Supporting Local Infrastructures for Peace Post COVID-19:
The Role of an Integrated Peacebuilding-Development Approach in Africa
Expert-level Dialogue

9th December 2020

Summary Note

This note presents the summary of the online dialogue with peacebuilding experts in Africa, holding a view to identifying policy gaps on peacebuilding that need to be addressed in the region. This ensures that infrastructures for peace in the region are capable of delivering peacebuilding response early and supporting and advancing development gains. Additionally, there was a collation of actionable recommendations for more consolidated action to support local infrastructures for peace at regional, national and local levels in the region.

Participants included peacebuilding experts from South, West, East and Central Africa. Recommendations from this dialogue will be incorporated into a final policy document on strengthening infrastructures for peace post-COVID-19. The overall finding of this dialogue was that the development of peace infrastructures at all levels has great potential to build cultures of peace on the continent.

----

1. Context[1]

In Africa, attempts to advance culture of peace have often proved difficult and ineffectual. And yet, the wide variations in levels of violence within and between countries show that it is not inevitable; rather, it is the result of choices made at individual, community and societal levels.[2]

Experiences from Africa demonstrate that high-level political deals or agreements do not deliver long-term peaceful solutions nor build resilient societies. Efforts to bring stability on the continent are reliant, not only on functional states, but also on resilient local and regional communities that can manage and resolve conflict peacefully.[3] This can be achieved by bridging the gap and overcoming the challenges between state and non-state actors, through strengthening their capacity, skills and knowledge to respond effectively

---

[1] GPPAC. (2020). Building Infrastructures for Peace in Africa: https://gppac.net/resources/building-infrastructures-peace-africa

[2] Hove, Mediel & Harris, Geoff (eds.). 2019. *Infrastructures for Peace in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Germany: Springer, 3.

[3] McNamee, Terence & Muyangwa, Monde. 2020. *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa: Lessons Learned for Policy Makers and Practitioners*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 10

to conflict and through enhancing coordination between state and non-state actors for greater inclusion and participation.

2. Infrastructures for peace in Africa: Lessons and Challenges

Infrastructures for peace have a solid foundation in the experiences of the African continent and are expressed through their leadership in supporting regional, national and local peacebuilding capacities. This includes national, local and community level infrastructures for peace in many African countries, such as Ghana, Uganda, Burundi, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, among others, as well as regional-level infrastructures, such as the East African Peacebuilding Mechanism, International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Early Warning and Response Systems developed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADEC) and other sub-regional bodies in the continent, with support and in partnership with local peacebuilders.

It was deduced from the dialogue that peace infrastructures in Africa vary hugely in sophistication and level and have the potential to resolve conflicts between individuals and within community organisations, peace committees which serve local communities, peace education and peace club programmes in schools, mediation mechanisms to prevent election violence and to ministries of peace to coordinate government and non-government efforts in peacebuilding.

However, the participants identified the following as major challenges to sustainable peacebuilding in the region:

Ineffective or non-existent peacebuilding frameworks and strategies. Frequently, peacebuilding frameworks are out of sync with realities and needs on the ground. Too often this is due to too numerous, various, and uncoordinated (though well-meaning) external partners. Nor do 'universal' approaches work; context matters. Post-conflict reconstruction approaches tend to focus on rebuilding the state while neglecting the reconstruction and healing of the people traumatized by conflict. Both are necessary[4]. This challenge can be attributed to *weak political will* which was raised by participants at the dialogue. It prevents the governments' investment into sustainably-driven solutions such as definition of peacebuilding within the local context and an in-depth analysis of the conflict(s). This has led to the absence of national peacebuilding policies (apart from the one in Kenya); lack of harmonized peacebuilding regional approaches on peacebuilding issues such as disarmament. It is also responsible for the dearth of Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) systems which ought to enable policy makers to make strategic choices.

Overloaded Mandates. In many cases, peace operations are given enormous tasks often without the requisite resources including finances, personnel, including those trained on

---

[4] CECORE, GPPAC. (2020). SDG16+ in Uganda: https://gppac.net/files/2020-07/GPPAC%20SDG%20Report%20Uganda_Final_digitaal_spread.pdf

peacebuilding, and equipment to fulfil them. As a result, the desired peace outcomes are unattainable.

Weak multi-stakeholder collaboration among I4Ps. This is vital in the search for the more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding. In some cases, this would require local, national, regional, and international actors all working together. In others, the most critical forms of cooperation are between civil society organizations, governments, regional bodies, and the private sector. Collaboration can take the form of sharing information and analysis; deciding on planning and assessment tools; building electoral frameworks or active citizenship initiatives; improving justice systems; introducing peace education in curricula and across society; and creating a more inclusive economy that gives people meaningful livelihood options. Institutions matter. Peacebuilding achievements should be recognized and built upon. In some cases, core institutions need to revisit their approaches to peacebuilding. In other cases, the right institutions and processes are in, or being put in place; they need to be more effective, financially supported and realized.

Accessibility of funding[5]. Being overly reliant on external/non-African donors to fund peacebuilding renders key programs vulnerable and unsustainable, as resources are often short-term while peacebuilding needs are long term in nature. Peacebuilding is a long-term process, subject to reversals. Potential points of failure are numerous. Too often populations are promised miracles and panaceas. When these do not materialize, resentment can fuel a return to war. Similarly, the international community often expects a sustainable peace but is usually unable or unwilling to make the long-term investment necessary to transform conflict-prone societies.

Exclusion of grassroots actors[6]. Peace is built and sustained at the grassroots. Peace agreements and peacebuilding efforts need to better reflect the reality, including on matters of transitional justice and on the role played by religion and local infrastructures for peace in African societies. Simply put, local ownership matters and is key to building peace. Peace cannot take root if the agency of local communities (including what peace means to them and how it manifests) is not respected or they are not empowered to own peacebuilding. Local agency, ownership and leadership is critical.

Lack of meaningful engagement of women across the continent. The involvement of women in peacebuilding in Africa remains sparse and unequal from one region to another. The feminist movement building in Africa is quite strong; however, connections with other actors in peacebuilding and development realm remains weak. Given the fact that women are not only vulnerable but also play critical roles in peacebuilding, they should be more engaged in the process. They are key drivers of peacebuilding.

---

[5] GPPAC, WANEP. (2019). SGD16+ in Ghana: https://gppac.net/resources/sdg-16-ghana-progress-towards-peaceful-just-and-inclusive-societies

[6] GPPAC, WAA. (2019). SDG16+ in Cameroon: https://gppac.net/resources/cameroon-sdg-16-cameroon-progress-towards-peaceful-just-and-inclusive-societies

Stereotypes around youth engagement. Despite recurrent claims to the contrary by leaders and mediators, young Africans are regularly excluded from peace processes. It is still common for youth to be perceived as potentially dangerous "factors" in peacebuilding. In reality, young people have agency and are not monolithic actors. They have tremendous potential for driving positive change in Africa where, not infrequently, stale gerontocracies dominate. When the capacities of young people are not built for peacebuilding, they will not understand the essence of peacebuilding let alone, support it.

3. Local Infrastructures for peace in Africa: Impact of COVID-19:

During the ongoing global COVID pandemic, a majority of African countries have succeeded in managing the crisis well and addressing the immediate consequences of the pandemic, with less radical social measures and impact on local peacebuilding work. However, the continent continues to experience the impact of COVID-19 on pre-existing fragilities, with the continent currently experiencing damages at the macro-economic level and the increase of reported violence within communities. This has projected the need for an entity that would focus on developing skills, on mediation and also understand dynamics behind conflicts - and try to get the most up-to-date information and expertise on mediation so that peacebuilders can work with parties and bring them together to find solutions, peacefully.

It is extremely important to recognize that COVID-19 has the potential to impede sustainable peace in Africa, as well as elsewhere, including because of the livelihoods of people who continue depending on informal businesses.

Since, the outset of COVID-19, local peacebuilders advocate to advance national-level policy frameworks on peacebuilding that would provide systematic guidance, coordination, and implementation of peace efforts at the national level; work to develop, strengthen and support community infrastructures that mitigate long-lasting impacts of the pandemic; set up community mechanisms for economic and social resilience, including through mutual aid and community solidarity; mitigate the spread and effects of COVID-19 in communities by carrying out community sensitizations on COVID-19, respond to cases of domestic violence, conduct door-to-door community peace sensitizations, do counselling and hands-on skills training for youth, convince youth still involved in armed violence to abandon and engage them in productive work, among other activities.

Peacebuilding organizations are finding their traditional toolkit at odds with the realities of this global pandemic. Peacebuilding is an exercise in fostering relationships and developing trust on a societal, communal and inter-personal level. The spread of COVID-19 has directly impacted this in a number of ways as many organizations have paused their programming. At the community levels, peacebuilders are often well placed to educate communities to the need for robust healthcare measures. Additionally, peacebuilders, due to their local level engagement, deep ties to communities and long-term partnerships, are often perceived as trusted figures and can provide nuanced

insights into the needs of communities which can better inform concerted national efforts to stymie the spread of COVID-19.

Overall, COVID-19 has provided a key entry point – as it has affirmed the need to have functional systems in place (in terms of structures, personnel and resources).

4. Key priorities for action:

Infrastructures for peace (I4Ps) are key to sustainable peacebuilding and that have been accentuated by the COVID19 pandemic - an opportunity to consolidate the mandates of existing I4Ps at regional, national and community levels with a view to building a resilient peace architecture for the continent.

There is currently a lot of potential for responses to peacebuilding; and this is the time to rethink what such responses will look like in view of the ever changing dynamics of the peacebuilding narrative. It has therefore become imperative to close the gap between the theory and practice of peacebuilding by actively engaging peacebuilding practitioners in the drafting of peacebuilding laws and policies.

Unless the root causes of a conflict are ascertained — why people fought in the first place—then whatever tools and interventions are tried, they will not secure peace in the long term and probably not in the short to medium term either. This is not a simple research task. Identifying the complex relationships of power and competition in any state—say between rival leaders, ethnic groups, or different regions— and how they have evolved over decades or even centuries takes time. This goes beyond focusing on the symptoms of conflict and insecurity, *as well as* investing enough or for the long term, in addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict, and amplifying the facilitators for peace.

5. Next steps and recommendations:

The following recommendations were proffered by participants on how to sustain peacebuilding in the region post COVID19:

Strengthen national ownership of and capacity for peacebuilding:
- Creative efforts by national leaders in building governance systems that are inclusive, participatory, and restore trust across communities are necessary for laying the foundations for regeneration and recovery. The primary responsibility of post-conflict reconstruction and development is, therefore, that of national governments, that must identify priorities, formulate strategies, and implement programs and activities to provide the conditions necessary for sustainable peace.
- It is recommended that national governments make budgetary allocations and disregard challenging application formats that promote state ownership in line with their own objectives, instead of those of local civil society. Given that accountability of the international community is important in this sense as well, budgetary discussions should be opened up to civil society actors.

- More harmonious approaches to organise collective plans and funds for the whole sector at the national level should be initiated. That will promote inclusive and complementary initiatives, instead of competitiveness.

Create an enabling legal and policy framework for local peacebuilders
- Flowing from the above recommendation, African governments can contribute to creating an enabling environment for local peace committees by putting in place appropriate legal and policy frameworks that clearly define the role and mandate of local peacebuilders such as Local Peace Committees (LPCs) in relation to existing peacebuilding and governance institutions. They can be incorporated into all new post-conflict peace-building initiatives. Creation of LPCs can be done in collaboration with communities, local government and institutions like National Focal Points on small arms as it has been done in Uganda, Burundi, South Sudan and Cameroon with a key focus on women, youth and traditional structures.
- This will not only provide institutional support for local peacebuilding but will also eliminate potential overlap and conflict between local peacebuilding institutions and state institutions.
- An appropriate legal and policy framework will also help to address the accountability deficit that many local peacebuilders face. This is particularly useful in countries that are yet to establish national peace infrastructures.
- External peacebuilding actors can contribute to developing the peacebuilding capacity of local peace builders in Africa by establishing and supporting national and regional networks of local peacebuilders to serve as platforms for facilitated peer learning and support, as well as the sharing of experiences and best practices. These mechanisms can be used to strengthen the capacity and performance of individual peacebuilding groups without directly interfering in their operations or making them dependent on external support.

Mend the gap between early warning and early response
- External peacebuilding actors may motivate and sustain the ground-level elements of early warning systems. As a few experiences in the region have shown, effective early warning must be a "bottom up approach" whereby the community is engaged. Such initiatives should be leveraged. Efforts should be made to link communities to the state and regional elements of Conflict Early Warning Systems (CEWS) in a more systemic way. In Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) for instance, through the GPPAC Southern Africa representative body, CEWS are being enhanced with support from the African Union Peace and Security Commission with conflict reporters in all 16 Member STATES. SADC is also collaborating with West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) to strengthen this system through knowledge exchange and mutual reinforcement engagements to get best practices from both regions
- Regular and long-term funding for early warning is critical. More should be done to engage the African local private sector in supporting early warning in particular, and peacebuilding activities in general.

Address the gender and youth dimensions of peacebuilding, and mainstream peace education in national curricula.
- African governments should be supported to develop, implement, and report on the development and implementation of their National Action Plans on peacebuilding. Furthermore, more must be done to mainstream peace education in national curricula across Africa in order to advance a strong culture of peace. Successes of pilot projects on peacebuilding education and sensitization such as those implemented by Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE) and Peace Champions (a youth group) in Uganda.
- To enhance social cohesion, women and youth should be actively engaged, especially at the community levels. In Burundi, for instance, youth and women have fostered social cohesion in polarized areas among some groups in Bujumbura. The use of credit and loans associations as well as peacebuilding strategies like mediation have been used to bring different groups together.
- The provision of microfinance services was used as a complementary approach to the reconstruction of fragile and conflict-affected settings. Apart from providing financial resources that help conflict-shattered populations jump-start their post-conflict livelihoods, the microfinance group lending also facilitated interactions among the populations including those made estranged by conflict.

Deepen normative frameworks for conflict prevention.
- The African Union should invest more efforts in consolidating the normative frameworks and shared values on democratic governance, anticorruption and economic governance, youth and women's inclusion, and transitional justice, and instil a culture of compliance through national and sub-regional instruments. The SADC and ECOWAS interventions in several countries to promote democratization and the rule of law underscores the fact that strong regional institutions are critical in the internalization of continental and regional norms. A good example for leveraging is the current draft mechanism for engagement with non-state actors in SADC.

Create a continental framework on peer learning for peace-building.
- There is very little learning of previous post-conflict experiences in Africa because of the absence of systematic programs for lesson drawing within the Regional I4Ps or the African Union. A database of comparative post-conflict reconstruction experiences would be a good start in the accretion of such knowledge that will inform future interventions.