



For Youth and By Youth: Re-Imagining Financing for Peacebuilding

December 2021



A Network of People
Building Peace

Introduction and Background

As the largest global network of local peacebuilders, GPPAC has been committed to recognising young people, in all their diversities, as leaders, partners and agents for peace. At all levels, we aim to support youth-led organisations, networks and initiatives. The inclusion of young peacebuilders has consistently been a cross-cutting priority of our network, from its genesis in 2005 until the most recent formulation of our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.

If we - international, regional, national and local communities - do not succeed in recognising and meaningfully including young people as agents for peace, then we will not realise conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

This paper presents some of the key challenges that young peacebuilders face in acquiring financial support for their work, and offers an alternative approach to address these challenges and to re-imagine current funding mechanisms towards participatory grant-making approaches that are created for young peacebuilders and run by young peacebuilders. It serves as a resource for the international community to engage with learning on participatory grantmaking that has proven to be a successful and impactful practice to support local ownership and leadership of young local peacebuilders.

Young Peacebuilders As Champions for Peace

As affirmed by Security Council Resolution 2250, youth – making up the largest segment of the population – play a critical role in sustaining peace, preventing conflict and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. As the future of the global population, youth are at the forefront of building the foundation for a peaceful next generation. Today, we see youth playing unique roles in peacebuilding processes as mobilisers, as researchers, as campaigners and as community leaders. Uniquely, they foster peer-to-peer peacebuilding action, and given the grassroots nature of many youth-led organisations, they have access to the most vulnerable populations in local communities. These important, even essential, contributions made by young peacebuilders require sustainable support that takes their unique situations into consideration.

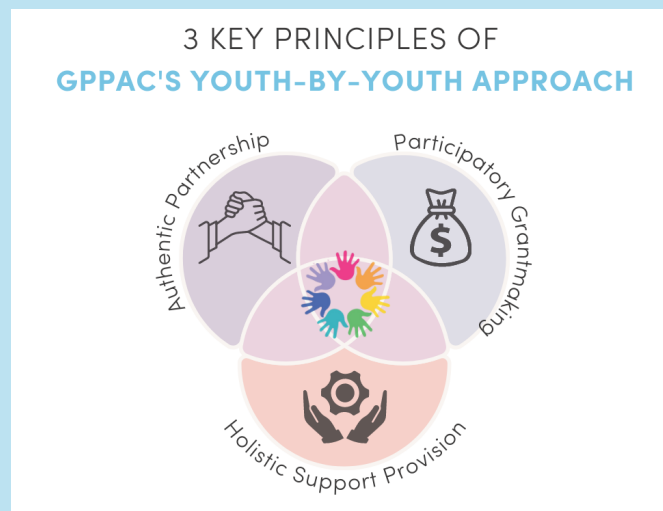
Most youth-led peacebuilding organisations are still only modestly funded or do not have access to funding at all, having to rely on volunteerism, and with few resources that inform them on how to appease this reality.

While progress has been made in recognising the contribution of youth in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, still there are several barriers faced by young peacebuilders when it comes to accessing and acquiring necessary support for their work. Prominently, the lack of quality and quantity financing for peacebuilding is true for all actors but is especially magnified for young peacebuilders. First, the current grantmaking framework – with cumbersome processes and extensive eligibility criteria – specifically affects young peacebuilders due to the absence of an established track record, among other requirements. The donor community rarely consults with young peacebuilders about the barriers they face in accessing funding, therefore, perpetuating the lack of informed financial strategies and limiting further local ownership. Furthermore, a trust gap between young people and their governments, multilateral organisations, and even international NGOs has further limited the capacity of youth to engage in peacebuilding. In efforts to address these barriers through intermediary models adopted in partnership between ‘adult’ or ‘more professionalised’ CSOs and youth organisations, it was found that these partnerships did not allow youth organisations to truly overcome challenges in accessing support due to unequal power relations and perpetuating of biased assumptions and perceptions of youth.

As a result, youth organisations participating in such partnerships did not experience benefits of ownership, space to grow their organisational capacities and track record, as they desired, thus prolonging their dependency on the mentioned CSOs.

Getting Serious About Youth Ownership: Participatory Grantmaking for Youth by Youth

In an effort to address the challenges outlined above, in 2018, GPPAC's Youth Peace and Security (YPS) Working Group founded a Small Grants Scheme. Beyond providing support for innovative ideas of young peacebuilders across the network by alleviating administrative hurdles, this funding scheme was uniquely designed based on a Youth-by-Youth Approach, meaning young people were in the lead of designing and allocating the small grants to their peers. The adopted approach prioritises the ownership of youth and amplifies the capacities of the recipients.



1. The principle of **participatory grant-making** is employed to ensure that young peacebuilders, who are the most affected by fund disbursement, are granted decision-making power.
2. The **principle of authentic partnership** which seeks to reduce the risk of perpetuating a top-down approach to identifying priorities by utilising local knowledge and supporting capacity building and knowledge exchange.
3. The **principle of holistic support provision** emphasises support beyond money and encourages the process of co-creation and capacity building between the donor and the grantee and mutual responsibility of outcomes.

The Principle of Participatory Grantmaking (Process)

The Small Grants Scheme exemplifies participatory grant-making where youth peacebuilders and donors engage in a process of co-creation for the formulation of calls for proposals. With donors assuming a role of support rather than control, youth recipients are able to craft eligibility criteria and funding priorities in a way that best addresses local needs rather than donor objectives. Having youth take the lead on this scheme ensures that young applicants can engage with a donor who understands their needs. Support, on part of the grantor, is provided to youth peacebuilders to help strengthen their grant applications and share relevant information to ensure that youth peacebuilders are able to clearly understand the guidelines and develop flexible models of donorship. Such a partnership between the intermediary donor and local youth organisations compounds their collective effort, as they are assumed to be equally interested in the projects' success and bring their comparative advantages in its pursuit. Therefore, this principle presumes that funds will end up going where they can make the most impact.

In GPPAC's scenario, the members of the YPS Working Group voted to form a core group of grantors, consisting of four people, to be in the lead of establishing the application process and allocation of small grants. When applications were reviewed, the core group members even supported the writing process together with grantees to ensure a better understanding of the specific grant requirements and support in making the applications stronger, building capacity to develop project proposals. In return, this process made young peacebuilders develop an enhanced understanding of the position of the donor and explore jointly flexible models of donorship.

Important Elements:

- Young peacebuilders should have ownership of funding division and allocation to ensure resources go to where they are needed most;
- Grantor and Grantee decide on shared priorities together. Donor and peacebuilder relationships must move beyond purely financial partnerships to encapsulate shared goals that are achieved by capitalising on the comparative advantages that each party offers;
- Funding instruments must be highly flexible, simple and unearmarked. Eligibility criteria, application procedures and reporting requirements should not be overly complicated and burdensome, with a focus on collective learning.

The Principle of Authentic Partnership (Power Dynamics)

The small grants scheme advances the principle of authentic partnership based on: 1) designing and managing participatory resource allocation processes with local organisations as primary implementers and with INGOs providing administrative oversight; 2) working with local organisations and their networks to conduct capacity-building needs assessments and then helping them meet those needs; 3) exchanging knowledge and facilitating access to global, regional and cross-border expertise for local organisations; and, 4) prioritising long-term, trusting partnerships, rather than short-term collaborations between INGOs and local organisations for a specific grant process.

GPPAC has applied the principle of authentic partnerships to projects carried out under the Small Grants Scheme. One example can be seen in the case of the Generation Peace Youth Network in the Philippines where youth peacebuilders advocated for the meaningful inclusion of youth in the design of national programmes for young people. By providing flexible and easily-accessible funding and ensuring meaningful participation throughout all stages of engagement and planning, these young peacebuilders were able to strengthen their advocacy and leadership while offering an inspiring example to be replicated elsewhere. INGOs can better support such practises and increase their implementation by bolstering youth-led organisations without dominating the strategies of local engagement. Ensuring adherence to the principles of authentic partnership is critical to boosting the power of youth peacebuilders to determine funding allocation and project design.

Important Elements:

- A supportive rather than controlling role of the donor increases the capacity of youth peacebuilders without perpetuating top-down action;
- Unequal power dynamics between the grantor and the donor should be addressed;
- All grantors should break with the presumption of an inherent risk when engaging with young local peacebuilders;
- Communicating information in a coherent and transparent manner prevents the exclusion of youth peacebuilders to the sidelines and contributes to capacity building which increases youth peacebuilders' self-sufficiency and sustainability of efforts.

The Principle of Holistic Support Provision (Package of Services)

To circumnavigate the barriers for youth organisations to access financial support in the long-term, INGOs and youth-focused CSOs can establish sustainable, strategic partnerships with youth-led organisations, going beyond merely financial commitments to ensure a holistic provision of support. This includes providing a “package” of technical and networking support that can enhance their organisational capacities as well as providing access to key policy spaces without forcing them to operate as “adult” organisations. Funds coupled with joint advocacy engagement can amplify and provide space for multi-stakeholder learning, exchange and action.

Beyond the financial support, for GPPAC Small Grant recipient Building Blocks for Peace, the provision of technical support, ment that they were able to grow their organisational capacities, specifically enhancing their reporting and management capacities. In addition, through network support and advocacy opportunities they were able to raise more visibility and recognition for their work. Along with their enhanced track record, this has led to new partnerships with different stakeholders and access to more funding opportunities for their work.

Important Elements:

- All grantors and grantees should prioritise the reciprocal sharing of information and non-financial resources to ensure shared learning;
- The grantors should be available to provide any services that are required by the grantee and within the capacity of the donor to provide;
- INGOs and youth-focused CSOs should share advocacy opportunities and provide access to key policy spaces for youth-led organisations.

The Impact of the Youth-by-Youth Approach

Through the GPPAC Small Grants scheme, young peacebuilders achieved meaningful and sustainable results in their respective communities. An outstanding example of this is the impact story of Building Blocks for Peace, a Youth-led organisation based in Nigeria.

“I was not expecting it, I thought it was not happening this year [...] I am very happy, this is a very big achievement for the YPS Agenda in Nigeria and we hope to serve as inspiration for other countries.”

- Rafiu Lawal, Executive Director of Building Blocks for Peace about the Project “Raising Visibility - Advancing Change: #NigeriaYouth4Peace”

When GPPAC member Building Blocks for Peace received their first small grant in 2019, the youth, peace and security agenda was still only marginally known and understood in Nigeria, despite initial efforts to raise visibility to the agenda since 2016. Through the Small Grants, Building Blocks for Peace’s efforts finally gained traction as they were able to organise the 2019 Nigeria Youth4Peace forum. The objective of this forum was to bring together various important stakeholders to discuss and raise awareness on YPS issues in the country. Scholars, representatives of different ministries, and the public all attended to explore strategies of localising the YPS agenda and strengthening youth participation in peacebuilding.

During the Youth 4 Peace Forum, participants learned how to effectively advocate and monitor the implementation of the YPS Agenda. As a result of the Youth4Peace Forum, the Nigeria Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security was established in December 2019, - a first-time initiative involving over 60 organisations to jointly advocate for youth security issues in Nigeria.

As a next step, developing a draft for a National Action Plan (NAP) on YPS was placed as one of the main priorities of the Coalition, leading to organising events and presenting documents to raise awareness on youth-led peacebuilding.

In 2020, upon the realisation that there was little tangible material on the impact of youth-led peacebuilding in Nigeria and the wider African continent to support the Coalition’s advocacy efforts, a second application to the GPPAC Small grants fund was developed.

Under the coordination of Building Block for Peace, various members of the Coalition as well as external stakeholders (including WANEP-Nigeria and the African Union Youth, Peace and Security Africa Program) supported the publication of the research paper “Connecting and Amplifying Voices of Youth Building Peace in Nigeria”. Setting a precedent in the region as being the only youth-led research on YPS, the paper is used as reference material for all those interested in learning more about youth peacebuilding and UNSCR 2250 within the context of Nigeria and Africa. On top of this, the publication contributed as a key resource to the mobilisation and awareness-raising of stakeholders, non-governmental and government actors for the adoption of the NAP on YPS.

Furthermore, GPPAC’s Small Grants Funding Scheme inspired Building Blocks for Peace to initiate a similar approach, launching a micro-grants scheme to support more youth-led CSOs across the country. Even through smaller awards of only 100-120 USD, they witness how the recipient youth organisations make an impact in their communities and further their organisational development.

In November this year, Rafiu Lawal - executive director of Building Blocks for Peace - received the marvellous news that after all their tireless efforts, Nigeria was becoming the first country in Africa, and second in the world after Finland, to adopt a National Action Plan on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.

Recommendations

Together, we must transform Youth, Peace and Security commitments into local implementation, to invoke positive sustainable change in our communities. This can only be achieved, if impactful financing is rooted in supporting young local peacebuilders, who champion peace daily, even with limited resources. Their efforts for conflict prevention and sustaining peace can truly be advanced, by committing to innovate financing models based on the principled youth-by-youth approach:

- **Employ the principle of participatory grant-making** by ensuring youth have ownership of funding allocation, with grantor and grantee deciding on shared priorities together, operating under funding instruments that are highly flexible, simple and unearmarked;
- **Apply principles of authentic partnership** by ensuring grantors/intermediaries take on a supportive rather than controlling role, dedicating efforts to assess and address unequal power dynamics, break with the presumption of an inherent risk when engaging with young local peacebuilders, and communicating information in a coherent and transparent manner;
- **Ensure the provision of holistic support** by encouraging young people to be at the forefront of project implementation and coordination; prioritise the reciprocal sharing of information and non-financial resources to ensure shared learning between partners, as well as sharing advocacy opportunities and providing access to key policy spaces for youth-led organisations.

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