally from within the country and with this trend peacebuilding interventions cannot be sustainable" (Lokwiya Francis).

Recommendation: The United Nations engagement with civil society should be sustained over the longer term and not be based only on one-off events or consultations so as to develop ongoing, meaningful relationships that can enhance local peacebuilding work. When consultations occur, participants noted that follow up or information-sharing after workshops or campaigns should be improved.

Recommendation: Introduce more flexibility in funding and new opportunities that specifically target the needs of local civil society such as small grants for core funds, networking opportunities, training opportunities on accountability, reporting, communication, and a move away from a "one-size fits all" model of funding. The Peacebuilding Fund was mentioned by some participants as a good source of funding. Some participants noted progress toward more flexible and accessible funding that is more able to meet the needs of civil society. Some pointed to administrative barriers that make it difficult for small civil society organizations to apply. New funding models that reach smaller, local-level CSOs and peacebuilding organizations are needed.

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is a non-governmental organisation established in 1962 in memory of the second UN Secretary-General, which aims to advance dialogue and policy for sustainable development and peace.

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Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)

The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict is a network of hundreds of civil society organisations from around the world and what unites them all is a dedication to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

gppac.net

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Peace Direct

Peace Direct works with local people to stop violence and build sustainable peace. We believe that local people should lead all peacebuilding efforts.

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UN Peacebuilding Support Office

The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs fosters international support for nationally-owned and led peacebuilding efforts. The Office assists the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), manages the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) on behalf of the Secretary-General, and works to enhance system-wide coherence and partnerships with UN and non-UN actors to back building and sustaining peace in relevant countries. PBSO was established in 2005.

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