Strengthening Peacebuilding Impact on the Ground: Considerations for Global Policy

Parallel Side Session – Second Annual CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding

co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (UN PBSO) and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations

13 December 2024 | The Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN

Summary Note

The discussion brought together participants of the CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding, including diverse local peacebuilders and representatives of the UN and Member States. The focus of this session was directed toward the lived experiences and expertise of local peacebuilders. The discussion highlighted a widespread perception that the concept of impact is understood differently by various stakeholders, that local action lacks sufficient evidence of its impact that meets donor expectations, and that local peacebuilders lack support in capturing their impact in ways that align with donors' differing expectations.. Continued inquiry into these emerging questions around local peacebuilding action is essential to advance progress in understanding and demonstrating peacebuilding impact. The discussion brought forward several dimensions of the conversation on impact, including the space for learning on peacebuilding impact, accountability demands faced by local peacebuilders, and fundraising needs of local actors, which cannot be seamlessly integrated into one framework. The points raised during this discussion can serve as a foundation for follow-up discussions in light of upcoming policy processes such as the formal phase of the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (2025 PBAR).

Background:

The discussion took place against the backdrop of two global trends: 1) the rising global securitisation and militarisation in response to an increasing number of conflicts, which challenges both the value and investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; and 2) the growing global rhetorical commitment and recognition of the value of conflict prevention, for instance through the Pact for the Future. Together, these global trends have sparked the need and a renewed effort to make a compelling case for prevention and peacebuilding, with a particular focus on understanding and demonstrating its impact. In this context, it becomes necessary to articulate what inclusive national ownership and leadership in peacebuilding and sustaining peace means and how to realistically capture peacebuilding impact.

The 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review (2020 PBAR) resulted in an increased focus on the impact of peacebuilding at the field level, which has framed subsequent discussions and processes. The 2 July 2020 Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Chair's letter encouraged measuring the success of peacebuilding and sustaining peace 'in terms of impact rather than outputs'. Building on this, the 2020 dual UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace requested a 'comprehensive review of United Nations peacebuilding in 2025, [...] with emphasis on the systematic impact made at the field level'

([A/RES/75/201-S/RES/2558](), OP 5). To better understand peacebuilding impact, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (DPPA/PBSO) launched the [Peacebuilding Impact Hub]() in December 2023. In June 2024, a convening in the Hague organised by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in partnership with the UN Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) for Peacebuilding Support, resulted in [a contribution]() to the 2025 PBAR, providing a foundation for further discussions on how to come to a more realistic understanding of what can be expected as results and impact of peacebuilding; how best to measure that; and for what purpose.

Three key observations emerge as the discussion on peacebuilding impact continues to evolve. First, donors and policymakers increasingly recognise that *impactful peacebuilding policies and programs stem from context-specific and locally-led actions driven by local realities, experiences, and needs*. This calls for a shift in the discussion about what peacebuilding impact truly means and who has the power to define it. Second, *the shrinking financing for peacebuilding demands an evidence-based approach to documenting its impact*. This necessitates showcasing the cost-benefit of investing in prevention, an exploration of how peacebuilding is measured, and the identification of the most effective methodologies for measuring impact that meets the donor responsibilities and local realities. Third, *there is an increasing need to be realistic about what peacebuilding can actually achieve*. [Previous discussions]() have revealed a notable difference in how affected communities perceive the impact of prevention and peacebuilding compared to international stakeholders. This raises critical questions about who holds the power to define peacebuilding impact and determine what constitutes success.

The launch of the Impact Hub and the discussion initiated by the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2024 set the foundation for continuing the dialogue as part of the 2025 PBAR and related processes, such as the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the 10th anniversary of UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, the fourth Financing for Development Conference. These key milestones offer a unique opportunity for continuous joint reflection among donors, policymakers and local peacebuilders on peacebuilding impact.

Key takeaways from the discussion include:

The discussion on peacebuilding impact revealed two shifts that need to be considered moving forward: 1) a shift in the narrative around peacebuilding; and 2) a shift in the approaches to measuring its impact.

1. **Shift in the narrative around peacebuilding:**

Peacebuilding must be understood as a long-term process, rather than a short-term project. Local peacebuilders understand that sustainable peace is not the outcome of a single project. Instead, it stems from institutional structures designed to promote and sustain peace, the daily work of networks that broaden and strengthen the commitment to peace within communities on the ground, and long-term efforts to build resilience that prevent risks from escalating into violence. For instance, in Ukraine, peacebuilding efforts centred on dialogue illustrate that impactful transformative processes cannot be confined to rigid logframes which focus on predefined, measurable outputs and outcomes expected from one or two consultations. Impactful dialogue is not the product of a single event but develops through a sustained and iterative approach.

Efforts to understand peacebuilding impact must focus on learning from both successes and failures. As early as 2017, the [Pathways for Peace](#) report sought to make a compelling case for prevention but fell short of achieving this goal. Current practices and results frameworks that focus on a certain type of accountability (particularly financial) and justifying expenditures often discourage open learning—especially sharing failures—due to fears of jeopardising funding opportunities. To address this, all peacebuilding stakeholders, including donors and UN actors, must collectively engage in a process of 'unlearning' to create safe spaces for honest reflection and knowledge sharing. It is crucial to ensure that the pressure to show results for fundraising purposes does not hinder the ability to openly learn from both successes and failures, as this is key to impactful peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding initiatives should prioritise the transformation of individual mindsets and strengthening connections and social networks. Peacebuilding should prioritise the transformation of individual mindsets and the ability to relate to others. This means recognising that peace is not just the result of political agreements but requires buy-in and commitment at the community level. Any peace process is short-lived if the attitudes within communities do not change. Peacebuilding networks can sustain dialogue, create platforms to share, bring people together, and foster trust, contributing to building and sustaining local constituencies committed to peace. In this context, awareness of people's mental well-being and community-based psychosocial support structures are crucial for addressing the emotional root causes of conflict and reinforcing resilience. As local peacebuilders emphasise 'not addressing emotions like fear and anger, which are often root causes of conflict, can prolong the path to peace'. By creating support networks and environments where individuals can better recognise and comprehend their emotions, they can participate more meaningfully in peacebuilding processes, making them more inclusive and constructive[1].

2. **Shift in the Approach to Measuring Impact:**

There is a need for a shared understanding among donors, policymakers and local peacebuilders regarding what constitutes impact of peacebuilding action. From the perspective of local communities, determining impact starts with asking the question '[what does peace mean to you?](#)' to diverse local actors. This question helps to capture the aspirations of local actors. Measuring success therefore requires understanding the extent to which those aspirations are addressed. It is also important to recognise that the meaning of peace for local actors can evolve depending on changing circumstances. Such a reality requires flexible and adaptive approaches to peacebuilding. Two key elements are essential for developing a shared understanding of impact: 1) trust in the knowledge and expertise of local communities; and 2) flexible funding that allows for adaptive peacebuilding[2]. This new approach will require a shift in the way donors fund peacebuilding, but it is necessary given that the current approaches have not produced the desired outcomes.

Impactful peacebuilding approaches need to be defined based on what is working within communities. At the community level, the most impactful approaches are rooted in local

---

[1] GPPAC. (2023). Resilience is prevention: https://www.gppac.net/resilience-prevention
[2] A good example of this practice includes the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'Contributing to Peaceful and Safe Societies 2024-2031 Grant Programme' which supports peacebuilding networks and provides flexible funding that allows space for learning.

methodologies, local indicators that help identify early signs of instability, and local infrastructures for peace. External approaches often fail to effectively prevent conflicts because they do not fully align with the priorities and the reality of local communities. Effective interventions are those that can be sustained by the people within a specific country or community.

The demand for evidence-based peacebuilding needs to include locally-generated and locally-relevant data. Consistently tracking and showcasing results using reliable data is crucial to make a case of peacebuilding in the current political landscape. The Impact Hub can play a significant role in advancing these efforts[3]. This approach should meaningfully integrate the evidence of the impact of local action, which is currently perceived as missing by local peace actors. Current evidence on impact is mostly focused on the level of INGOs and multilateral organisations that collate results of their local partners and in that process lose the details relevant at the local level. The evidence of impact should include community-led indicators, perception surveys, and qualitative methods for better impact measurement. Impact evaluations and assessments must capture 1) social transformation, such as the increased commitment of communities to peace and democratic values, 2) the emergence of new connections and partnerships for peace, 3) survival of existing peacebuilding networks and movements, and 4) reinvigorated organising for nonviolent action and resistance in the face of conflict. Implied in the aforementioned: generally a changed attitude to the use of violence (and a reduced perceived necessity to do so) at individual and collective level. The current measurement approaches tend tofocus on quantifiable outputs and thus overlook the nuanced outcomes of peacebuilding and activism, particularly at the local and micro-local level.

The evidence of the impact of local action requires adequate platforms for local actors to share, learn, and grow collectively. Currently, the prevailing rhetoric around impact is largely seen as accountability-driven and rooted in colonial and top-down practices aimed at meeting the expectations of donors or higher-level decision-makers who are accountable to their taxpayers and/or boards. These colonial and top-down approaches are often perceived as being 'forced' on local actors by the donor community. There is a significant need to amplify grassroots voices through learning platforms that prioritise local actors. Consultations with key stakeholders conducted by GPPAC and PartnersGlobal revealed strong support for a collaborative space where local actors can explore what 'impact' means from their own perspectives and jointly engage in defining and measuring impact based on their lived experiences. By shifting the narrative on impact measurement, a collaborative learning space could foster innovation in how local actions are evaluated and supported. Such a space could complement the Impact Hub and expand empirical evidence by documenting the knowledge about what local strategies and practices produce the most impact toward social transformation.

The following key recommendations emerged from the discussion:

- **There should be space for honest and open dialogue between donors and local peacebuilders to address mutual accountability requirements.** This includes recognising that donors are often constrained by the expectations of their constituencies. Peacebuilders should be invited to meaningfully collaborate with donors

---

[3] Access the Impact Hub here: https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/impact-hub

on equal footing in developing strategies that both meet donor accountability requirements and support locally-led and locally-owned peacebuilding efforts.

- **The 2025 PBAR outcome document should encourage strengthening the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), including its Impact Hub, with regard to measuring impact in a meaningful way.** This will enable an inclusive and comprehensive approach to collecting evidence of peacebuilding impact. The Impact Hub should work systematically with civil society, amplifying local impact stories, particularly those from networks and youth-led organisations. The Impact Hub should move forward with the conversation on issues presented in this summary note with diverse stakeholders to unpack its several dimensions, including learning, accountability, and fundraising, and help leverage available expertise and resources in one common direction. The PBSO could convene multi-stakeholder peacebuilding research and knowledge events and processes with the global peacebuilding community and other knowledge holders to help move towards coherent approaches and standards for impact assessments and other forms of peacebuilding knowledge.
- **The donor community should commit flexible and long-term financial support for peacebuilding that is locally-led not only in terms of setting priorities but also in terms of defining what constitutes impact.** This means investing in approaches that support and empower local communities to define and address their identified peacebuilding needs. Key areas of investment should focus on promoting behavioural change, shifting individual mindsets, and strengthening local infrastructures for peace. Additionally, donors should create space for locally-led determination of impact, such as providing platforms for joint learning among local peacebuilders, and substantive rigid requirements for pre-determined output-based reporting.