

Unpacking a Network Approach: The Role of Networks, Movements and Coalitions in Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

*Informal Learning Session for the Civil Society-UN Dialogue Initiative
Summary Note*

12:30pm-2:00pm, 1 December 2023

On Friday, December 1st, the representatives of Member States, the UN and civil society gathered as part of the CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding in an informal discussion entitled: “Unpacking a Network Approach: The Role of Networks, Movements and Coalitions in Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”. This discussion tackled two questions: 1) what are the benefits offered by the peacebuilding networks and 2) how donors and policymakers can support them to strengthen efforts to build and sustain peace. Participants highlighted that **the networks offer a unique ‘one-stop shop’ for inclusive and diverse expertise from various local partners**, which grants them the opportunity to be effective partners for the international stakeholders achieving meaningful and sustainable change at the field level. In the current peacebuilding architecture, with existing mechanisms for partnership (networks), political commitments ([S/RES/2282](#), [S/RES/2558](#), [A/RES/76/305](#)) and guidance for building effective partnerships, only action is missing.

Differently from other civil society modalities, **networks are not just one group of actors aligned around a specific strategy, they are a one-stop shop for diverse priorities and expertise of its members**. Networks host a rich array of coordinated diverse partners with broad expertise (networks of women, youth, regions, among others, each working across the Peace-Development-Humanitarian Nexus). Civil society organisations, for example, organised themselves into networks to advance policy development on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security, as well as subsequent National Action Plans (NAPs) for their implementation. Networks continuously grow and expand as more networks are joined together to benefit from collective learning and shared access. With a lot of networks being cross-border, they are able to more easily work on borderless conflicts. Networks offer a multiplier effect for building peace constituencies at the country level and more consolidated action for policy change.

Networks have the trust of and legitimacy within the communities. Local communities trust networks, and many local governments rely on their expertise. The basis of networks are trust and solidarity that often extends national borders to bring together local partners with similar experience and strengthen their capacity through learning. For example, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders’ “Peace Exchanges”¹ facilitate cross-regional sharing of best practices and lessons learned among critical leaders in the WPS process. This initiative strengthens partnership and solidarity between key stakeholders across different regions, countries and communities.

¹ Leclerc K. & Farion S. (2022). *Exchanging Ideas, Shaping Peace: A Guide for Intergenerational and Intercommunal Peace Exchanges*. Global Network of Women Peacebuilders. <https://gnwp.org/peace-exchange-guide/>.

Networks gather individuals around a shared goal. However, diversity and trust often bring high expectations which may be hard for networks to meet.

There are certainly challenges faced by networks and local peacebuilders in achieving their sustainability. First and foremost, it is the absence of long-term, flexible, and sustainable funding for the network approach. Money often does not go to networks, but directly to individual organisations based on existing financial structures. At the same time, networks offer a unique opportunity for organisations who would not otherwise be eligible for funding (i.e., new organisations and those located in the periphery). Networks connect local peacebuilders to experts and give out small grants for an extra push at the beginning. For example, GPPAC provided a grant through its participatory Youth-by-Youth grant to convene young peacebuilders in Nigeria to prepare them for the consultations on the YPS National Action Plan. It was stated that a small help coming from networks at the beginning is worth more than big project grants due to the flexibility of such funding. Further, institutionalising core costs is also the issue also the issue at hand. To ensure the sustainability of networks and smaller organizations, it is essential to cover their core costs first. Another challenge is the continuous absence of network visibility in policy discussions. It was highlighted that peacebuilding networks do not benefit from attention at the global level due to the specifics of its structure that is made up of individual organisations. Further, within networks, there needs to be procedures that allow smaller organisations not to be crowded out by bigger organisations and networks.

Recommendations for policymakers and donors:

- **Policymakers need to change from wariness and distrust to a collaborative mindset with networks.** Regular dialogue is key. The CS-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding can be the foundation of such relationships.
- **The international community should ensure the participation of civil society in the design of programmatic approaches and financing mechanisms.** When it comes to the network approach, funding and political support must be prioritised.
- **Donor strategies need to be reconsidered.** Donorship is not ready for the interconnected and complex environment of networks. Legal considerations need to be explored to allow funding for networks, rather than individual organisations. For this, networks should work towards making their approach more transparent vis-a-vis other modalities by for example making the difference between networks and intermediary organisations clearer. Further, donors should prioritise funding convenings and dialogues, in addition to the current focus on funding peacebuilding projects.
- **Networks should make sure that smaller and diverse organisations' voices are heard and strengthened.** With diversity comes some challenges as the interest of youth networks may not be the same as the ones from women.
- **Regional networks should better bridge the needs on the ground to global networks installed in New York City.** There is a need to utilise networks that already exist, especially in New York City, because they depend on the information provided by regional networks.