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# Grading the United Nations

2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review Consultation  
with Local Women Peacebuilders

**ICAN** International  
Civil Society  
Action  
Network  
*For women's rights, peace and security*



A Network of People  
Building Peace



## SUMMARY NOTE

This summary note provides an overview of the perspectives of local women peacebuilders on the effectiveness and impact of the UN System and the donor community in advancing peacebuilding and sustaining peace at the field level. The perspectives were shared by local women peacebuilders participating at ICAN's 10th Annual Forum titled ['Peacebuilding in a Time of Pessimism'](#).

## 1. Despite the growing recognition of the need to localise peacebuilding action for impact, common understanding is required about what localisation means.

This includes:

- ▶ Prioritising locally-determined priorities in strategic decision-making;
- ▶ Minimising external influence over decision-making;
- ▶ Institutionalising partnerships with local women peacebuilders;
- ▶ Prioritising authentic partnership with women peacebuilders;

## 2. The UN should move away from excessive bureaucracy and excessive reliance on a business approach.

This includes:

- ▶ The UN should not implement peacebuilding programming on the ground.
- ▶ The UN should reduce its bureaucratic processes to enable quicker delivery of peacebuilding programming.
- ▶ The UN's role should be to operationalise the UN Charter.
- ▶ The UN should be guided by the UN Charter and not the donor priorities.
- ▶ The UN should amplify local knowledge and expertise.

## 3. Financing for peacebuilding requires structural change towards quality financing.

This includes:

- ▶ **Quantity of financing for women-led peacebuilding work needs to be improved.**
  - ▶ Providing direct and sustained funding for women peacebuilders' work;
  - ▶ Adopting indicators to assess the amount of funding that goes directly to women-led organisations.
- ▶ **The quality of financing also needs to be improved.**
  - ▶ Intermediary models need to be supplemented by funding provided directly to women peacebuilders and their networks;
  - ▶ Loosening compliance requirements;
  - ▶ Supporting locally-informed measurement of success.

## 4. The accountability for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is required.

This includes:

- ▶ National Actions Plans (NAPs) should be developed and adequately funded.
- ▶ Existing financing commitments require a follow-up.
- ▶ An accountability mechanism could strengthen the WPS implementation.
- ▶ Local awareness of WPS is still required.
- ▶ Global military spending can be reallocated towards locally-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

## **5. The understanding of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture needs to extend beyond New York-based entities.**

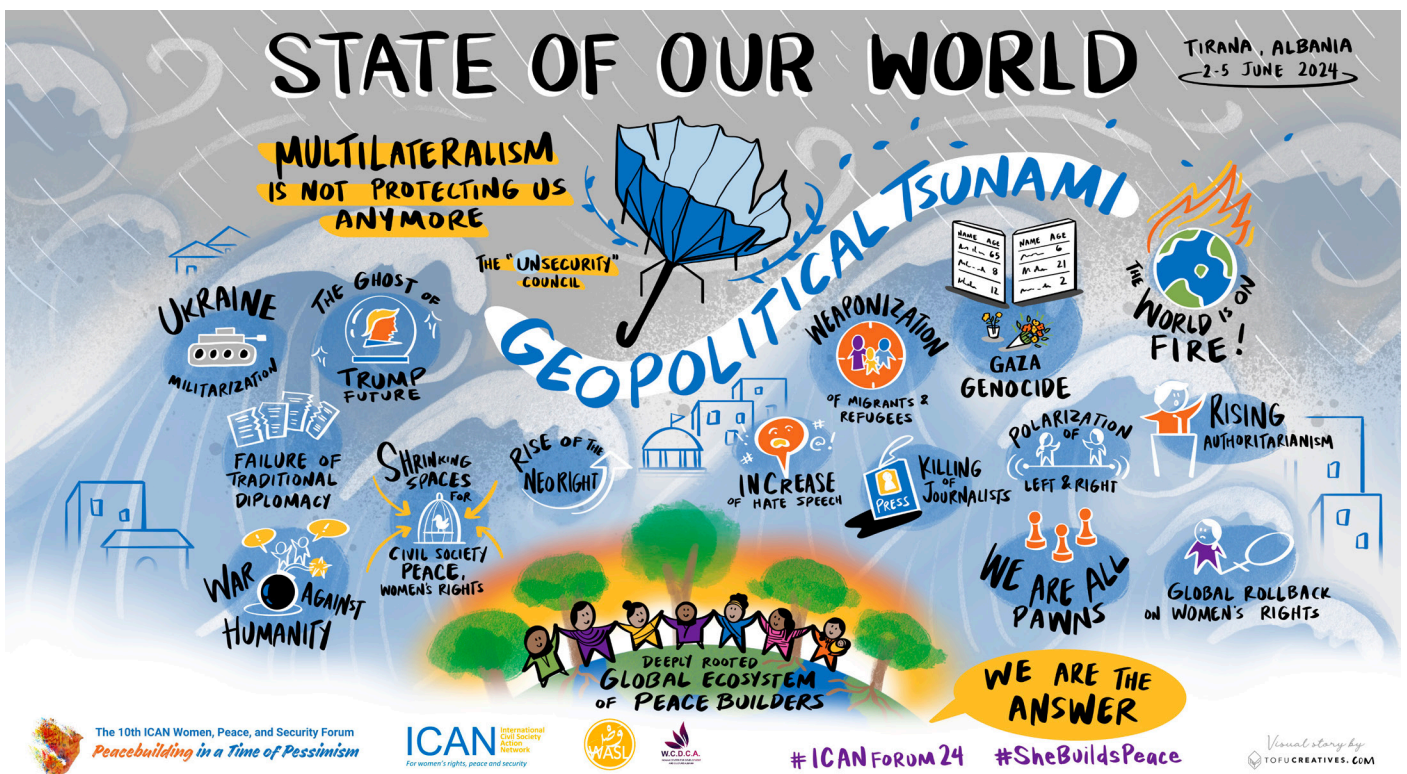
- ▶ The work of AFPs and their impact needs to be equally reviewed during the 2025 PBAR, with relevant concrete steps for strengthening their role to be reflected in the outcome resolution.

## **6. Locally-led networks should be supported in policy and practice on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.**

- ▶ The donor community should test innovative funding models (micro and small grants) that facilitate flexible access to funding for community-based organisations and their networks.
- ▶ Donors should develop a criteria for networks, coalitions and intermediary partners to ensure that their role is in providing technical support while local actors are in the lead of the decision-making.

The 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (2025 PBAR) consultation aimed at providing an opportunity for women peacebuilders operating at the local level to contribute to strengthening the UN Peacebuilding Architecture. The consultation enabled the participants to share their insights about the work of the UN in their respective contexts.

The participants concluded that to be impactful, policy and programming for peacebuilding and sustaining peace must be centred around people, not political interests. As such, localisation is critical for impactful policy and programming. Peacebuilding starts with the values people share in the home, then builds out into their communities, and finally grows into the global policy on peacebuilding and sustaining peace that is expected to support people’s needs and priorities.





The following key takeaways emerged from the consultation:

## 1. Despite the growing recognition of the need to localise peacebuilding action for impact, common understanding is required about what localisation means.

There is a growing recognition among donors and policymakers that the impact of peacebuilding policy and programming stems from context-specific action driven by local realities, experiences and needs<sup>1</sup>. However, there is still no common understanding about what localisation looks like in practice.

Women peacebuilders suggest that localisation implies peacebuilding policy and programming that 1) put local needs ahead of political interests and 2) build on the work local peacebuilders are already doing. Localisation includes, but is not limited to, the following principles:

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**Prioritising locally-determined priorities in strategic decision-making:** *Both the donor community and the development partners must consult with local peacebuilders and their networks as equal partners in all aspects of decision-making. Such consultation should start from the development of policy and programming and take the form of intentional ‘co-design’ or ‘co-creation’ that enables local peacebuilders to actually shape relevant policy and programming. This aligns with the global policy. For example, dual resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace consider women’s groups ([A/RES/70/262-S/RES/2282](#), OP4(d)) and local peacebuilders ([A/RES/75/201-S/RES/2558](#), OP1) to be equal stakeholders in efforts to operationalise peacebuilding and sustaining peace. In 2022, the General Assembly further urged efforts to fund initiatives that integrate women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the planning, implementation and reporting of peacebuilding and sustaining peace at all levels ([A/RES/76/305](#), OP6). In practice, some funds distributed by peacebuilding networks live up to these principles: ICAN’s Innovative Peace Fund (IPF) gives local partners the ability to determine their priorities and define their own programmes, while offering strategic and technical support based on individual need<sup>2</sup>. On the contrary, many UN funds, for example, increasingly make their grants less accessible to women peacebuilders, signalling the lack of consultations with civil society<sup>3</sup>.*
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**Minimising external influence over decision-making:** Local methodologies are often perceived as inferior to programming generated in the Global North. Instead of providing space for local women to engage in peace dialogues through intentional ‘co-design’ or ‘co-creation’, facilitators often rely on ‘independent’ male experts from other countries and often regions<sup>4</sup>. While engaging neutral facilitators and mediators has a methodological value, *peace dialogues cannot remain ‘elite’ and exclude the primary beneficiaries of these dialogues from direct participation in peace dialogues on the basis of ‘co-design’ or ‘co-creation’.*

<sup>1</sup> Local women peacebuilders observed that Women, Peace and Security projects in Libya implemented by external stakeholders did not result in any meaningful impact, while local civil society achieved sustainable outcomes with minimal funding. Similarly, during the Doha process on the situation in Afghanistan, women were criticised by the Taliban as ‘puppets of the US inserted into the process to make it look good’; in reality, women brought issues the closest to the needs of the communities in Afghanistan.

<sup>2</sup> GNWP et al. (2021). Fund Us Like You Want Us To Win: [Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/fund_us_like_you_want_us_to_win.gnwp_gppac_ican_wilpf_kvinnamadre_211122.pdf): [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/fund\\_us\\_like\\_you\\_want\\_us\\_to\\_win.gnwp\\_gppac\\_ican\\_wilpf\\_kvinnamadre\\_211122.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/fund_us_like_you_want_us_to_win.gnwp_gppac_ican_wilpf_kvinnamadre_211122.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Women peacebuilders suggest that proposal formats of UN agencies, funds and programmes are becoming more rigid, limiting flexibility. We found that in several years, the proposal requirements have already predetermined outcomes, outputs and activities, which creates difficulty for women to innovate according to reality on the ground.

<sup>4</sup> Women peacebuilders expressed concerns about foreign men having easier access in dialogues with Taliban than women of Afghanistan.

- ▶ **Institutionalising partnerships with local women peacebuilders:** Partnerships between the UN, donor community and civil society are often top-down, inconsistent, and dependent on individual UN staff's commitment, with limited resources for meaningful engagement. Women generally find it more difficult to access the UN spaces, aside those 'reserved' for women. At the same time, given the continuous rotation of staff at the UN and Member States' embassies, institutionalised partnerships with local peacebuilders, including women's groups has the potential to support the retention of institutional memory and proper transitions. *The UN field presences should develop institutionalised community engagement strategies on the basis of [the UN System-Wide Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#). This also requires appointing a focal point for the engagement with civil society in each entity, with country/regional leadership being accountable for the delivery on localisation indicators.*




As [more donors are investing in localisation](#), this concept is being co-opted by a variety of development partners in search for additional funding. Women peacebuilders observe the following trends:

- ▶ **Prioritising authentic partnership with women peacebuilders:** Authentic partnership is based on: 1) designing and managing participatory resource allocation processes with local organisations as primary designers and implementers of programming, with development partners providing administrative oversight; 2) working with local organisations and their networks to conduct capacity-building needs assessments and then helping them meet those needs; and, 3) prioritising long-term, trusting partnerships with local organisations. Many intermediary organisations, however, present themselves as representing the local communities in conflict and fragile settings, while in reality, their priorities are driven by the donors and organisational headquarters based in the Global North. Many of these organisations have country offices that, despite hiring national staff, continue to promote the goals of their headquarters based in the Global North. *The donor community and development partners should ensure that any intermediary organisations they work with implement and adhere to the principles of authentic partnership in their work with local peacebuilders.*
- ▶ **Allocating resources for localisation to local actors:** The UN has made significant strides in fundraising to advance localisation, but most of the decision-making on strategy development and financial resources remains within the UN System and barely reaches the community level. *The donor community should strive to make resources available to local peacebuilders directly and, where this is not possible, reconsider how resources are allocated between the UN and civil society second-tier applicants or the UN implementing partners and encourage a more equal distribution of resources.*

## 2. The UN should move away from excessive bureaucracy and excessive reliance on a business approach.

The 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations ([‘HIPPO report’](#)) affirmed that the UN does best when it facilitates more and does less (p. 5). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly challenged the role of the UN, with many Member States taking a firm decision to ask the UN to leave for the period of the pandemic. This spearheaded the change of the UN System’s fundraising and engagement strategies. Specifically, the Our Common Agenda process and the upcoming adoption of the Pact of the Future are presented as a Member States-led process aimed at re-establishing the trust between the UN and its Member States. A similar review and reconsideration of relationships with civil society need to take place, as the UN is perceived as a competitor, rather than a meaningful partner to women peacebuilders.

**Women peacebuilders observe the following trends of the UN’s expansion across the globe and put forth the following recommendations:**

-  **The UN should not implement peacebuilding programming on the ground:** The broad interpretation of the UN mandate creates confusion among donors and competition among the UN and local peacebuilders. According to the [UN Charter](#) and the [HIPPO report](#), the UN’s primary role is to be a convenor and facilitator, providing supporting technical expertise, where required. *The UN should adhere to its mandate and not overstep into the roles of other stakeholders within the multilateral space.*
-  **The UN should reduce its bureaucratic processes to enable quicker delivery of peacebuilding programming:** The UN is also becoming an increasingly bureaucratic institution, resulting in slow operations. Internal processes are too complex and take a long time. Women peacebuilders shared that by the time some of the UN agencies, funds and programmes (AFPs) approved their proposals, they were no longer relevant. It is reported that it takes on average over a year to receive funding support from UN AFPs. This contrasts sharply with quick funds available to local partners through innovative funding mechanisms by networks and intermediary organisations (i.e., ICAN’s [Innovative Peace Fund](#) and GPPAC’s [Youth-by-Youth Small Grant](#)). *The UN should revise its operational structures to lighten its processes and make their work more accessible for local peacebuilders, including women-led organisations.*
-  **The UN’s role should be to operationalise the UN Charter:** The UN does not promote the principles enshrined in the UN Charter as it rarely calls on the governments for violation of fundamental rights, using the arguments related to national ownership and non-interference. However, the UN was created to uphold human rights and promote conflict prevention. Therefore, the UN is uniquely positioned and obligated to promote human rights, including local peacebuilders’ participation in peacebuilding action. To this regard, *the UN should advocate for the meaningful participation of civil society in policy and program design and implementation. Similarly, the UN should advise the donor community and national governments to integrate local peacebuilders’ priorities in the design of strategies, funding mechanisms and policies at all levels.*

- ▶ **The UN should be guided by the UN Charter and not the donor priorities:** The UN shifts its priorities based on the donor priorities. For example, since the 2018 Pathways for Peace report, the UN's focus on advocating for conflict prevention funding diminished until 2022, when changes in global politics refocused donor attention back on prevention efforts. Back in 2006, the Secretary-General asked Member States to consider providing more predictable financial support for conflict-prevention activities ([A/60/891](#), para 92). However, in the absence of traction among Member States, the interest in prevention was abandoned until another opportune moment. *Prevention is a fundamental mandate enshrined in the UN Charter; therefore, it cannot be abandoned due to the lack of financial support through voluntary contributions by the donor community. Assessed contributions should be used to fulfil the purposes of the UN Charter and not simply to sustain the UN operations.*
- ▶ **The UN should amplify local knowledge and expertise:** The UN often assumes control over publications published by independent consultants or civil society under their funding, including during independent evaluations of its work. For example, there are at least two reported instances brought up during the consultation, where local women peacebuilders submitted analytical reports commissioned by the UN, and their work was never published because it did not meet the expectations of the UN system. Local knowledge often relies on alternative methodologies, which are not inferior but provide valuable insights into fragility and unpack innovative peacebuilding approaches. *The UN should amplify local knowledge and expertise by supporting reflective learning; encouraging story-telling and other qualitative methods of conveying data; and allowing adequate capacity to local networks to carry out data collection with streamlined channels of rapid analysis. These processes should directly feed into decision-making to ensure that information meaningfully informs further action. Where needed, the UN should assist local peacebuilders in translating their real-life experiences into the jargon-heavy UN language to improve takeover of these messages by decision makers.*



### 3. Financing for peacebuilding requires structural change towards quality financing.

Meaningfully supporting women peacebuilders entails scaling up existing resources for women-led peacebuilding work and ensuring that women peacebuilders can actually utilise these resources to advance locally-determined priorities.

- ▶ **Quantity of financing for women-led peacebuilding work needs to be improved.** In the past, such allocations have been extremely low. For instance, between 2017 and 2018, a mere 0.2% of the total bilateral aid targeting fragile countries went directly to women's rights organisations, and this percentage has not changed in a decade. The COVID-19 pandemic and the global political shifts further aggravated the situation, with women-led organisations reporting cuts and delays in funding<sup>5</sup>. *Providing direct and sustained funding for women peacebuilders' work is a prerequisite for them to develop institutional capacities and capitalise on their roles in advancing inclusive and sustainable peace. This requires adopting indicators to assess the amount of funding that goes directly to women-led organisations, rather than only looking at gender-equality as a target.*
  
- ▶ **The quality of financing also needs to be improved.** It's important to change the ways the money is accessed by women peacebuilders. *The donor community, including multilateral donors and the UN AFPs, must explore innovative avenues to transform the current system of peacebuilding financing to sustainably address the challenges faced by diverse women peacebuilders to ensure impactful peacebuilding action<sup>6</sup>.* There are several opportunities to provide more quality financing for women-led local peacebuilding action:
  - ▶ *Intermediary models need to be supplemented by funding provided directly to women peacebuilders and their networks: Current eligibility criteria makes it impossible for local women peacebuilders and their networks to apply for funds. Further, existing funding processes require significant absorption capacity and fulfilment of technical criteria that smaller or newly established organisations do not have, halting innovation and limiting peacebuilding ownership. Donors should review and ease their eligibility, application and reporting criteria and requirements to better balance their own fiduciary requirements with the realities and capacities of women peacebuilders and reduce the time and resources necessary to meet those requirements. Donors further should test innovative approaches to support women peacebuilders, including through the creation or strengthening of pooled funds aimed at directly supporting women peacebuilders as beneficiaries, as well as through channelling money through their embassies directly to local women peacebuilders and their networks. Finally, donors should invest in building fundraising and organisational capacities of community-based organisations and individual women peacebuilders living in conflict-affected communities.*






<sup>5</sup> GNWP et al. (2021). Fund Us Like You Want Us To Win: Feminist Solutions for more Impactful Financing for Peacebuilding: [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/fund\\_us\\_like\\_you\\_want\\_us\\_to\\_win.gnwp\\_gppac\\_ican\\_wilpf\\_kvinnna\\_madre\\_211122.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/fund_us_like_you_want_us_to_win.gnwp_gppac_ican_wilpf_kvinnna_madre_211122.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Id.

- ▶ *Developing trust in local action, allowing for flexibility and adaptivity:* Local women peacebuilders report that consistent demand for delivery on selected, often predetermined, project outputs creates anxiety and limits their creativity and ability to react to ad-hoc changes on the ground. Donors should break with the presumption of an inherent risk in working with local organisations, and endorse women peacebuilders' own assessment of risks and mitigation measures as these are likely to be the most efficient solutions. Donors should also consider loosening restrictive logframes that often diminish creativity and, instead, embrace the unknown to test local capacities to enhance the possibility for impact of local action.
- ▶ *Loosening compliance requirements:* In many contexts, women peacebuilders are unable to access funding due to the registration requirement and/or the requirements of an approval by the government, which is simply not possible in authoritarian contexts. Donors should support innovative funding mechanisms with lighter compliance requirements, whether established internally or through intermediary organisations, to test options for advancing meaningful support to women peacebuilders.
- ▶ *Supporting locally-informed measurement of success:* Many grants available through the UN System still focus on outputs rather than impact. Donors should support adaptive monitoring and evaluation processes, including community-led determination of impact and encourage clear and realistic goals. This includes basing measures of success for peacebuilding programmes on the expertise of funding recipients, using non-indicator-based monitoring and evaluation methodologies, investing in programmes that have a structured way of 'learning by doing', and conducting 'ripple-effect' evaluations which involve returning to understand long-term impacts.

#### 4. The accountability for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is required.

While women peacebuilders observe the relevance and positive impact of the WPS Agenda on their work<sup>7</sup>, the implementation of the Agenda is still missing. The following trends are reported:

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**National Actions Plans (NAPs) should be developed and adequately funded:** In many contexts, there are still no NAPs or there are no localisation plans for NAPs. Where NAPs exist, the financial resources allocated to achieve their objectives are often lacking.
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**Existing financing commitments require a follow-up:** Following the adoption of the 2022 General Assembly resolution on financing for peacebuilding ([A/RES/76/305](#)), there is no follow-up by the donor community, and no reporting process is developed.
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**An accountability mechanism could strengthen the WPS implementation:** Even though women peacebuilders work to link the WPS commitments to CEDAW that provides an accountability mechanism, the WPS Agenda does not have a dedicated forum to take stock of its implementation. The UNSC Annual Debates on WPS could technically serve this function; however, the focus of these discussions largely depends on the preference of the UNSC President for this month. The WPS-Humanitarian Action Compact also does not serve this function as it tracks the implementation of the Compact commitments, and very few Member States are signatories to the Compact. The UN System similarly does not have any accountability mechanism for the integration of the WPS across its work. The UNSC should discuss avenues for strengthening accountability and reporting on the implementation of the WPS commitments by Member States and the UN System.
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**Local awareness of WPS is still required:** Almost 25 years since its adoption, it is still difficult to localise the WPS Agenda due to the lack of tools and resources for awareness raising on WPS. The UN and the donor community should support the development of resources to make WPS relevant and understood by communities.
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**Global military spending can be reallocated towards locally-led peacebuilding and conflict prevention:** In 2000, when women peacebuilders collectively advocated for the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda at the UNSC, it was for a new gender-transformative approach to peace and security that requires making conflict prevention a priority on the UNSC's agenda. Despite the UNSC adopting the Agenda, the global military budget continues to grow from year to year, further fueling conflict and tensions. Governments should reduce their military expenditure by at least 15%, with further cuts annually, and increase their investment in local peacebuilding and nonviolent and inclusive approaches to peace and human security. Governments, with support of the UN and bilateral donors, should further ensure that human security focus in national policies is present, *adequately* funded and developed in partnership with local peacebuilders.

<sup>5</sup> The WPS helped women peacebuilders to advocate for effective national policies, supported donor attention to the topic, and provided tools for implementation.

## 5. The understanding of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture needs to extend beyond New York-based entities.

Currently, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture is primarily understood to include the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) that operates from New York, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) with field secretariats in a few countries, and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) with a very small footprint at the field level<sup>8</sup>. These entities are not accessible and often not known to women peacebuilders, indicating their limited relevance at the field level. Most of the work that is accessible and relevant to civil society is done by the UN AFPs. Therefore, *the work of AFPs and their impact needs to be equally reviewed during the 2025 PBAR, with relevant concrete steps for strengthening their role to be reflected in the outcome resolution.*

## 6. Locally-led networks should be supported in policy and practice on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Amid a geopolitical tsunami of rising authoritarianism, a global rollback of women's rights, and the failure of traditional diplomacy, women peacebuilders are increasingly relying on their local networks and innovation to build an ecosystem of peacebuilding to meet this moment. Networks of local peacebuilders, such as ICAN and GPPAC, provide their members with technical support, solidarity, protection and effective quality financing mechanisms. They also promote joint learning (including learning by doing), share access, build on their individual strengths, avoid repetition of efforts, and divide tasks among themselves. *The donor community should test innovative funding models (micro and small grants) that facilitate flexible access to funding for community-based organisations and their networks. Donors should also develop a criteria for networks, coalitions and intermediary partners to ensure that their role is in providing technical support while local actors are in the lead of the decision-making.*

<sup>8</sup> This idea has been reiterated in the Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture entitled the '[Challenge of Sustaining Peace](#)' (para. 59).