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Building Peace



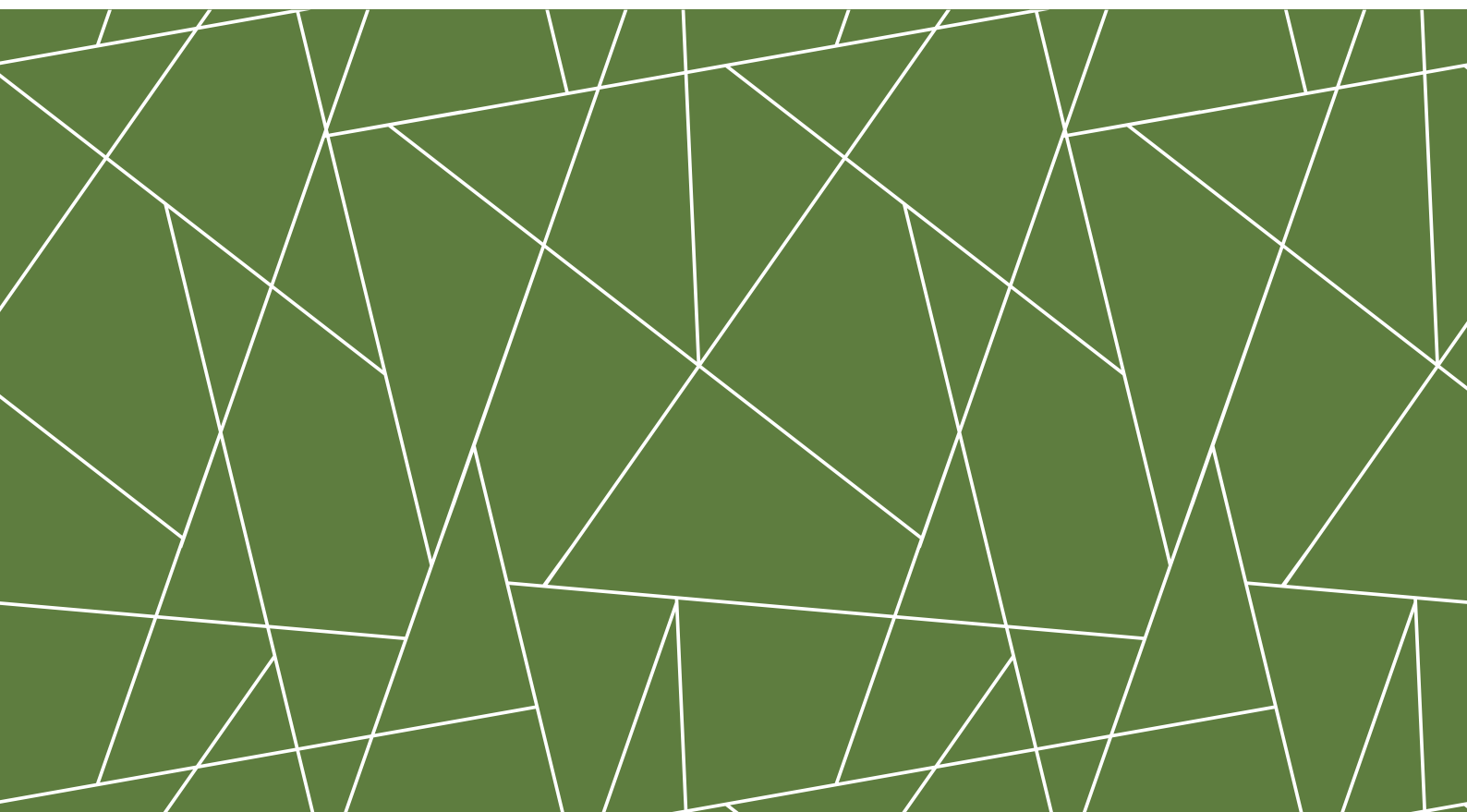
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ACHIEVING PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS:

THE ROLES OF REGIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2019



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amid a changing global order and the mutation of conflict away from conventionally fought interstate wars, regional organisations have become increasingly important actors in preventive action

- United Nations World Bank Report, Pathways for Peace, 2018

Situations of conflict and injustice rarely remain confined within national borders: they increasingly spill into neighbouring countries, compelling a regional response. It is therefore increasingly the case that global policy frameworks call for action at the regional level – be it peacebuilding, development, conflict prevention, good governance or strengthening democracy.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sustaining Peace agenda, and the UN-World Bank Pathways for Peace Report all recognise the role of regional organisations in supporting proactive preventive action, strengthening governance, addressing structural causes of fragility, and placing human security at the core of peacebuilding action. In fact, national performance on peace, justice and inclusion is strongest in regions where regional institutions have demonstrated capacity to uphold good governance through the strengthening of democratic institutions.¹ This signals an emerging opportunity for regional organisations to carve out unique mandates for peace, justice and inclusion.

Action on peace, justice and inclusion should cut across social, economic and political agendas and be sustained through partnerships with those most impacted by conflict, inequalities and fragility – local communities, traditional leaders, indigenous groups, and beyond. As such, the strengthening of good governance and democratic institutions at the regional level should come hand in hand with efforts to meaningfully engage both regional organisations and local communities.²

This context invites a critical assessment of how intergovernmental regional arrangements can strengthen partnerships with civil society and peacebuilding networks. This would enable regional organisations and civil society to work with Member States and international partners to build and sustain strong and just institutions, going beyond political limitations in order to contribute to the lasting peace of communities.

To explore the opportunities for partnerships between regional organisations and civil society in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), International IDEA, and the Community of

1. Community of Democracies, *Liberal Democracy and the Path to Peace and Security*, 2017. <https://community-democracies.org/docs/liberal-democracy-and-the-path-to-peace-and-security-2/>

2. QUNO & GPPAC, *Building sustainable Peace: How inclusivity, partnerships and a reinforced UN Peacebuilding Architecture will support delivery*, 2018 <https://gppac.net/resources/building-sustainable-peace-how-inclusivity-partnerships-and-reinforced-un-peacebuilding>

Democracies (CoD) convened a global conference of regional intergovernmental organisations in partnership with the Organisation of American States in September 2019. This report presents the key takeaways from the discussion and highlights the opportunities to strengthen the role of regional organisations in building peace, justice and inclusion with the support of local communities and peacebuilding organisations.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Some opportunities that regional organisations can undertake to build peaceful, just and strong institutions include:

Enhancing the institutional capacity of regional organisations to promote democracy. Given the current challenges facing democracy, and the implications this has for the realisation of peaceful, just and inclusive societies, there is a need for regional organisations to enhance the resilience of the structures in place to support democratic and multilateral institutions. This will require drawing upon civil society's capacities to enhance national democratic institutional processes, which will in turn support national stakeholders in preventing conflicts, building strong and accountable institutions, and breaking out of cycles of conflict.

Establishing stronger prevention and peacebuilding mandates. Whilst regional organisations are in a strong position to promote peacebuilding and conflict prevention, some lack the appropriate mandates to do so. As such, it is necessary for regional organisations to operationalise the peacebuilding resolutions into their institutional policies and priorities. In order to ensure that these mandates are effective and have meaningful impact, such mandates will need to be grounded in the expertise of civil society at the design, implementation and evaluation levels.

Creating spaces for coordination and policy coherence with civil society. Given the dynamic nature of the current geo-political challenges, regional organisations should form stronger organisational partnerships with civil society in order to advance the realisation of peace, justice and inclusion at all levels. This will require the creation of new regional platforms and partnerships, in addition to the strengthening of existing ones, in order to provide regular and meaningful engagement and ensure complementarity in the work of civil society and regional organisations.

Sustaining action toward the realisation of lasting peace. Given that both regional organisations and civil society are able to work beyond the limitations of the electoral cycle and the agendas of political parties that could change over time, regional organisations should draw upon the capacities of civil society in order to lay the groundwork for sustainable peace. In order to achieve this goal, greater collaboration is necessary to generate coordinated strategies toward the medium and long-term prevention and management of regional conflicts.

Promoting human rights and ensuring accountability. Regional organisations should form greater partnerships with civil society in order to more effectively monitor and ensure accountability for human rights violations, where possible, through existing regional human rights systems. This will require playing a more active role in supporting governments' engagement with civil society and strengthening democratic institutions in order to prevent democratic backsliding.

THE ROLE OF ACTORS IN BUILDING PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Given the complex and interconnected nature of the challenges to the promotion of peaceful societies, the provision of justice for all, and the building of accountable and inclusive institutions, addressing these issues is beyond the scope of any one actor. As the world is facing critical challenges that increasingly have regional dimensions, the existence of strong regional organisations that work in close collaboration with other key actors is critical. As such, regional organisations, local communities and civil society, when working in partnership with one another, have an opportunity to advance good governance and democracy, and in turn, help to advance peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Regional organisations form a crucial part of the work towards peace, good governance, and democracy, often drawing upon their institutional strengths to fill the implementation gaps of global policy agendas.

Regional organisations form a crucial link in the conflict prevention and peacebuilding architecture. Through their important work with member states, civil society, and multilateral partners- particularly on issues of governance, institutional strengthening, conflict prevention, and peace and security- regional organisations have become important actors, enablers and co-implementers of policies that further SDG 16+ goals and the sustaining peace agenda. Additionally, regional organisations also have the added value of sustainability, predictability and, in many cases, neutrality of action.

The proximity of regional organisations to risk and resilience data provides them with a comprehensive understanding of regional issues. Regional organisations are in a strong position to identify the root causes of regional crises before they develop into intractable conflicts; for example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) draws up conflict prevention data from member states, which enables the organisation to advance tailored regional prevention mechanisms and solutions.³ As such, regional organisations are able to draw upon their knowledge and understanding of regional issues in order to provide localised support and prevent crises from escalating.

3. UN Office on the Special Adviser on Africa, *Mapping Study of the Conflict Prevention Capabilities of African Regional Economic Communities, 2018*
<https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/pubs/2019mappingReport.pdf>

Being intergovernmental, they have the capacity to advance regional solutions. Given their work with member states, regional organisations are effective in agenda setting as well as coordinating national policies in order to meet common regional goals. This can be seen with regards to the OAS' engagement with national governments to facilitate the resolution of territorial disputes between Belize and Guatemala.⁴ Regional organisations can therefore play a key role in translating challenges to peace, justice and inclusion into effective regional solutions.

As the nature of armed conflicts continues to change and new security threats emerge, regional organisations need to respond not only to the security concerns of their member states, but also to the human security of their citizens. However, **regional organisations experience challenges in supporting democracy, development, peacebuilding and good governance** due to policy, operational and implementation gaps at numerous levels. It is in this space that partnerships and collaborative efforts with civil society can work to overcome these limitations.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The work of civil society forms an essential building block in the development of peaceful, just and inclusive societies, with their deep understanding of localised structural issues playing an important role in laying the foundation for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Civil society can effectively inform regional policy agendas. Given civil society's networks, skill sets and knowledge bases, it is well placed to support the development of a common understanding of risks and jointly determine how best to respond to them in a manner which reflects the reality on the ground. The Pacific Resilience Partnership Task Force within the Pacific Islands Forum is one example of a regional process which benefits from reaching out to civil society as a means of developing comprehensive development strategies.⁵ Civil society is also in a strong position to ensure that regional policies are effectively implemented in practice because they are capable of measuring the local impact of actions.

4. OAS, *Report on the Situation of the Belize and Guatemala Territorial Dispute*, 2010 <https://www.oas.org/sap/peacefund/VirtualLibrary/Inter-StateDisputes/Belize-Guatemala/Reports/ReportSituationBelizeGuatemala.pdf>

5. *Pacific Resilience Partnership, A Review of the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Pacific Resilience Partnership Governance Arrangements*, 2020 http://www.resilientpacific.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/FRDP-Report-2020_Ecopy_Final.pdf

GOOD PRACTICE: EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE SYSTEM (ECOWARN) IN WEST AFRICA

In 2002, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) entered into a strategic partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the implementation of a regional early warning and response system (ECOWARN).⁶ WANEP provides ECOWAS with data and analyses on conflict indicators and risks, drawing upon the research of over 400 community monitors who send their information to the national early warning systems in the 15 member states of ECOWAS. This information is received at the regional centre at WANEP, which focuses on monitoring data and mobilising political will to address challenges at national and regional levels. Through this early warning system, ECOWARN has helped to put in place key mechanisms to reduce and prevent election-related violence, highlighting the added value of partnerships between regional organisations and civil society.

Being locally grounded, civil society is able to identify the root causes of conflict, injustice and exclusion. Civil society is, in many cases, already engaged in local conflict resolution and management, with such actors being able to identify root causes of unrest with little training. For example, in Afghanistan, prior to receiving negotiation training from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), local women had already been in negotiations with the Taliban to address concerns within their communities.⁷ As such, given their extensive knowledge base and grounding in local communities, civil society provides an effective means of resolving conflicts and addressing fragility through locally informed and inclusive approaches.

GOOD PRACTICE: CSO ENGAGEMENT IN THE BOE DECLARATION (2018)

In recognition of the security challenges faced at the regional level, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) leaders adopted the 2018 Boe Declaration in order to broaden the definition of security in the Pacific to include human security, humanitarian assistance, environmental security and regional cooperation.⁸ The process of developing the Declaration involved the PIF Secretariat conducting numerous consultations with civil society organisations in member countries, providing an opportunity for the development of a regional agreement with the capacity to coordinate national responses, which is at the same time, inclusive and meaningfully informed by actors on the ground. Representing a strong example of partnership between regional organisations and civil society, the Declaration provided an opportunity to strengthen a transformational, integrated and inclusive approach to the climate-security nexus across the region.

6. UN Office on the Special Adviser on Africa, *Mapping Study of the Conflict Prevention Capabilities of African Regional Economic Communities*, 2018
<https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/pubs/2019mappingReport.pdf>

7. United States Institute for Peace (USIP), *How can we negotiate with the Taliban? Afghan women know*, 2019 https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/02/how-can-we-negotiate-taliban-afghan-women-know?utm_source=usip.org.

8. Boe Declaration on Regional Security' <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Both regional organisations and civil society have advantages in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies. On one hand, **regional organisations have the benefit of offering space and access** to national and other relevant actors. On the other hand, **civil society provides analysis critical to understand root causes of conflict**, which is often missing in regional and state-centric assessments. Through a partnership, regional organisations and civil society are able to move past the limitations they face individually with regards to visibility, access and structures, addressing the underlying issues that lead to conflict, injustice and exclusion. Given the policy, operational and implementation gaps that exist between regional processes and their implementation at the local level, experiences of civil society provide regional organisations with the opportunity to support national governments in addressing structural issues, as well as issues of governance in an inclusive and participatory manner.

MEETING REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTERSHIPS

SDGs and sustaining peace call for the role of regional organisations in the promotion of peaceful societies, the provision of justice for all, and the building of accountable and inclusive institutions. However, numerous challenges pose a threat to the realisation of these agendas. Perhaps the greatest challenge is the weakening of democracy and multilateralism, which have in turn exacerbated other issues such as protracted political crises, exclusion, militarisation, failure to act on climate change, and violent extremism. Given the indivisible and cross-border natures of these issues, effective solutions require holistic approaches which harness the capacities and mandates of regional organisations and local communities. As such, **the global challenges can be understood as major opportunities for the strengthening of regional organisations and their partnerships with civil society toward the realisation of common objectives.**



1. REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE THEIR INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO PROMOTE DEMOCRACY.

Given that some of the main threats to democracy today reside within democratic systems themselves- as demonstrated in 1992 in Peru and 1993 in Guatemala, when democratically elected Presidents shut down Congresses- there is a need to assist national governments in strengthening their democratic institutions in order to help them to break out of cycles of violence and rebuild for a sustainable peace. Evidence-based studies also show that open liberal democracy is not only a good practice, but it presents the best path forward to achieve peace and stability.⁹

9.CoD, ISS, Brookings, *Liberal Democracy and the Path to Peace and Security*, 2017
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberal-democracy-and-the-path-to-peace-and-security/>

LESSONS LEARNED: THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES' (OAS) ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Since its formation in 1948, the OAS has had a close relationship with civil society. The OAS Registry has long opened up structured spaces for engagement with civil society, such as the annual dialogue between civil society organisations and member states on topics such as human rights, democracy, and LGBT rights.¹⁰ In recent years, however, an influx of new, well-funded conservative organisations which reject the role of international institutions has seen these spaces becoming increasingly polarised and characterised by a breakdown in dialogue. As a means of overcoming this breakdown, it was agreed that civil society would organise themselves into coalitions of like-minded institutions; however, this did little to resolve the lack of dialogue between coalitions, and exchange across the board remains limited. This is indicative of a broader trend of nationalism and isolationism, in addition to the rejection of multilateral institutions perceived as imposing a “liberal agenda” at the expense of the traditional values.



2. REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ESTABLISH STRONGER PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING MANDATES.

Whilst regional organisations are in a strong position to promote conflict prevention and peacebuilding, some regional organisations still lack appropriate mandates to do so. As such, RIGOs will need to explore avenues for mobilising and enhancing their capacities to support peaceful, just and inclusive societies.¹¹ In particular, this will require regional organisations to draw upon the expertise of civil society in order to meaningfully develop their structural, strategic and operational peacebuilding mandates.

10. OAS, *Guidelines for the Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities*, 1999

<http://www.oas.org/consejo/sp/CUMBRES/documentos/cp06620e04.doc>

11. GPPAC, *In the Spirit of Partnership: Operationalisation of Sustaining Peace at the Regional Level*, 2020

https://www.gppac.net/files/2020-03/GPPAC_Regional%20Peacebuilding.pdf



3. REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS CAN BETTER COORDINATE ACTIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN ORDER TO ENSURE GREATER POLICY COHERENCE.

Given the dynamic nature of the geo-political and geo-strategic regional environment, there is a need for regional organisations and civil society to form partnerships as a means of fostering greater coordination toward the realisation of shared goals. This raises opportunities for regional organisations and civil society to work together to ensure complementarity in their work, in turn increasing the capacity of both to meet their objectives.



4. REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUSTAIN ACTION TOWARD THE REALISATION OF LASTING PEACE.

Through intergovernmental systems providing spaces which facilitate inclusive collaboration with civil society networks, the strengths of organisational partnerships may be utilised to advance the realisation of sustainable peace. Given that both are able to work beyond the limitations of the electoral cycle and the agendas of political parties, there is scope for regional organisations to draw upon the capacities of civil society in order to lay the groundwork for sustainable progress.



5. REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY.

The promotion of human rights plays an integral role in promoting democracy and, in turn, upholding peace, providing justice and creating inclusive societies. This is recognised by the OAS, which works with states to help strengthen the laws and institutions that provide human rights protections. Partnerships with civil society organisations which hold governments to account therefore provide an opportunity to ensure greater monitoring and accountability for human rights violations through existing regional systems.

GOOD PRACTICE: THE INTER-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC CHARTER

The Inter-American Democratic Charter, adopted on 11 September 2001 with the aim of strengthening democratic institutions in the nations of the Americas,¹² recognised that many of the threats to democracy lie within democratic institutions themselves, and provided the OAS with the tools to act in a more preventative manner to meet its regional objectives. It is also important to recognise that the Charter noted the need for the OAS to draw upon the contributions of civil society, whilst also promoting the strengthening of civil society organisations. The Charter is therefore an example of good practice in terms of utilising regional and civil society partnerships to address the challenges posed to democracy and multilateralism.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

It is clear that the challenges facing the international community are characterised by cross-border risks and insecurity, and further complicated by new pathways to unrest, such as climate change. Furthermore, the capacities of existing institutions to effectively respond to these issues are often limited by crises of democracy and multilateralism, as evidenced by increasing cases of state isolationism and rejection of cooperation. **These challenges present an opportunity for greater collaboration between regional and civil society organisations as a means of drawing upon one another's strengths and enhancing regional institutional capacity to ensure peaceful, just and inclusive societies.**

12. Inter-American Democratic Charter, 2001 <http://www.oas.org/en/democratic-charter/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the nature of conflicts continue to change, democracy and multilateralism remain weakened and, as new security threats emerge, regional organisations need to respond not only to the security concerns of their member states, but also to the human security of their citizens. However, as a result of policy, operational and implementation gaps at numerous levels, regional organisations remain somewhat limited in their capacity to single-handedly support democracy, development, peacebuilding and good governance at the regional level. It is in this space that partnerships and collaborative efforts between regional organisations and civil society can work to overcome their limitations and offer opportunities for the realisation of shared objectives.

Towards this end, the Regional Working Group could be set up with a focus on opening up spaces for cooperation with regional organisations aimed at the following:

Enhancing the institutional capacity of regional organisations to promote democracy by:

- 1) Documenting and facilitating regional and cross-regional exchanges of lessons learned and best democratic practices in order to strengthen the resources in place to support democracy and multilateralism;**
- 2) Partnering and identifying synergies with other actors, including civil society, in order to develop coordinated medium and long- term strategies to promote good governance;**
- 3) Providing spaces to communicate civil society's best practices at the regional level in order to allow others to learn from them, avoiding duplications of efforts and increasing their visibility;**
- 4) Investing greater financial and technical resources in the promotion of free and fair electoral processes as a means of both promoting democratic norms and peaceful post-election transitions;**
- 5) Legitimising temporary and transitional arrangements as a means of gaining access to the peacebuilding sphere and laying the groundwork for lasting peace.**

Establishing stronger prevention and peacebuilding mandates by:

- 1) Enhancing the capacity of existing mandates to design and implement regional peacebuilding initiatives through operationalising the peacebuilding and sustaining peace resolutions into institutional policies and priorities;**
- 2) Ensuring that peacebuilding initiatives are developed through a multi-stakeholder approach in which national and sub-regional efforts, including those led by civil society, are meaningfully integrated into the design, implementation and evaluation of peacebuilding mandates;**
- 3) Integrating rigorous assessments of all peacebuilding-related initiatives in order to pay closer attention to their quality and impact on the ground level, and adapting funding priorities accordingly to maximise impact;**

- 4)** Ensuring that diverse civil society informs relevant policy-makers with locally led research analysis which effectively highlights the key issues and the assistance required to carry out actions;
- 5)** Engaging in new forms of collaboration by encouraging donors to take more risks in terms of drawing upon the expertise of civil society organisations in the most remote areas and those outside of the general partnership cycle.

Creating spaces for coordination and policy coherence with civil society by:

- 1)** Developing and strengthening existing channels, structures and resources in place to support partnerships and coordination with civil society to facilitate systematic and regular dialogue;
- 2)** Ensuring that regional organisations conduct regular mapping of civil society activities that have a potential to strengthen regional objectives, provide needed support to sustain such efforts, and ensure complementarity and non-repetition;
- 3)** Ensuring joint analysis and strategies in each specific context by establishing regional working groups composed of regional organisations, member states, civil society organisations, financial institutions and donors to share analysis and coordinate joint actions;
- 4)** Providing the required space and access points for local communities and civil society to have a meaningful seat at the table which is not only limited to their presence but also ensures meaningful input into relevant processes;
- 5)** Engaging in deeper and more regular analysis on how regional organisation's work aligns with, and impacts activities carried out at, the regional and country levels by national governments and civil society.

Sustaining action toward the realisation of lasting peace by:

- 1)** Drawing upon the networks and expertise of civil society to identify the groups most vulnerable on the ground in order to make targeted and meaningful resilience building interventions;
- 2)** Developing early warning conflict systems based on the information obtained through local community monitors who have the capacity to feed into national and regional initiatives;
- 3)** Meaningfully engaging diverse civil society groups, including women and youth, in the design of initiatives by guaranteeing access to decision-making spheres, enabling their participation to share experiences and provide analysis to better inform regional and national policies and actions in a context-specific manner;
- 4)** Implementing regional policies in a manner which encourages accountability of national governments for their implementation in the long-term;
- 5)** Promoting the principles of democratic governance and multilateralism, and developing national capacities to conduct peaceful elections and ensure the protection of civic space.

Promoting human rights and ensuring accountability by:

- 1)** Strengthening the laws and institutions which provide human rights protections at the regional level;
- 2)** Establishing mechanisms to ensure the monitoring of human rights records in national governments in a manner which is neutral and inclusive of civil society expertise;
- 3)** Providing financial and technical support, as well as the space for civil society engagement in existing regional human rights systems;
- 4)** Establishing regional mechanisms for individuals to seek redress when domestic institutions fail to uphold the law, or when they themselves are violators of the law;
- 5)** Operationalising human rights norms through their implementation into institutional policies and priorities at the regional level.

Achieving Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: The Roles of Regional Intergovernmental Organisations and Civil Society

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Authors: Marina Kumskova, Ellie Cumberbatch, Mallika Joseph

Editors: Luis Consuegra, Patricia Galdamez, Marie-Laure Poirré

Contributors: Johanna Hilbert, Eilidh McNaughton

Design: Eilidh McNaughton

