

## Strengthening Peacebuilding Impact on the Ground

### *Considerations for Global Policy*

*On 13 December 2024, Lukudu William of CEPO South Sudan shared a personal reflection on the relevance of local experiences in peacebuilding work, emphasising their critical role in ensuring impactful peacebuilding action.*



My friend worked for the UN in South Sudan and shared his extensive knowledge of inclusive peacebuilding action with another staff member. This individual later used the expertise gained to secure a higher position elsewhere, leaving their post vacant. When the UN sought to fill the role, we advocated for it to be given to a national staff member, as South Sudanese nationals possess a deeper understanding of the local context and are better equipped to identify the right experts within their communities. However, the position was ultimately filled by someone from the Global North. My friend decided to leave the UN, feeling that too much time and resources were being spent helping outsiders grasp the complexities of South Sudan's situation, rather than empowering local leadership. It just seemed like a waste of time and resources.

What do we learn from this story? Here are three points for your consideration:

- **The UN should be encouraged to hire staff from local communities and national actors.** People with backgrounds in civil society peacebuilding work offer a lot of expertise that can make the work of the UN a lot more localised and impactful.
- To further strengthen impactful action, **the UN should consider building and sustaining stronger ties with the communities.** This means the establishment of institutionalised platforms and strategies for the partnership with civil society. We see these partnerships working effectively at the global level, with the co-design of the CS-UN Dialogue. Similar practices can be implemented at the local level.
- Finally, **all UN Country Teams should have a position of someone tasked to liaise with civil society.** We have been told that there is always someone. But in most cases, this person is hard to identify, and many work with civil society because of personal commitment. This is not sustainable. Expert-level peacebuilding personnel should

include civil society engagement in their ToRs to ensure continuity beyond individual staff members. The RC should have localisation objectives embedded in the Terms of Reference.

**Why is the focus on localisation so critical?** To prove the point, I want to share the good practice of the Peace Ambassadors programme who are volunteers in local communities. CEPO trains them on early warning and most recently mental health and psychosocial support because they requested it. The Peace Ambassadors are a reliable and sustainable source of information for the government which calls the Peace Ambassadors to monitor and verify outbreaks of violence. The Peace Ambassadors can provide this information because they:

- Trusted by their communities
- Work closely with chiefs, religious leaders, and traditional leaders, among others
- Remain in the communities

The same programme would not succeed if implemented by the UN because it will not be developed by local actors and be treated as a project rather than a part of everyday life. The UN should not take the role of implementer. Instead, the following points could be considered:

- **The UN should focus on leveraging its convening power to unite diverse peacebuilding stakeholders at the country level.** By fostering partnerships among diverse actors, the UN can support peacebuilding priorities more effectively. As part of this convening capacity, the UN should provide political support and a platform for fundraising to strengthen and expand such initiatives.
- Even when acting as an intermediary, **the UN should adhere to the same principles of [authentic partnership](#)**, as we do in GPPAC. This means giving the decision-making priority on projects and outcomes to local peacebuilders, while purely providing logistical and technical support to them through the structures that the UN and other intermediaries already have.
- Finally, **financing needs to be spent with impact.** The amount of money that is needed to operate the UN machinery versus the resources available to local partners also needs to be re-evaluated.

I thank you.