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CECORE



Advancing local peacebuilding impact through quality financing: *Sub-regional learning and exchange of best practices in meaningfully supporting local organisations*

Summary Note

A Civil Society - Donor Roundtable Discussion | Yaoundé | 23 May 2023

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND CONTEXT

In order to achieve more meaningful engagement with local actors in practice, it is critical to fulfilling two ambitions. First, strengthening the position of local actors in the aid system at the country level and rethinking how they are funded, including by co-creating an authentic partnership between donors and local organisations in terms of setting peacebuilding priorities and objectives as well as designing and implementing local peacebuilding programmes. Second, scaling up and learning from country-level funding mechanisms offers more flexibility and adaptability (short-term) to inform policy and budget decisions in capital cities (long-term).

Indeed, multilateral aid frameworks and bilateral donor commitments acknowledge the importance of and strive for more meaningful engagement with local actors, as without them, the impacts of aid investments will not be sustainable. For instance, the [OECD-DAC Recommendations on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#) (2021)—developed in consultation with DAC Member States—and the [Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development](#) (2022) stress the need for local ownership, leadership, and meaningful engagement of local actors to address today's vast and complex development, humanitarian and peacebuilding challenges. One way of doing so is by rethinking the way in which local actors are funded, including the partnership between donors and local actors. This understanding is highlighted in [point two of the Donor Statement](#) as well as in the most recent 2022 General Assembly Resolution on Peacebuilding Financing ([A/RES/76/305](#)), which called for longer-term and more flexible funding for local-level peacebuilding and increased quality investment in youth and women-led organisations. Together these commitments set the stage for moving the localisation agenda forward as donors increasingly recognise that they need to adjust their approaches in such a way that local actors can access quality funding as directly as possible.

The following key elements contribute to strengthening the position of local actors in the aid system at the country level:

- **Donors should engage with local peacebuilding organisations as partners and not as contractors or implementers.**

The [2022 Resolution on Financing for Peacebuilding](#) recognises the importance of taking into account the local context in peacebuilding and sustaining peace (OP8). This requires donors to work with local actors to determine local priorities within their political constraints. The [traditional role of donors has predominantly been that of a controller of resources](#) to ensure the grants are used in line with their goals and not necessarily the goals of local peacebuilders. To this point, donors often work with intermediary organisations to channel funds to local partners and rarely interact with local partners directly in determining their priorities and ways to channel resources. This approach allows for donors' limited understanding of local needs, such as the need to apply flexibility to the measuring impact of local peacebuilding work.

A noteworthy example of flexibility emerged in the collaboration between the German Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa/zivik) and CECORE in Uganda. In this partnership, ifa/zivik discussed and allowed flexibility in measuring impact. Acknowledging that peacebuilding impact does not bear fruit overnight, CECORE voiced concerns about reporting primarily on short-term project outputs. In response, ifa/zivik conducted a comprehensive assessment and subsequently launched an ex-post evaluation approach, allowing for the collection of outcomes that emerge years after a project's completion. This responsive action demonstrates ifa/zivik's commitment to actively listening to and acting upon the recommendations of their local partners, thereby fostering a more equitable relationship that strengthens local peacebuilding impact.

- **Donors and local peacebuilding organisations should invest in relationship-building based on equal footing, trust, understanding, and encouragement.**

The [2022 Resolution on Financing for Peacebuilding](#) stresses that civil society can play an important role in advancing efforts in peacebuilding and sustaining peace (OP8). Relationship-building between civil society organisations and donors can start before the allocation of financial resources and can even be completely independent of it. One effective approach to facilitate partnerships is by convening spaces for civil society and donors to (informally) exchange priorities and get to know each other. In Cameroon, such spaces do not necessarily exist. Consequently, encounters between civil society organisations and donors predominantly revolve around deliberations concerning financial opportunities. This leads to a significant number of donors remaining unaware of the diverse and impactful undertakings pursued by numerous civil society organisations, resulting in a disproportionate allocation of funding solely to a few select organisations that enjoy familiarity with the donors. As a result, they are better positioned to build a track record, allowing them to accumulate more financial resources over time.

A good practice that enabled relationship-building based on trust, understanding, and encouragement between donors and civil society was the 2019 Peace Café co-convened by the Peace and Development Advisor and WAA-Cameroon in the UN Information Center in Yaoundé. It allowed donors, policymakers and civil society representatives to meet informally to connect, exchange priorities, and discuss current issues.

- **Donors should support local peacebuilding organisations, especially women-led and youth-led organisations, in getting access to key spaces.**

In point three of the [Donor Statement](#), donors commit to sharing their platforms with local partners rather than speaking for them. In this, the needs of women and young people, among other groups, should be particularly amplified given the specific challenges that they are facing in accessing relevant spaces for dialogue. Building on this commitment, as stated in the [2022 Resolution on Peacebuilding Financing](#), donors should provide extra support to women-led and youth-led organisations to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and youth in peacebuilding. This entails that donors should critically reflect on their roles and power dynamics within their engagement with women and youth-led organisations. By recognising the disparities in access and influence, donors can actively leverage their unique position to support them in gaining access to key spaces. This will [support donors in their effort to reposition themselves as supporters](#), allies, and catalysts.

- **Donors should adopt participatory grantmaking methodologies.**

The [Secretary-General's 2022 Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#) recognises the importance of innovative financing mechanisms that strengthen national ownership and support local actors in their work. Therefore, a participatory grantmaking approach to project design and implementation plays a crucial role in ensuring alignment with the goals and capacities of local partners.

The French government has recognised the significance of developing projects jointly, particularly with local women and youth-led organisations. As part of this approach, in Cameroon, all funding dedicated to civil society is co-created with local organisations, starting from submitting a concept note and extending to project development and implementation. In practical terms, the French Embassy in Cameroon meets with the civil society organisations (CSOs) proposing projects (right of initiative) and then assesses with these CSOs the major themes of need - in line with French political priorities. These analyses are then used to create funds available to civil society, from which calls for proposals are published.

Teams from the French cooperation department and external partners offer training and/or advice to CSOs whose projects are shortlisted, enabling them to refine and strengthen their proposals. With this support, CSOs then submit more complete proposals with coherent technical and financial bids. As a result, it becomes easier for CSOs to monitor and evaluate their projects and impact. Throughout the project implementation, the French Embassy in Cameroon offers continuous accompaniment and support by organising face-to-face meetings at the French Institute, field visits, and remotely by e-mail or video conference. By doing so, the French Embassy in Cameroon ensures that local organisations have access to guidance and assistance when needed. This approach moves away from the traditional model of providing feedback solely based on a written final report and emphasises active engagement and ongoing support. It also enables local actors to propose responses to the real needs of communities, to make the donor understand the implementation difficulties and to offer concrete solutions to overcome these difficulties. It further allows them to enter an initial funding phase where they strengthen

their capacities on project management tools that allow them to propose projects to larger donors.

- **Constructive relationships between civil society and the government are crucial for impactful peacebuilding action.**

As stated in the [Secretary Generals 2020 Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#), it is the primary responsibility of the National Government to identify, drive, and direct priorities, strategies and activities for sustaining peace. Therefore, for civil society to engage with government actors is a key element of peacebuilding efforts. This engagement does not always involve providing financial support but allows access to government facilities. For instance, in 2023, WAA signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Family Affairs to ensure accompaniment in their EU-funded [VOYCE project](#) that aims to prevent the radicalisation of youth and supports those who have to de-radicalise in the North West and South West of Cameroon. The partnership agreement gives WAA Cameroon credibility as a civil society organisation and thus allows them access to state-run disarmament demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) centres to include ex-combatants in their peacebuilding training. By formalising their relationship through the MoU, WAA can collaborate more effectively with the government and leverage state resources to promote peace. This cooperative approach allows civil society organisations to contribute their expertise in alignment with government priorities, ultimately bolstering peacebuilding efforts and contributing to sustaining peace.

However, establishing relationships with government actors can present challenges for civil society organisations, primarily due to the government's decision-making power regarding the involvement of local organisations in peacebuilding efforts in Cameroon. The government has the authority to limit their engagement and restrict their actions, which poses obstacles to civil society's meaningful participation.

A recent good practice of a project where the UN agencies, national commissions, and civil society organisations are working together is the PBF-funded “Health for Peace” project in the Far North of Cameroon, implemented by WHO and IOM together with local organisations and the National Commission for DDR. In alignment with the National DDR strategy, the project aims to enable authentic and effective dialogue on community health to reinforce social cohesion, trust, exclusion reduction, resilience, and violence reduction. Thus, when local authorities such as the National Commission for DDR in the Far North integrate community activities led by local organisations in their plans and align them to the National Strategy, constructive and sustainable working relationships between the government and local organisations can be established. The UN can support these efforts by providing funding and convening diverse actors.

- **Donors and local peacebuilding organisations should allow a broader discussion on the value and impact of national peacebuilding networks.**

As stated in the [Secretary-General’s 2022 Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#), increasing the level and quality of funding for networks in peacebuilding should be a key priority.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial to recognise the challenges and opportunities to enable quality funding through networks. The most prevailing challenge is that funding networks may lead to power struggles and competition over resources within the network. Differing priorities, agendas, and interests among network members can create tensions and hinder effective collaboration.

In addition, the presence of fraudulent or fake civil society organisations in Cameroon is a concern as it is difficult to fully understand if they are a legitimate member of a network and eligible for funding, especially for donors. Accessing information to verify the legitimacy of organisations remains a challenge for donors as, for instance, websites and Facebook pages are not regularly updated. Furthermore, many of these organisations lack internet access altogether, exacerbating the difficulty in obtaining relevant information and contacting them. Verifying the legitimacy of CSOs is an important step to ensure that genuine organisations are recognised, supported, and able to contribute to peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The lack of personnel at the embassy level to gather information about civil society organisations slows down the process of verifying the legitimacy of local organisations. Further, the limited reach of donors, particularly beyond the capital, hampers their ability to establish contact with local civil society organisations.

Well-established networks such as GPPAC Eastern and Central Africa, consisting of reputable organisations such as WAA Cameroon, can play a crucial role in navigating the landscape of existing smaller CSOs and grassroots organisations, even in remote areas. For instance, through WAA's well-established relationships with traditional and religious leaders and vast knowledge of existing small youth-led initiatives, they can support donors in verifying the legitimacy of unknown local organisations by providing additional background checks, reviews, and references from reliable sources within their vast network.

A good practice where increased funding to a network/coalition that led to collaboration and cooperation instead of competition comes from Nigeria. What began as an informal network to deepen cooperation and solidarity amongst organisations transformed into [the Action Group on Free Civic Spaces](#) in Nigeria, a coalition of 61 organisations. The Secretariat of the Action Group was responsible for disbursing funding to member organisations based on clear and transparent agreements made in advance. Coalition members respected the financial decisions and focused on implementing their activities instead. By acting as a unified network, the Action Group on Free Civic Space harnessed the power from their collaborative approach, enabling them to achieve significantly more together than they could have as individual entities, as the government might have pressured them to seize their activities.

Recommendations

Based on the lessons learned from Cameroon, Nigeria, and Uganda, the following recommendations have been identified for advancing local peacebuilding impact through quality financing:

- Donors should engage with local peacebuilding organisations as partners and not as contractors or implementers by constantly adjusting their practices based on a reflection on how donors understand programming and partnerships, taking power dynamics and capacity issues into account, leveraging local peacebuilding organisations' expertise and judgement, and allowing flexibility.
- Donors should invest in relationship-building with local organisations based on equal footing, trust, understanding, and encouragement through establishing inclusive donor-civil society platforms for regular, informal exchanges and practising active listening to the perspectives and needs of local peacebuilding organisations. In this, the UN could play the role of the convenor, offering its office space to host exchanges and using its influence to invite relevant stakeholders. In this, specific attention must be paid to the accessibility to diverse women and youth-led organisations.
- Donors should adopt participatory grantmaking methodologies by including local organisations in the process of developing calls for proposals, offering multiple opportunities for them to strengthen their submitted proposals, and providing continuous personal accompaniment and support throughout the project implementation phase.
- The UN should support local peacebuilders in building constructive relationships between civil society and the government. Where the government limits their engagement and restricts their actions, the UN should ensure the accessibility of information about how to access more flexible funding opportunities, such as the UN Democracy Fund, which, unlike the UN Peacebuilding Fund, does not require the government's approval.
- Donors could rely on the value and impact of national networks in identifying reputable organisations and navigating the landscape of existing smaller CSOs and grassroots organisations.