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Supporting Local Infrastructures for Peace Post COVID-19: The Role of an Integrated Peacebuilding-Development Approach in Latin America and the Caribbean

Expert-level Dialogue

4th December 2020

Summary Note

This note presents the summary of an online dialogue with experts in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. The dialogue was convened stock to take of existing infrastructures for peace in LAC region and understand the impact of these infrastructures on building peaceful and inclusive societies; facilitate a joint learning to understand the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic on the operationalization of local infrastructures for peace; and to collate actionable policy recommendations on the ways infrastructures for peace can be better supported by external actors post COVID-19.

Participants included peacebuilding experts from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El-Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana Suriname, Honduras, Venezuela. Recommendations from this dialogue will be incorporated into a final policy document on strengthening infrastructures for peace post-COVID-19.

Context:

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a heterogeneous region that has experienced a variety of conflictive systems over time and across countries. While the armed conflicts of the past (for example, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru,) have come to an end, new drivers of conflict have emerged in the 21st century: socioeconomic inequality, permanent insecurity and securitization, corruption, lack of trust in democratic institutions, youth dissatisfaction and social polarization – just to mention a few. In some cases, these factors have mixed with longstanding grievances – such as those related to indigenous rights – to deepen tensions. These dynamics often have regional and cross-regional trajectories and linkages; local realities could be unaccounted for in national responses; capacities of national governments vary from context to context¹.

¹ GPPAC, Permanent Missions of Colombia and Peru to the United Nations and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lessons Learned and Strategic Operationalisation of Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace in the Americas: Expert-Level Consultation for the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review Outcome Document, June 2020, <https://gppac.net/files/2020-07/Operationalisation%20of%20Peacebuilding%20and%20Sustaining%20Peace%20in%20the%20Americas%20%28ENG%29%20%281%29.pdf>



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Local infrastructures for peace:

In several contexts, effective dialogue and prevention strategies were deployed through local infrastructures for peace. According to the participants of the meeting, local infrastructures for peace both prevent conflicts and suppress violence. Local peacebuilders support policy and action in a meaningful way by contributing to the analysis of conflict dynamics, power relations, actors, gender analysis, and enabling early warning and response. Some of the efforts include citizen diplomacy Colombia-Venezuela initiative², engaging with media and academia for peace education, pursuing environmental justice, conducting evidence-based research, community mediation and capacity building.

Local infrastructures for peace face a number of challenges that need to be taken into consideration.

- One of the critical challenges is *the lack of political commitment to the infrastructures for peace*. One of the participants noted that the conflict in Guatemala is an example of situations currently being exacerbated by the numerous efforts to limit and dismantle local infrastructures for peace. There appears to be strong trust and network-building between civil society in the region, but not necessarily between civil society, the governments and regional organizations. If things are left as they are, sustainable peacebuilding in the region will remain elusive.
- The lack of political commitment impacts *regional capacities* to address and prevent conflict. While the need for spaces for dialogue and joint analysis is critical, the lack of a common understanding of risks and root causes of violence needs to be taken into consideration.
- *Shrinking Civic space remains another issue in many countries in the region*. This includes the prosecution of human rights defenders, environmental activists and indigenous social leaders. Many countries have adopted controversial laws that allow governments to impose legal and regulatory barriers to the registration of civil society organisations that receive international funds. The current context of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbates and justifies existing violations of human rights and violent repressions against local peacebuilders.
- Participants also noted *the lack of visibility of peacebuilding* in LAC, especially when conducted by women and girls, and, as follows, *lack of appropriate and dedicated funding for peacebuilding*. Civil society experiences difficulties participating in meetings organised by Member States, regional organisations and the United Nations because of the lack of institutionalised processes for engagement. They have no financial capacities to establish liaison offices in New York or Geneva, where they can establish collaborative contact with policymakers.

Local Infrastructures for peace during COVID-19:

When COVID-19 began to spread, these peace infrastructures have become more important. The pandemic has impacted peacebuilding in LAC, particularly by creating trust crisis and polarization, deepening inequalities, driving violence, reducing environmental security, reduced civic space, among other impacts.

² Ramirez, Socorro, GPPAC, CRIES, and PCCV, "Colombia-Venezuela Citizen Bridges (PCCV)," <https://gppac.net/resources/colombian-venezuelan-citizen-bridges>



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Local peacebuilders advocated for adjusting the response to the pandemic going beyond the general approaches. They worked to encourage attention to underlying structural deficiencies and structural roots of violence and instability in LAC societies. They also tested available technology, explored formats and methodologies, and convened a series of ongoing workshops on key issues that the region is facing in times of COVID-19, including with the focus on human displacement; regional geopolitics; the political crises; the role of multilateral organizations; among others. Without enabling these infrastructures and in the context of shrinking civic space, there can be no possibility of achieving peaceful, just, and inclusive societies in any country of the region. It is only when local infrastructures for peace are in place, peacebuilding gains can be sustained through development work.

Key priorities for action:

Similarly like humanitarian actors cannot solve conflicts themselves, development actors cannot carry out their mandate without utilising peacebuilding tools and methodologies. With the new challenges presented by COVID-19, peacebuilding should be a concerted effort of many actors – Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, international civil society, private sector, development banks, and so on who join efforts to co-create peace infrastructures that build on existing local initiatives.

In this vein, it is critical to advance the following priorities: 1) evidence-based research; 2) strengthening partnerships at all levels, and 3) contextualizing and deploying peacebuilding tools and methodologies.

Next steps and recommendations:

The LAC context demonstrates that by deploying holistic (integrated peacebuilding-development) and inclusive approaches, multi-stakeholder partnerships could be built to be attuned to the varied peace and development needs of local communities. Inter-governmental organizations at the regional and national levels could be critical partners in the following recommendations and entry points:

- *strengthening horizontal and vertical partnerships at all levels:*
 - There should be more multi-stakeholder consultations and roundtables that involve not only civil society but also regional actors, donors and governments.
 - Capacity building on peacebuilding should be at all levels – regional, national and local - will improve the understanding and implementation of the peacebuilding and development commitments of national governments.
 - Strengthening regional collaboration and activating peacebuilding capacities of regional organizations would enable the strong history of regional cooperation in LAC delivering on sustainable development and sustaining peace.
 - To consolidate peacebuilding action, all actors in the region need to work in consonance towards the common objective of peacebuilding.

- *supporting civil society organizations and networks and creating enabling environment for them to build strong local infrastructures for peace:*
 - Local peacebuilders require the autonomy and security that builds on not only the commitments to protect human rights defenders but also recognizes the



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- challenges faced by peacebuilders.
- Diverse experiences of civil society need to be taken into consideration and their comparative advantages need to be built on. For example, Catholic networks and indigenous groups in the region can engage more in work bordering on the reduction of violence around elections; engage in capacity building on peace education and mediation; and contribute to strategies on how to promote sustainable peacebuilding.
 - The role of academia in peacebuilding needs to be uplifted to consolidate and inform peacebuilding action through evidence based research on peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity. Universities and other academic institutions in the region can link and bridge the work of peacebuilding – development organisations at different levels – regional, national and community levels through evidence based research; as well as preparing long term curricula for capacity building on peacebuilding education.
- *Ensuring women’s meaningful participation in peacebuilding, as well as the integration of gender analysis in peacebuilding work:*
- In the region affected by inequalities, it is important to support analysis and research of gendered root causes of inequalities and addressing them through peacebuilding and development programming.
 - It is important to improve the visibility of women by focusing on the existing women networks in the region; and encouraging and supporting more women with progressive ideas to take up positions in government. Also, the role of indigenous women in the region cannot be overemphasized – they should be supported to be involved in peacebuilding activities, given their wealth of traditional knowledge and experiences.
 - The academic institutions can also be supported to investigate the importance of the role of women in peacebuilding and other incidental matters such as migration.
- *Incorporating climate security into peacebuilding programmes:*
- The imperative to purposefully build capacity for climate security and incorporate climate security into the debate on peacebuilding and development issues is critical. This is because there are a lot of ongoing climate disasters that can strengthen the dynamics of crime; however, there is a paucity of research on how climate change impedes peacebuilding.
 - More work needs to be done to examine the intersection of climate and peacebuilding and environmental justice. The situation in the Amazon region requires attention as it faces massive deforestation and militarization – an absurd combination that threatens the protection of inhabitants in the forest vicinity.
- *Improving funding availability for peacebuilding in the region:*
- Funds should be deployed to support the strengthening of civil society networks and the networks between governments and civil society within the region.
 - In the LAC region, only 1 % of funding/resources is allocated to women organizations. This is not sufficient for the significant activities that touch peacebuilding directly or incidentally. Gender considerations can no longer



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remain a missing link in peacebuilding programmes, if sustainable peace is to be achieved in the region women have a critical role to play in building sustainable peace.

- Experiences of local peacebuilders in Latin America need to be uplifted at the global level to encourage donor support.
- Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, flexible funding for peacebuilding work remains critical to allow peacebuilding responses to be sustained during the crisis.