Applying Sustaining Peace Workshop 3

On February 10, 2017, the International Peace Institute, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, and NYU's Center on International Cooperation organized a workshop on applying the sustaining peace framework in practice.

This workshop was the third in the "Applying Sustaining Peace" series, and focused on inclusivity and civil society partnerships. Participants discussed ways to achieve inclusivity across UN efforts to sustain peace.

The Secretary-General's forthcoming report on Sustaining Peace will explore UN partnerships, including with civil society and local actors. The forthcoming joint UN-World Bank prevention study will ask how development policies and programs contribute to preventing conflict. Both policy conversations raise unsettled questions about how to harness the long-term impact of participatory governance and inclusive peacebuilding.

Workshop participants included member states active in the security Council and/or the Peacebuilding Commission; experts from the UN system including the Peacebuilding Support Office, the UN Development Program, the Department of Political Affairs, and UN Women; and civil society representatives from both international and local peacebuilding organizations and foundations.

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Sustaining Peace through Inclusion:
Partnerships with Civil Society and Local Actors

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Across the United Nations system, there is now a common understanding that peacebuilding occurs at the local level, sustained through people-centered approaches. National ownership is not solely understood as concerning the government but also local individuals, whether they are part of an NGO, belong to a community-based organization, or are unaffiliated citizens. The impact of inclusive processes is considerable; establishing close partnerships with networks on the ground allows for a better understanding of key concerns and needs. Rather than imposing peacebuilding plans and actions, the main focus should be on supporting national ownership, particularly through strengthening the capacities of national and local actors for more inclusive engagement in the development of plans and activities.

While these principles have become accepted wisdom in the UN community, questions remain about how to achieve them in practice. How to craft more inclusive peacebuilding was a challenge raised in the 2015 report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the peacebuilding architecture (the AGE report), as well as the dual resolutions on Sustaining Peace—which invite the Secretary-General to report back on efforts to strengthen UN partnerships, including with civil society, and to support the participation of women and youth in peacebuilding processes.

Addressing Gaps in National Ownership

Gaps remain in the UN's efforts to link peace, development, and humanitarian actions through nationally-led planning and projects. Participants agreed that inclusivity and ownership in the peace and security sector are difficult as peacekeeping missions are government-oriented and often see their presence as temporary, even if their engagement lasts several years. In the development sector, including national and local actors seems to be prioritized more, through a systemic and long-term perspective, with external actors assuming a collaborative role.

Traditional international development actors have often struggled to define their activities in the political realm; however, there are recent shifts in both thinking and practice. These new approaches will be captured in the forthcoming UN-World Bank Prevention study, which will analyze how development policies and programs contribute to preventing conflict. Participants also pointed to the inclusive and people-centered vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a possible entry point for integrating inclusive peacebuilding in development programming, particularly through national planning and reporting on targets related to nonviolence, justice, and citizen participation.

The discussion also noted confusion over the meaning and implications of "inclusive national ownership." To be inclusive, measures must be people-centered and deliberate about reaching the whole society. However, national and local processes tend to remain disconnected from each other; some participants argued that inclusivity is mostly implemented at the national level at the expense of local-level initiatives. Further, inclusion of local and national actors is often understood as coordinating with the executive branches; this often overlooks the role of parliamentarians. Unlike many officials and bureaucrats, they are mandated to represent their districts when they draft and pass laws, adopt national budgets, and help implement national priorities, thus could play a key role in ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are inclusive and people-centered.

Box 1. Engaging Parliamentarians for Local Peacebuilding in Ghana

In Ghana, parliamentarians were successfully engaged by local constituents and NGOs—with the support of UNDP—to draft and adopt the National Peace Council Act in 2011. Following successful civil society-led mediation in Northern Ghana, there was a call for more coordination with the government's mediation and prevention efforts. The resulting legislation created a peace infrastructure that reaches to the district level across the country, and continues to serve as an independent state mechanism for prevention. UNDP served as a facilitator in this peacebuilding process at the request of local officials, and according to one involved participant, was careful to cede ownership of the initiative to local actors. This example challenges the often incorrect assumption that local actors are too small to deliver results. In this case, the program started small in Northern Ghana, and was then extended to other villages and districts through the national architecture.

Countering State Exclusion: Entry Points in 'Closed Societies'

As the AGE report warned, "Too often, 'national ownership' is equated with acquiescing to the strategies and priorities of the national government. In divided post-conflict societies, such an approach risks perpetuating exclusion." On this dilemma, participants were briefed on the work of a local NGO in northern Pakistan, *Aware Girls*, that works to prevent extremism and the recruitment of youth by building the capacity of young people, and young women in particular, as peacebuilders. It plays a role in policymaking at the provincial level, by supporting female candidates in local elections and advocating for good governance.

In Pakistan, as elsewhere, these civil society leaders face a drastic shrinking of space and freedom of speech for organizations working on peace and security, in the name of the fight against terrorism. The Commonwealth's 2016 Global Youth Development Index ranked Pakistan as showing the greatest decline in its youth development index scores, for the period between 2010 and 2015 (along with Angola and Haiti). During this period, numerous civil society organizations were banned and their programs restricted. Here, the role of the UN in sustaining peace was deemed essential in supporting member state advocacy, assuming a watchdog role, and following up on states' funding commitments.

Where inclusion in peace and security work is limited, participants discussed possible entry points through the development sector. There was a consensus that under the development umbrella, some level of inclusion is always achievable. For example, livelihood programming, such as agricultural programs, are deliberately inclusive and are often welcomed, as they are not viewed as threatening or politically intrusive. Participants raised concerns about avoiding the securitization of development, while others pointed out that national and local organizations often provide both peacebuilding and development programming—and show more flexibility between the two fields, often not even acknowledging a distinction, based on current needs in their communities.

Discussions further raised the importance of leadership in maintaining civic space. In contexts where public space is under threat, the fear of reprisal is a barrier to inclusive participation. The UN has worked in many countries with this status quo, such as Zimbabwe (see Box 2).

Box 2. Civil Society Partnership in Post-Conflict Zimbabwe

In societies under stress, governments may see civil society as a threat and seek to restrict their participation. In Zimbabwe, in the post-conflict period, civil society organizations and NGOs were characterized by central governmental authorities as focusing, openly or secretly, on human rights and governance to ultimately seek regime change. The political factions were often of the view that civil society organizations must align with one political party. This fueled confusion among the public about the roles and responsibilities of NGOs. In light of this climate of distrust and polarization, UNDP used the Millennium Development Goals as a unifying programme, as well as funding approaches to forge partnerships between government and civil society actors on a collaborative and joint ownership basis.

Central Challenges to Inclusion

Local actors are often left out of government structures and decision-making and execution in long-term peacebuilding processes. The following challenges affect the capacity of local actors, including women's groups and youth organizations, to effectively engage as partners:

- **Funding** affects whether local actors can sustain engagement in the long run, as financing and grant mechanisms are often not adapted or open to local actors. The lack of predictable funding over longer timeframes also leads to challenges.
- **Stakeholder mapping** is necessary to build broader partnerships. Policymakers and international practitioners are not necessarily aware of local peacebuilders in each country; programs are mainly designed for international NGOs and national (capital-based) NGOs. In many cases, there is little outreach to remote regions and areas.
- **Context analysis**—that examines both conflict drivers and peace resources—can question the assumption that local actors are too small to deliver results. In many conflict settings, local capacities are underestimated. International NGOs have developed and tested tools to assess the needs and existing capacities of local actors, and plan together for capacity-building (at the workshop, participants heard about Peace Direct's recent Peace Exchange in Northern Nigeria, as one approach).

The workshop generated a lively discussion, through case studies and analysis of successes and challenges moving forward. As we move toward the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the sustaining peace resolutions, we will continue to consider the central challenges to inclusivity and unpack how international actors can better work with and support local actors.