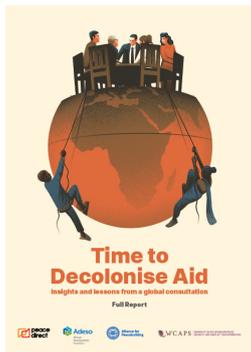




Race, Power, and Peacebuilding

Insights and lessons from a global consultation





Decolonising the Sector

This is the second report in our decolonising the sector series. The first report “Time to Decolonise Aid” was published in May 2021 and can be downloaded here: peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/

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Abbreviations

CSO

Civil Society Organisation

ICAN

[International Civil Society Action Network](#)

IO

International Organisation (UN, World Bank etc)

INGO

International non-governmental Organisation

GPPAC

[Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict](#)

NGO

Non-governmental Organisation

P4D

[Platform4Dialogue](#)

UN

[United Nations](#)

UNOY

[United Network of Young Peacebuilders](#)

Executive Summary

In October and November 2021, Peace Direct, in collaboration with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), and United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) convened a global online consultation to discuss structural racism in the peacebuilding sector.

Over 160 people from 70 countries took part in the consultation and we are indebted to all those who shared their insights, experiences and analysis. Our findings build on those in our first report ‘Time to Decolonise Aid’¹, published in May 2021, which established the extent of the problem across the wider humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. Our aim for this report was to probe in more detail the issues as they relate specifically to peacebuilding.

Our findings include the following:

- Global North peacebuilding practices, norms, and attitudes share with the international humanitarian and development sector the same deep-rooted problems of structural racism and neo-colonial worldviews, which are barely acknowledged by peacebuilding practitioners in the Global North.
- Key peacebuilding frameworks are rooted in Global North knowledge systems and values, which do not always resonate with Global South actors. The valuing of Global North knowledge and language over knowledge from other contexts, reinforces the unequal power dynamic between the Global North and Global South, often alienating Global South peacebuilders.
- Some attempts to incorporate local perspectives into peacebuilding frameworks have had limited success and continue to prioritise ‘cut and paste’ approaches resulting in many local peacebuilders feeling disconnected from peace efforts in their own countries.
- Research processes are primarily developed, owned and legitimised by Global North power holders and decision-makers. This monopoly on knowledge production enables them to determine the peacebuilding sector’s focus.
- Local peacebuilders believe that international peace interventions are primarily motivated by the interests of Global North actors and external geopolitics, leading many to be distrustful of Global North actors leading peace efforts.
- Peacebuilding funding is opaque, inaccessible to most peacebuilding groups/organisations in the Global South and often wholly inadequate in terms of flexibility and duration.
- The unequal power dynamics between Global North and Global South actors reinforces the continued prioritisation of the interests of those removed from the conflict, reducing the effectiveness of peace efforts and their sustainability.

1 Peace Direct “Time to Decolonise Aid”, May 2021 <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>

Recommendations

The following recommendations are arranged into three different groups.

The first group of recommendations focuses on changes to existing worldviews, norms and values. Without a change to worldviews and values, other changes are almost impossible to achieve.

The second group of recommendations focuses on knowledge and attitudes.

The third group of recommendations focuses on practice.

Taken together, we hope that they offer one possible way to decolonise peacebuilding.

Worldviews, norms and values

- **Acknowledge that structural racism exists**
Acknowledgement of the problem is an essential first step, as this underpins all subsequent efforts to re-shape the peacebuilding sector. Without such acknowledgement, both internally, as an individual actor, and externally, explicitly as an organisation, all subsequent change efforts are likely to fail.
- **Reframe what is considered as expertise**
Donors, IOs, INGOs, and policymakers need to expand the definition of what makes an individual an expert on an issue. This will involve valuing contextual expertise as highly as technical or thematic expertise, as well as acknowledging the value and perspectives of partial insiders to a conflict and not just impartial outsiders.
- **Consider whether Global North knowledge is relevant for each context**
Global South based indigenous knowledge systems and beliefs may differ greatly from the prevailing knowledge held by Global North actors about how peace should be built. Be open to the possibility that Global North knowledge actors may not be as important as you think it is.
- **Interrogate the notion of “professionalism”**
Donors, IOs and INGOs should consider who they are excluding through their work culture and to consider what requirements in the name of professionalism are in fact excluding marginalised populations, including non-White practitioners, women, and youth.

Knowledge and attitudes

- **Acknowledge, value, invest in and learn from indigenous experiences and knowledge**

The inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems provides the peacebuilding sector with a unique opportunity to develop approaches that are culturally resonant to the conflict-affected area, and which will ideally continue to be relevant long past the end of any donor funded peacebuilding programme.
- **Mind your language**

Be careful not to use language that diminishes the agency of people and communities in the Global South. Be mindful of the exclusive terms and jargon that you use, and how such terms may exclude others. Consider auditing the language and the terms that your organisation uses, through a 'decolonising' lens, to determine how they should change.
- **Avoid romanticising the local**

Adopting local approaches with little consideration may not shift power within the local population. Avoiding romanticising the local will enable a more honest, clearheaded appreciation of what local groups can bring, as well as their limitations. This will also help to avoid assuming homogeneity amongst locals – some local actors may disagree and hold divergent beliefs, all of which should be seen as valuable and worthy of discussion.
- **Reflect on your identity**

Every practitioner – both those who are locally based and those who work internationally – must reflect on their motivation for being involved in this work. This must be done with the humility to accept that good intentions alone do not prevent harmful outcomes. In addition, all actors should ask what privileges do your identities afford you? In what ways have you reinforced the 'White gaze' of the sector?
- **Remain humble, open, and imaginative**

International practitioners must approach their work with greater humility. It is vital that they remain open to criticism and feedback from actors in the Global South, and that they reflect on those comments. For practitioners from the Global South, it is important that they remain open to the idea that the sector can and, in many ways, should change.
- **Reimagine the peacebuilding sector**

Part of the process of decolonising means reimagining new ways of engagement between the Global North and Global South. Imagining a future peacebuilding sector when conflicts rage across the planet is difficult, and where established ways of doing things are so entrenched. But reimagining peacebuilding based on mutuality, respect and trust between Global North and Global South actors is essential.

Practice

- **Decentre the Global North in decision making**

Decision making should be decentred from current power holders in the Global North. The first step in this process should be to devolve power from Global North capitals to embassies and offices in the host country. From there, Embassies and donor country offices should consider establishing mechanisms which involve shared or devolved decision making on issues of funding and prioritisation of peacebuilding efforts.
- **Recruit differently**

Diversifying the staff, management and Board of Directors of Global North organisations is an essential step in Decolonising Global North structures and attitudes. Diversifying Boards and other governance structures is arguably the most difficult but most important step an organisation can take. Recruitment policies for staff positions needs to be reviewed through a 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' lens to ensure that under-represented groups are encouraged to apply. This includes a re-evaluation of what constitutes expertise (see earlier recommendation).
- **Stop and look closely before acting**

Intervening quickly in a conflict situation can do more harm than good, especially if donors, IOs or INGOS have no prior experience of the conflict context. Donors, IOs and INGOS are asked to stop and consider carefully whether they should intervene directly, particularly if they don't have the relevant contextual knowledge.
- **Invest in local capacities for peace**

Local peacebuilding capacity exists in every conflict context. Donors, IOs, INGOS, and policymakers should commit to investing in that capacity first, before considering the role and utility of non-local actors such as INGOS.
- **Establish meaningful partnerships for peace**

While investing in local capacities for peace is an important step, such partnerships need to be long term and based on mutuality, trust, co-learning and respect.
- **Develop safe and inclusive spaces for conversations about power**

External actors need to allow opportunities for a critique of their power and practices, and how the use of this power influences the peacebuilding efforts that are developed and supported.
- **Create space for self organisation and change**

Donors, IOs and INGOS must create spaces and opportunities for local groups, organisations, partners and grantees to share experiences, self organise and strategise together.
- **Fund courageously and trust generously**

Entirely new funding processes are needed, based on the principles of accessibility, adaptation, trust and flexibility. In addition, modifying the power dynamics between funders and grantees requires more than increased inclusion and accessibility to funds; it requires grantees to be entrusted to determine their own priorities.

➤ **Support the work of marginalised local communities**

For local actors committed to decolonising, they need to recognise that peace efforts likely privilege actors with more proximity to the Global North. As local actors seek to shift power from the global to the local, it is vital to consider who is currently excluded due to the preferential treatment of some local actors over others.

➤ **Expect and insist on the partnership behaviours that matter to you**

Every local actor should determine what partnership behaviours matter to them when engaging with international actors. Then, when developing relationships with international funders, IOs and INGOs, local organisations can return to those markers as expectations for the partnership, giving the international actor something definitive to strive for and giving themselves something definitive to critique, should that be necessary.

➤ **Recognise the power of local solidarity**

Local actors should invest in strengthening local networks. This could include creating opportunities for communal organising, the development of common policy goals, or spaces for discussing different perspectives and needs and how they might be met.

Introduction

In recent years, the ‘Decolonising’ agenda has moved from the margins into the mainstream discourse in the international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. While humanitarian and development actors have been grappling with this issue in increasing numbers, the peacebuilding sector in the Global North has been slow to engage, giving the impression to many Global South activists that peacebuilding is somehow different and immune from these critiques.

In May 2021, Peace Direct published ‘Time to Decolonise Aid’ a report based on a global consultation with practitioners, activists and researchers from around the world that explored structural racism in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. While it was not the first report to examine this issue, it was one of the first reports to highlight how structural racism shows up in the sector from the perspective of a wide variety of Global South practitioners. Given how extensive and deep rooted the problem was, Peace Direct, in collaboration with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), and United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) held a global, online consultation in late 2021 aimed at understanding the ways in which racism manifests itself in the peacebuilding sector, and this report is a summary of that consultation.

By analysing current peacebuilding approaches through a ‘decolonising’ lens, we hope to encourage the peacebuilding sector to embrace the decolonising agenda and address unequal global-local power dynamics. While there may be some overlap in themes between ‘Time to Decolonise Aid’ and this report, we have attempted to avoid repetition as much as possible.

Methodology

The findings and analysis in this report are based on a series of online consultations held during October and November 2021. These took the form of online discussions using Peace Direct's online portal, Platform4Dialogue (P4D) and two rounds of Zoom videoconferencing calls. Over 160 participants, spanning 6 continents and 70 countries explored the unequal, global power dynamics in the sector, structural racism and identified ways to decolonise peacebuilding practice.

For the [P4D consultation](#), pre-prepared questions were developed across 6 discussion threads which served as starting points for a participant-led dialogue over two days.

What is a P4D?

Created by Peace Direct, Platform4Dialogue (P4D) is a safe and secure text-based web-based platform for organisations and individuals to exchange ideas and facilitate discussions. Initially, P4D was established to help support Peace Direct's efforts to bring together local peacebuilders and civil society to communicate and share insights during times of urgency, and where meeting physically would be too risky or costly. However, since launching the platform in 2017 it has also been used by Peace Direct and other organisations around the world to facilitate global and regional conversations with local peacebuilders, researchers and activists on a wide range of subjects, from the role of young people in peacebuilding to how the United Nations is viewed by local communities.

P4D is designed to be low bandwidth, enabling participants to access it even with poor internet speeds. Conversations on P4D are held asynchronously, which enables participants to read and post comments whenever they are able to, and to return to the discussion threads over a 2-3 day period. In this way, any P4D discussion does not rely on participants to block out specific times of the day to participate. To support multi-lingual conversations, P4D uses a Google translate function which enables participants to read and send messages in different languages.

See: www.platform4dialogue.org for more information

The first round of Zoom calls consisted of three region-specific calls for participants from: 1) Anglophone Africa and Europe 2) Francophone Africa and Europe 3) Middle East and Asia. A Zoom call for Latin America was offered but not used by participants. The linguistic groups were chosen based on the language that is most commonly spoken in the relevant region as well as what participants expressed most comfort with. The languages chosen were Arabic, English and French. The Zoom calls were hosted by staff from GPPAC, ICAN, PD and UNOY who speak the relevant language and these calls were facilitated using the Chatham House Rule.²

2 'Chatham House Rule' <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule#:~:text=The%20Rule%20reads%20as%20follows,other%20participant%2C%20may%20be%20revealed.>

The second round of Zoom calls were held in November to give as many people as possible the chance to participate and to further validate the data gathered in October. They followed the same pattern as the initial Zoom calls and topics were chosen based on preliminary data analysis that highlighted key themes that could be expanded upon from the P4D discussion. Participants were given the opportunity to contribute anonymously, and all transcripts, audio-visual recordings and private information were stored securely by Peace Direct. All quotes used in this report either came from the P4D discussion or the Zoom calls. Some quotes were modified for clarity and length, but modified versions of these quotes were verified and consented to by participants to ensure accurate representation of the ideas that they had shared.

There were some limiting factors to the research. We acknowledge that the data generated by the 160+ participants is not a representative sample of the global peacebuilding sector. While this was not possible, the selection of participants was based on a diversity of age, gender, ethnicity and country of practice, to give as broad a representation of the sector as possible. While the research was triangulated through the use of two rounds of key informant interviews, another limitation was the fact that the second round of additional interviews were conducted in English. We recognise that this not only excluded potential participants, but also reproduced the forms of coloniality that we are attempting to deconstruct. This choice was made as a result of staff capacity at the time and as such, potential biases arising from this choice have been taken into account within the analysis. Lastly, to mitigate author bias in the selection of themes, members of our partner organisations reviewed the draft report and a peer review was conducted by participants to crosscheck and ensure it was faithful to the consultation.

As the authors of this report are from organisations based in the Global North, we want to acknowledge the possible tension that might exist in writing a report on decolonising peacebuilding practice. We understand that this report is not a blueprint for decolonisation, nor does it aim to be. Rather, this report seeks to raise awareness of the existing power dynamics in the sector and advocate for a radical re-balancing of power between Global North and Global South actors and the communities they serve.

Throughout the research and writing process, we aimed to be reflexive and bring to centre the perspectives and experiences of practitioners based in the Global South. While we understand that writing the research findings in report format will continue the normalisation of report writing and undermine the decolonisation of research methodologies, we acknowledge that this format is preferred by funders, international practitioners and decision makers, who are the primary audience for this report. Nevertheless, we do hope that the contents of this report will add to the growing literature on decolonising the wider sector and help make way for greater investment in indigenous research methodologies in peacebuilding. The report's authors are also exploring ways in which these lessons can be shared outside of a report or primarily written format.



Peacebuilding Knowledge

Peacebuilding research

The consultation began with a discussion on peacebuilding research, with the aim of understanding how it is undertaken, how it is used and who benefits from it.

As a result of the colonial legacy in the sector, as highlighted in “Time to Decolonise Aid”,³ knowledge and research have been largely produced and consumed by Global North actors, even when most of the thematic and geographic focus of this work is located in the Global South. Participants discussed how the various stages of research were rooted in Global North values and knowledge systems that ultimately devalue approaches and knowledge systems in the Global South.⁴ In the consultation participants emphasised the unequal power dynamics in peacebuilding research, arguing that it is important to reconsider some basic assumptions. For example, one anonymous participant from the Global North mentioned that:

“*The best thing that we can do, I think anyway, is to understand [that is to accept] that our knowledge may not be the best knowledge. It’s not the only form of knowledge.*”

Participants built upon these sentiments and agreed that there was an imbalance of power between the Global North and the Global South in terms of what is considered as ‘credible’ knowledge and who decides if it is to be trusted. Atiaf Alwazir explained that this represents a “symptom of the idea that there’s only one legitimate type of knowledge which is Western knowledge.” Alwazir further explained that:

“*This is validated in research centres/universities etc., only using certain types of legitimate ‘sources’, while other sources are not legitimate or unprofessional. There’s a form of imposition of this ‘one type of knowledge’ worldwide which has tremendous effects on indigenous people and their knowledge.*”

Amardeep Kainth expanded upon this by saying:

“*The area of knowledge production is one where organisations are exceptionally uncomfortable and resistant in ceding power and ownership. The focus is on “increasing capacity” which for me is problematic as it is grounded in a deficit thinking approach. From my perspective/experience, this is deeply rooted in classist and colonialist understanding/ownership of knowledge.*”

3 Peace Direct “Time to Decolonise Aid”, May 2021 <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>

4 Peace Direct “Time to Decolonise Aid”, May 2021 <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>

By determining what knowledge is considered legitimate and useful, a very narrow range of methods of knowledge production is normalised, and existing power dynamics are repeated.⁵ By doing so, peacebuilding practice restricts, controls, and classifies knowledge to reinforce colonial narratives of worth and value.⁶

Participants highlighted that one of the most obvious ways to overcome these issues and to restore the balance of power in research practice is for practitioners in the Global North to take a step back in the various stages of the process and allow for the growth and development of indigenous knowledge systems. As participant Lumenge Lubangu noted:

“*The process of knowledge creation must be transferred to local actors through the multiplication of activities, effective collaboration and the creation of community relays at each base.*”

Many of the approaches used by local civil society are an effective way of sharing knowledge between diverse groups of people. An anonymous participant from one of the Zoom calls provided some examples of indigenous knowledge systems:

“*One thing that we were trying to do in Somalia and Yemen is document some of the informal mechanisms to peacebuilding. In Yemen, for example, so many women use art, dance, poetry, and also community dialogue, which unfortunately in the top down approach, are never really viewed as important*”

As documented in “Time to Decolonise Aid”, some of the language used by the international development and humanitarian sector can reinforce discriminatory beliefs about non-White populations.⁷ Peacebuilding concepts are no different, and are typically developed by people very far from the conflict affected areas they are studying.⁸ While there has been an attempt to create opportunities for local practitioners to provide feedback on these concepts, they are rarely invited to design them.⁹ The fact that local, indigenous peacebuilders have little say in the creation of peacebuilding terminologies shows how language becomes a medium of domination and social force as these concepts and terminologies are reinforced and mediated across the sector.¹⁰

5 McWhorter, Ladelle. “Scientific Discipline and the Origins of Race: A Foucaultian Reading of the History of Biology.” In *Continental and Postmodern Perspectives in the Philosophy of Science*, edited by Babette E. Babich, Debra B. Bergoffen, and Simon Glynn, 173-88. Aldershot, Hants: Avebury, 1995. <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/philosophy-faculty-publications/45/>

6 Debbie Sonu “Making a racial difference: a Foucauldian analysis of school memories told by undergraduates of color in the United States, *Critical Studies in Education*”, 2020. DOI: 10.1080/17508487.2020.1763415

7 Peace Direct “Time to Decolonise Aid”, May 2021 <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>

8 *Ibid*

9 Van Brabant, K. & Patel, S. Global Mentoring Initiative “Localisation in Practice: Emerging Indicators and Recommended Practices” (June, 2018) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Localisation-In-Practice-Full-Report-v4.pdf>

10 Barasa, M N., Khasandi-Telewa, V. I., and Ndambuki, J “The Role of Language in Peacebuilding”, *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, vol. 6, No 2, (2016) pp. 74-93 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.6.2.04>

Many participants agreed that excessive use of certain peacebuilding terms reproduce colonial dynamics by alienating local practitioners, making them feel uneducated and inferior especially as these terms are either inaccessible or difficult to translate into local languages. This not only reinforces the English hegemony but also the so-called “ivory tower” of the aid sector. This is a term which refers to the privileging actors with formal institutional education, particularly from Global North institutions, over other actors’ varied forms of expertise. One participant, Ncoline Nwenushi Tumasang Wazeh, demonstrated this by stating,

“Core peacebuilding agendas including women, peace and security; and youth, peace and security contained in UNSCRs [United Nations Security Council Resolutions] 1325 and 2250 respectively are too technical for grassroots actors, interpreted by them as ignoring the resourcefulness of grassroots women in maintaining peaceful communities and preventing violent conflicts.”

Moreover, participants identified that many of these terms fail to align with local realities and fail to acknowledge the inherent humanity and political nature of peacebuilding. As a result, these concepts are very difficult to implement on a practical level and can often be counterproductive. One anonymous participant illustrated this by challenging the notion of impartiality in peacebuilding:

“What I deal with all the time for years and years is trying to show people I am partial and partial to the communities, and I’m doing this in the face of elites who want to co-opt what communities, different perspectives in the community want and want to say this is what we need to do. And I also have to be partial in the way I see communities on both sides of a conflict. So that means I can go into the armed group opposition held area, and go into the government held area.”

Despite the value of ‘insider-partial’ mediation and peacebuilding being well documented¹¹ it remains poorly utilised and accepted by Global North policymakers and donors.

Scholars such as Robtel Neajai Pailey have argued that one of the main problems is the ubiquity of the White Gaze¹² – a process whereby people and societies are viewed under the scope of White ethnocentrism. Participants in the consultation argued that the peacebuilding sector is no different. This suggests that peacebuilding concepts are not only developed through the lens of the White Gaze but also that indigenous approaches are likely to be regarded as less credible.

11 Maiese, Michelle. “Insider-Partial Mediation.” *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: March 2005 <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/insider-partial>

12 Pailey, Robtel Neejai, “Decentering the White Gaze of Development”, (October 2019) <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12550>

Opinion article

Arab Educational Institute/ Pax Christi Association

The term 'conflict' is widely employed in development discourse about Israel and the Palestinians. It has created a **distorted view of reality which suggests an abstract symmetry between parties**. There is actually a huge political, military and economic inequality between Israel and Palestine and in the West Bank, where the Arab Educational Institute operates, using the term 'conflict' filters out the reality of direct and indirect occupation.

When speaking about 'conflicts' the emphasis is often on mitigating them or taking their roots away. However, Palestinian development projects, such as the Arab Educational Institute (AEI) are unable to deal with these root causes – namely the occupation itself. The role of organisations such as AEI is limited to developing Early Warning and Response Systems that, for example, allow the local population to warn each other about checkpoint violence by soldiers.

In addition, peacebuilding jargon anesthetizes the oppression of Palestinians in real-life situations of inequality in the eyes of the international community. For instance, calling areas dominated by the Israeli occupation army and settlers 'disadvantaged' or 'marginalized', removes the question of responsibility and the power dynamics involved. This may be convenient from the viewpoint of depoliticizing development language and thus making it acceptable to larger groups of people, but it creates the **false suggestion that no acts happen that intentionally marginalize Palestinians**.

Similarly, Palestinian resistance has been routinely equalized to 'terrorism', following the Israeli army's terminology which is reflected in international media reports and applied in much academic and aid jargon. How deep this terminology has roots is evident from Palestinian NGOs stressing that their projects are 'nonviolent' – as if to distinguish their projects from any violent resistance, the last implicitly considered illegitimate notwithstanding the context of occupation. Associating Palestine with 'terrorism' **removes any notion of Palestinian self-identification and diminishes their cultural, social and political identity**.

This ties into the widely held assumption that especially Palestinians should deliver on 'peace', and that opposition to negotiations, even when these essentially sustain the unequal status quo, is not acceptable. A distorted view is created when focus is directed at the need for 'peace negotiations' while colonization of the West Bank and East-Jerusalem continues and internationally no measures are taken to stop it.

'Peace discourse' thus functions to hide and justify colonial power dynamics. It is necessary to present alternatives, such as development and aid workers talking about the need for a 'just peace' in which the Palestinian perspective and reality are fully incorporated – a peace not only as a distant prospect, but as a means to direct politics here and now, on the ground.

'Just peace' or 'justice and peace' are concepts which clarify that peace can only be reached through justice and rights. While the occupation should be included in development discourse, (occupied) Palestine and the need for solidarity should be at the center of it.

Arab Educational Institute

www.aeicenter.org

<https://www.facebook.com/AEIsudstoryhouse>

Bethlehem. Palestine

Participants agreed that there were many solutions to create a more balanced power dynamic within peacebuilding knowledge production. Most importantly, and perhaps most generally agreed, was the need to recognise local and indigenous peacebuilding, religious and cultural knowledge and value the language of local civil society. In this way, participants felt that it might be possible to hybridise peacebuilding language in a way that decentres the Global North and ensures not only accessibility for local communities, but also their agency in designing and implementing these concepts.

A specific example was given by Themrise Khan on peacebuilding terms,

“ Conflict analysis isn’t a naturally occurring phenomena amongst local communities, unlike conflict resolution, for which tools and practices exist in communities globally. ”

This observation not only suggests that there is a difference in the terms used by Global North and Global South actors, but also points to the fact that conflict resolution as practiced by local communities may contain within it conflict analysis as understood by Global North researchers, even if it isn’t called by that name.

Peacebuilding Frameworks

Peacebuilding frameworks are tools designed to establish a strategic and methodological approach to peacebuilding. While the existence of such frameworks can be very helpful for international, national and local actors, there is an ongoing debate around whether they are aligned with the needs of countries in the Global South with diverse political and social realities.¹³ It is also argued that the failure to shift the design of peacebuilding frameworks to local entities is rooted in structural racism.¹⁴

During the consultation, participants highlighted how these frameworks are applied universally, as a ‘one size fits all’ approach. For example, Fernanda Ortiz Murillo noted that:

“ There is a general structure of how to intervene that has been drawn by the external actors (UN, INGOS, etc.). I believe so, because when we compare some interventions for e.g. of United Nations, it looks like there is a template used every time that there is a conflict. ”

13 Tschirgi, Necla, “Strategic Frameworks and Peacebuilding: Current Trends and Critical Directions.” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 5, no. 2, Sage Publications, Inc., 2010, pp. 1–5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48603384>.

14 Slim, H. “Is Racism Part of Our Reluctance to Localise Humanitarian Action?” Jun 5th 2020 <https://odihpn.org/publication/is-racism-part-of-our-reluctance-to-localise-humanitarian-action/>.

Participants felt that the near universal application of peacebuilding frameworks can often be counterproductive and hinder the prospects of sustainable peace. Participant Amjad Saleem described this with a personal example from his time working in Sri Lanka:

“ Working in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and after the end of the conflict, I was often amazed by how many international actors saw the conflict as binary, between the Tamils and the Sinhalese and so ‘we need to deal with bringing reconciliation between the two’, ‘north and south’, yet forgot for example the Muslim community who had been also affected by the conflict and faced pressures from both communities especially in a post 2009 scenario or even forgot that Sri Lanka’s history of conflict also has a Sinhalese uprising. So, any conflict analysis of Sri Lanka didn’t really consider these. As a consequence, especially in the 90’s and 2000’s, the Tamil community disproportionately got aid and relief whilst those on border settlements were missed out by both contributing to a wider problem. ”

Developed without utilising the experience and knowledge of local peacebuilders, many peacebuilding frameworks appear far removed from the local realities in which they are applied. For many participants, this demonstrates the persistence of White Saviourism in peacebuilding.

White Saviourism can also be seen in the way in which concepts such as “Sovereignty as Responsibility”, coined by a South Sudanese scholar and diplomat, Francis Deng,¹⁵ morphed into the doctrine of the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P). Participant Jacqui Cho commented that:

“ The reformulation of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ to ‘responsibility to protect’ [shows] that the moral imperative of ‘responsibility’ was shifted from internal to external character. ”

Cho elaborated further by saying that:

“ Both ‘Do No Harm’ and ‘R2P’ depoliticise both the context and the ‘peacebuilding’ activities themselves, when any form of entry into a conflict setting has a political character, regardless of whether it is done under the ‘peace banner’. This depoliticisation in turn makes it easier for outsiders to see it as their place to intervene, either militarily or through ‘soft’ measures, and also more easily avoid the key question of accountability. ”

15 De Waal, A. and Nouwen, S. M. H. “The necessary indeterminacy of self-determination: Politics, law and conflict in the Horn of Africa”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol 27. 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12645>

Peacebuilding frameworks such as the two mentioned above have the potential to perpetuate unequal power dynamics by making it easier for external actors to intervene and centre the role of peacebuilding with a select few in the Global North. For participants such as Landry Ninteretse, White Saviourism is at the heart of the issue. He said:

“ *white saviours’ use their own research, judgement, benchmark, perspectives and often limited knowledge to design, conduct and assess the success of their work, perpetuating the already felt sentiment that locals are unable, lack competences, capacity and know-how in handling their own crises.* ”

Participants argued that the moral superiority and lack of self-reflection that is associated with White Saviourism tends to obscure the ways in which race influences how knowledge is constructed and legitimised.¹⁶ Moreover, it engenders the notion that the Global South is inherently violent, savage and in need of ‘civilising’ – a notion that underpinned much of colonial expansion.¹⁷

Kloé Tricot O’Farrell, a consultation participant, illustrated how this ideology is present in the frameworks of peacebuilding practice. When conducting research on the ‘preventing/ countering of violent extremism’ (C/PVE) agenda and its impact on peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, she and her colleagues quickly realised that there was little evidence of strong support for violent groups. She stated,

“ *We saw how, the C/PVE agenda had impacted not only the work of international agencies and INGOs, but also of national organisation and authorities. Many now adopted a narrow focus on ‘radicalisation’ and ‘violent extremism’, whereas they previously worked on a range of peace, governance and development priorities crucial for building peace...But under C/PVE, the analysis tended to be reduced to factors causing recruitment into violent groups, resulting in interventions that focused on issues like religion and which target individuals, groups and movements labelled as ‘radicals’, ‘extremists’ or ‘terrorists’ – ignoring the real picture of what causes conflict.* ”

Participants agreed that there were solutions to overcome some of these problems, one of which was to establish a more intersectional understanding of local civil society which would help to develop and apply contextually relevant frameworks. Another suggestion proposed by participant Nicoline Nwenushi Tumasang Wazeh was to recognise that peacebuilding has existed in indigenous communities for a long time and local communities have approaches of maintaining peace and preventing violent conflicts, which are generally not mainstreamed or integrated in imported peacebuilding frameworks. She commented:

“ *Let’s prioritise the experiences and knowledge of these locals, since peace and security means different things for different communities.* ”

16 Macey D. “Rethinking Biopolitics, Race and Power in the Wake of Foucault.” *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2009;26(6):186-205. doi:[10.1177/0263276409349278](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349278)

17 McWhorter, Ladelle. “Sex, Race, and Biopower: A Foucauldian Genealogy.” *Hypatia*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2004, pp. 38–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3811093>

Rosalie Fransen built on this by saying that it is important to:

“*restore relationships between academics/scientists and local civil society through participatory research. Local civil society has unique access and trust within their communities and an in-depth understanding of their context that outside researchers lack. Their perspectives and experiences should be taken seriously as a core source of knowledge, not dismissed as subjective or as lacking rigor.*”

In doing so practitioners based in the Global North would be able to work with indigenous peacebuilders to identify the specific needs of a community and develop frameworks which are contextually relevant and inclusive. One such example was provided by participants Jospin and Gerard, local peacebuilders in Democratic Republic of Congo, who have developed a peacebuilding programme in schools that incorporates human rights and peace education. Programmes such as this are highly effective due to their contextually appropriate understanding of conflict dynamics, as well as their sustainable inclusivity of young people in local civil society. Gerard said:

“*We have had positive feedback from young people in such violent environments, in villages, in entities where violence was more or less the rule. Some young people have participated in actions to fight and prevent conflicts. These are the realities that we are living. And the young people of the different communities are organizing activities, despite the reticence and distrust that we see from the side of the adults, the mentors.*”

Providing space for local actors to conduct peacebuilding on their own terms would bring people at the margins of decision making into the centre and generate greater collaboration between the Global North and the Global South. Moreover, it would give indigenous practitioners greater agency and legitimacy in the peacebuilding processes. Jospin and Gerard’s work reinforces for a point made by peace, conflict and development scholar, Cedric de Coning, who suggests that the key to successful peacebuilding is to ensure that the local system has the freedom to develop its own self organisation.¹⁸

Participants agreed that it was important to remain self-reflective when constructing and implementing peacebuilding frameworks as a way of addressing the complex and uneven power dynamics in the sector. Joram Methenge detailed some relevant questions to ask when developing and applying frameworks:

“*i) Was the analysis framework used participatory? ii) Was it designed by all stakeholders with all stakeholders mind/ OR is it “a one size fits all approach” iii) Does it reflect the perspectives of local communities in conflict? iv) Does it address the root causes of the conflict? v) Will it enhance conflict resolution or exacerbate conflict? vi) Will it empower the local actors to handle future occurrences of conflict? vii) Is the framework designed to conceal or hide the root cause, actors, designers and beneficiaries of the conflict? viii) Are local conflict resolutions mechanisms and cultural institutions integrated in the framework?*”

18 De Coning, C. “Understanding peacebuilding as essentially local. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*”, 2(1): 2013 <https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.as/>



NAVYA KHANNA

Case Study

Efforts to integrate the Afghan Refugee Population by the local Peacebuilders in India

All over the world violence, war, persecution and extreme poverty force millions of people to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. Due to traumatic migration experiences such as lack of social support, separation from family members, cultural differences and language barriers, refugees are more susceptible to psychological challenges. Thus, it is essential to meaningfully integrate the refugee population in the host country. In New Delhi, India, local peacebuilders have developed methods to build trust with and promote inclusion amongst the Afghan refugee population.

The Peacebuilding Project, in collaboration with People Beyond Borders, planned a project which aimed at building self-reliance and capacities of female Afghan refugees (aged 13 and above) by training them to make sustainable sanitary napkins.

The local peacebuilders included in the project were aware that the Afghan community, similar to the Indian society, is a traditionally patriarchal society. For this reason, the leading partners chose to develop an all women team of volunteers to create a welcoming environment. **More often than not, INGOs overestimate the importance of thematic information and abstract concepts, which is not enough to create peaceful social cohabitation in the local community.** In this case, local peacebuilders were more familiar with the context and adopted practical methodologies based on the realities and needs on the ground.

By talking to the refugee women, the team learnt that the majority of them had close family members living in Afghanistan and were concerned about their safety. During this highly sentimental situation, the peacebuilders decided to improvise activities to build resilience and reduce stress amongst the participants. It also led to social cohesion amongst the different ethnic communities within the Afghan population such as Hazaras, Pashtuns and Tajiks.

One activity included creating a 'dream board' where participants shared their career goals and dreams. This made people develop a connection with each other, feel less isolated and share past experiences.

Volunteers from the host population used their existing networks to connect some participants with services such as English classes, or pro bono therapy sessions. This shows how by developing acceptance, trust and respect, **local initiatives can be successful in building and improving relations within and between communities.**

Even after the formal completion of the project, volunteers continued to conduct workshops with refugees. **The flexibility and adaptability of local initiatives shows how they can be more cost efficient and sustainable than INGO programmes.**

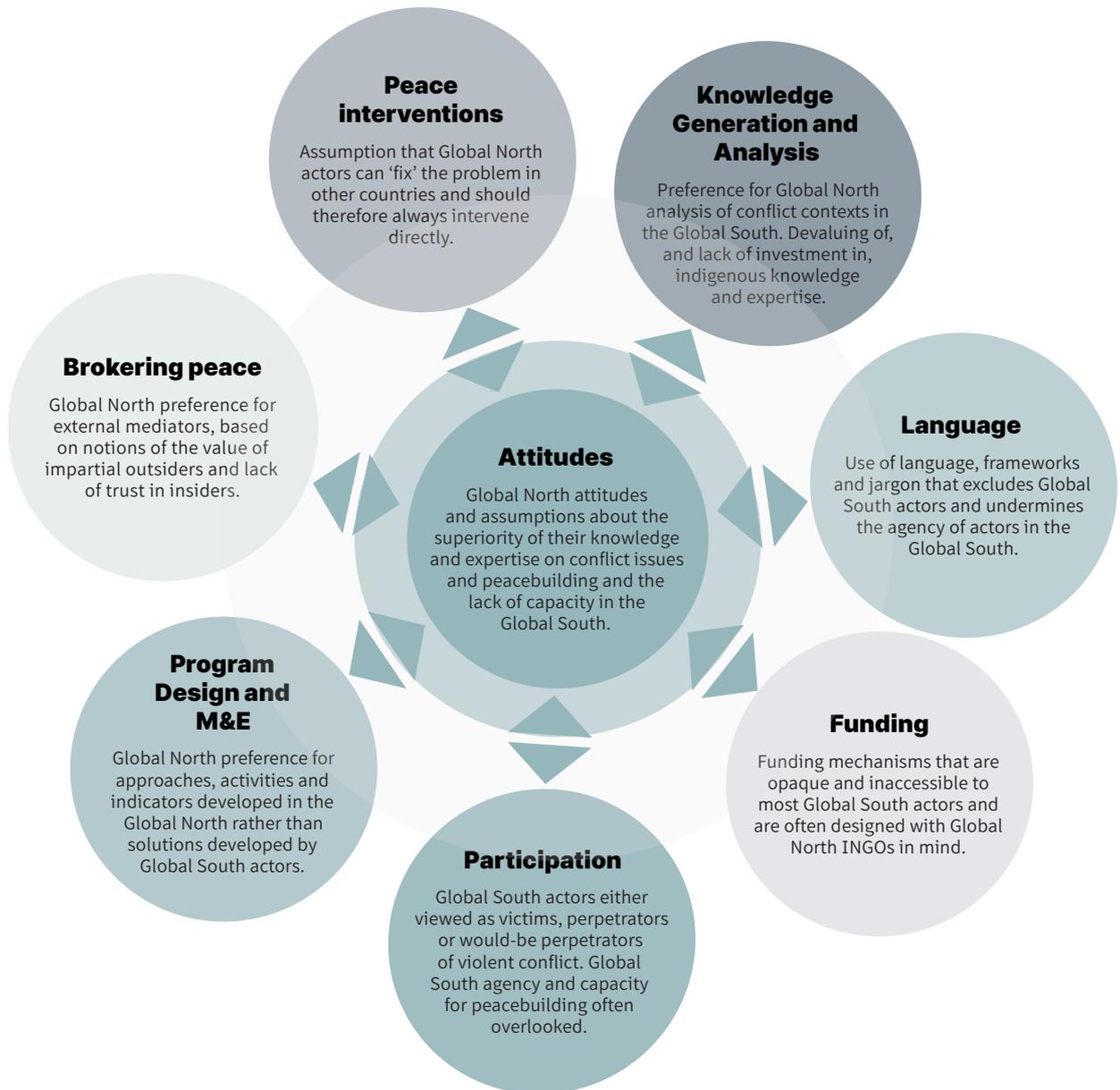
The key role international entities can play in such interventions, is by assisting local peacebuilders in getting access to donor aid, which would allow them to expand their scope of action.

Navya Khanna

<https://www.peacebuildingproject.org>

<https://instagram.com/thepeacebuildingproject>

How structural racism shows up in peacebuilding





The area of knowledge production is one where organisations are exceptionally uncomfortable and resistant in ceding power and ownership. The focus is on “increasing capacity” which for me is problematic as it is grounded in a deficit thinking approach. From my perspective/experience, this is deeply rooted in classist and colonialist understanding/ownership of knowledge.



Amardeep Kainth



Peacebuilding Practice

During the consultation, participants talked about how peacebuilding practice is hampered by structural racism. They identified a number of distinct areas of concern: (a) the trend towards a ‘professionalised’ industry of peacebuilders, (b) how unequal local-global power dynamics limit effective peacebuilding, and (c) the Global North’s role in geopolitics and its impact on peace efforts.

The limits of professionalisation

Many participants argued that the colonial and patriarchal nature of peacebuilding has created a ‘professionalism’ that has split emotion from reason which has left the sector focused on sterile efficiency. Participant Atiaf Alwazir argued that the undervaluing of emotion is a key aspect to ‘professionalism’ that is present in much of the Global North:

“ Even in our own work environments, and when there is no conflict, professionalism is equated with non-emotions. I think it has to do with a ‘colonial civilised approach’ as well as a patriarchal model for what is ‘professional’ and ‘objective.’ ”

Participant Gabriele Garcia highlighted added to this by saying:

“ The marginalization of emotions compromises us from understanding the complexity of the power relations, biases, and the individual and collective traumas involved. Bringing emotional literacy to the table is a decolonizing practice to approach conflicts and question the overvalued rationality. ”

A practical example of how ineffective peacebuilding can be by neglecting emotion was described by participant Cathy Ameyna:

“ Local and indigenous peacebuilding process are still ignored due to issues such as Christianity, introduction of western solutions and others. For instance African communities had various means of dealing with death and atrocities. In the Luo culture in Kenya they had ‘tero buru’ which was a mourning ritual only for men, keeping in mind that men were not expected to be seen crying in public. However, with the advent of Christianity these practices were frowned upon and even ignored, yet men still have no avenue to mourn after a loss. Peacebuilding solutions to trauma and healing is a totally foreign concept in the African context, with no incorporation of African traditions. ”

This example highlights the need for indigenous approaches to peacebuilding practice to be recognised, supported and developed.¹⁹ Ameyna provided a solution to this issue:

“*Research has persistently shown that in times of conflict and trauma, traditional mechanisms seem to offer more long lasting reconciliation processes because all participate. If African knowledge was accepted and allowed in developing peacebuilding theories, there would be more robust mechanisms than what we currently have.*”

Furthermore, participant Gabriele Garcia expanded on these comments, suggesting ways in which to incorporate emotion into peacebuilding practice. She noted that:

“*We can do it by facilitating a secure atmosphere that encourages people to (i) get used to the emotions and learn how to name them; (ii) acknowledge how these emotions influence behaviours, choices, and relationships; and (iii) recognize the power relations that come with silenced emotions.*”

By placing a greater value on emotional literacy, participants felt that peacebuilding practitioners may be able to develop a greater understanding of the conflict and may be able to address sensitive issues that are central to the conflict more appropriately. Not only would this generate a more sustainable and effective peacebuilding process but would also incorporate indigenous approaches and broaden the centre of what classifies as robust peacebuilding.

Unequal local-global power dynamics

In “Time to Decolonise Aid,” participants explored how funding in the sector continues to flow from the Global North to the Global South, often mapping onto pre-existing colonial ties. Participants also felt that donors continued to hold the majority of the power in their relationship due to the recipients’ dependence on external funding.²⁰

In this consultation, many participants held similar views, sharing that those who funded peacebuilding efforts often had outsized power to dictate every aspect of the peacebuilding effort from its timeline to the theoretical framework informing the approach.

One participant, Jessica Katsoun, stated how the interests of the peacebuilding INGOs, as the main vehicle for donors funding on peacebuilding, dictated the peacebuilding priorities within conflict-affected contexts saying:

“*INGOs all contribute with their varying mandates and agendas to prioritize or deprioritize funding, resources, and the main issues being addressed on the in-country agenda within that domestic ambit.*”

19 “Africa’s next Decolonisation Battle Should Be about Knowledge,” Conflict News | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, September 6, 2019), <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/9/6/africas-next-decolonisation-battle-should-be-about-knowledge>.

20 Peace Direct “Time to Decolonise Aid”, May 2021 <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/timetodecoloniseaid/>

One of the consultation participants, Pascal Richard, illustrated how the agenda of funders can be aimed at protecting their image in their country of origin rather than engaging with the interests of the community they are seeking to intervene:

“ Working for the German International Cooperation in Zimbabwe a main concern of those at the helm of funding streams was to ensure no funding provided would be appearing in German newspapers as shoring up the (at the time Mugabe led) part of the government (under the government of national unity). Accountability of that money was towards parliament/public in Germany and not the people affected. This stood in the way of more daring and engaging support to peacebuilding initiatives. ”

While Richard's comment highlights how funder mandates can prioritise the interests of the Global North, a comment by Amjad Saleem highlights how Global North priorities can influence and determine those of Global South actors:

“ A few years ago in Sri Lanka, the international community was transfixed on the idea of ‘transitional justice’ because they felt that this was what was needed to build trust between local communities, not that much consultation had been done locally on that regard, so most of the peacebuilding organisations (both local and international) pivoted their work to talk about transitional justice, because this is where the funding came from. Suddenly there was talk about setting up the 4 pillars related to this. This symbolises what is wrong with the current practices, where we follow the money trail. ”

Saleem was part of a vibrant conversation during which participants shared the extent to which international interests and new Western theoretical frameworks were imposed in third-party-led peace efforts. One participant, Kloé Tricot O'Farrell, shared a reflection which many participants resonated with, saying that the imposition of external interests:

“ point to the inherently political nature of peacebuilding / aid and the fact that, as things stand, interventions are meant to serve the purposes of donors – i.e., western governments. C/PVE is a clear example (at least for some) of how conflict analysis can be driven by external priorities – and you wonder if there are other examples, which is an interesting and important question. In some cases, it might be more obvious such as when donors push for justice and security sector reform interventions for instance, which I have read often fail to understand and take into account the needs and set-up in the countries at hand. ”

She continued, inviting critical reflection by saying:

“Whenever donors are pushing specific agendas, we really need to take a moment to think about why they are pushing it and what it might mean for the people affected by conflict. For instance, even if we fully agree with the importance of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) or the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas, I think we need to take a moment to reflect on what donors pushing them means (or might mean) in practice. Are we seeing interventions that directly support women and young people and their meaningful inclusion in peacebuilding efforts, or are we seeing tokenistic interventions (based on simplistic analysis or in spite of thorough analysis) that donors (and others) can use to tick the gender and/or youth inclusion box?”

Her questions highlighted a disconnect between the imposed agendas and the interests of the conflict affected population. It also emphasised a sentiment that many peacebuilders from the Global South shared, which was that external actors instrumentalise the experiences and identities of marginalised communities to advance their own theoretical and political interests. Though both the WPS and YPS agendas for example have had success in creating established accessways for marginalised communities to engage with peace efforts,²¹ there are ongoing critiques of how and the extent to which, both have been implemented. Some argue that approaches to implement the WPS agenda has reinforced perceptions of women solely as victims, that there has been little change in women’s inclusion, and that it has resulted in feminist peace movements being absorbed into existing patriarchal, militaristic peace and security frameworks.²² Similarly, there are many critiques of the efforts around the YPS agenda, finding that it fails to truly engage with young people as potential peacebuilders, and rather as would-be victims or perpetrators.²³

One participant, Lani Anaya, shared an example of how these agendas are being poorly implemented by donors and are often driven by their own interpretations of what conflict means, rather than the reality on the ground:

“for example, in YPS in Latin America, one of our challenges is that usually when you talk about conflict, Latin America dynamics doesn’t fit into the theoretical frameworks of what is understood by conflict. So all these populations of young people in the region are left outside because other regions in the world take priority. So, the agendas from multilateral organisations and foreign ministries pave the way to what is relevant, and it’s more from top down instead of being a bottom-up approach.”

21 Otto, D. “The Security Council’s Alliance of Gender Legitimacy: The Symbolic Capital of Resolution 1325”. In H. Charlesworth & J. Coicaud (Eds.), *Fault Lines of International Legitimacy* (pp. 239-276). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511691614.009

22 Women Around the World, “What’s the problem with Women, Peace and Security?” October 2015, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/women-around-world-week-9>

23 Berents H, Mollica C. Reciprocal institutional visibility: Youth, peace and security and ‘inclusive’ agendas at the United Nations. *Cooperation and Conflict*. 2022;57(1):65-83. doi:10.1177/00108367211007873

Though the WPS and YPS resolutions aim to centre marginalised populations, these quotes highlight how, for many local peacebuilders, they can sometimes serve as virtue-signals for international actors more than being adequately implemented in peace efforts. As actors from the Global North hold the majority of the funding for peacebuilding interventions, these agendas continue to be referenced while not serving the local populations. INGOs often feel as though they are removed from this dynamic as many do not consider themselves to be funders²⁴, but an anonymous consultation participant elaborated on how INGOs are in fact instrumental in maintaining these power inequalities:

“ INGOs end up positioning themselves as the necessary intermediary to working with civil society organisations because it’s easier, because we [the INGO] can help frame them a little bit more into these modalities rather than allowing for the messiness and confusion and like co-building that I think would be genuinely indicative of mutuality, because we are trying to be effective, because we are trying to be efficient and because we are dependent and we are subject to the demands of donors. ”

Despite these real challenges, participants did not believe that funding and the power dynamics between funders and funding recipients meant that peacebuilding could never be part of redressing the current global power dynamics. Noting the need for ‘co-building’ and mutuality as outlined in the quote above, and an acceptance of the messiness of the problems being addressed, participants felt that the peacebuilding sector needs to abandon the idea that genuine peacebuilding can be adequately measured through strict results-based frameworks or by performance indicators developed in the Global North. They also emphasised that peace efforts cannot be effective without trust and genuine partnerships between funders and recipients. Another anonymous participant expanded on this saying that:

“ I [think mutuality is] possible for sure, but I think it’s making sure that we align with the right donors. [...] ”

This suggests that donors need to exhibit a range of behaviours and competencies that will support mutuality. Such behaviours may include being aware of their own power and how they use it, being humble, flexible and adaptive in their funding of peacebuilding efforts, and being willing to take risks and admit failures in the messiness that often characterises building peace.

24 Schmitz, Hans Peter, “International NGOs: Legitimacy, Mandates and Strategic Innovation” August 2020, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/08/26/international-ngos-legitimacy-mandates-and-strategic-innovation/>

The Global North's role in geopolitics and peace efforts

The 'White gaze' in Peacebuilding

As explored in the “Time to Decolonise Aid” report, ‘the White gaze’ influences how non-White actors are treated when engaging with the international aid system. While the report details the origins of this phenomenon, it did not explore the specific implications of the ‘White gaze’ in situations of conflict. This section will briefly explore the specific manifestations of this phenomenon in peace efforts.

While most people now acknowledge and reject the insidious nature of colonial-era racial hierarchies and their assumed characteristics, many stereotypes about particular racial and ethnic groups persist today. One belief that stems from the colonial-era and which continues to impact peacebuilding is the narrative that there is something inherently ‘primitive’ and ‘barbaric’ within non-White, non-European populations.²⁵ For conflict-affected populations who are non-White and from the Global South, such stereotypes continue to influence the ways the international community engages in conflict-affected areas.

Participants explored the way that some Global North policymakers believe that they are best positioned to facilitate peace efforts and also believe that Global South actors are unsuitable leaders. Amjad Saleem, a participant, invited the following uncomfortable reflection:

“Let’s face it, when was the last time the international community came into a conflict situation and started off by asking “how do the locals normally resolve their conflicts?”. We don’t!! We start off with the premise that things are not working because the local system is corrupt and so we need to come into fix this.”

There is a growing contingent of actors from the Global South who argue that common concerns voiced by Global North policymakers about peacebuilding efforts led by Global South actors are based on racist and/or discriminatory beliefs that stem from colonialism.²⁶ They argue that the excessive fears of corruption in peace efforts in the Global South or the insistence on the need for an external mediator²⁷ are ways to hint that populations of colour are lacking the necessary ‘civility’ to lead in conflict resolution and transformation efforts and require the guidance of a more educated, external actor; one who is usually White and from the Global North. Participants noted that there are many reasons why specific concerns may be raised about a conflict-affected population in the Global South, concerns that have less to do with the community’s race and ethnicity and everything to do with the challenges faced by conflict-affected communities. However, there is a particular focus on certain concerns that is reminiscent of colonial-era narratives (i.e., the “White man’s burden”) that White populations are in some way more ‘civilised’ and therefore necessary to help ‘less civilised’ populations address conflict.²⁸

25 Simpson, Murray K. “From Savage to Citizen: Education, Colonialism and Idiocy.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 28, no. 5, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 2007, pp. 561–74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036235>.

26 Bersselaar, Dimitri van den & Decker, Stephanie ““No Longer at Ease”: Corruption as an Institution in West Africa.” *International Journal of Public Administration*. Vol 34, Issue 11. 2011 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2011.598272>

27 Press, Sharon and Deason, Ellen E., “Mediation: Embedded Assumptions of Whiteness?” (2021). Faculty Scholarship. 494. <https://open.mitchellhamline.edu/facsch/494>

28 Mgbeoji, Ikechi. “The Civilised Self and the Barbaric Other: Imperial Delusions of Order and the Challenges of Human Security.” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 5, [Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Third World Quarterly], 2006, pp. 855–69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4017782>.

Case Study

Re-framing local ownership in peace processes

Peace processes²⁹ have become a standard international approach for resolving armed conflict. Yet, despite their importance in peacebuilding practice, many peace processes fail or are only partially implemented, often prioritising short-term political settlements, or measurable “deliverables” over longer-term sustainable peace outcomes. This leaves many post-conflict societies more vulnerable to recurring violence and instability, with peace in these contexts lasting just seven years on average.³⁰

Why peace processes fail has been a subject of ongoing debate among academics and practitioners, and many are beginning to rethink fundamental assumptions about how they are undertaken. In response to this, the Principles for Peace (P4P) initiative was established in late 2020. The initiative aims to re-frame current peacebuilding approaches by establishing new international principles, norms and guidance for structuring, sequencing and building more inclusive peace processes. As part of their broader consultative process, P4P teamed up with Peace Direct to convene a number of participatory consultations with nearly 400 local and international peacebuilding practitioners, scholars and activists to unpack the theme of local ownership and responsibility in peace processes. Findings from these consultations highlighted the shortcomings of the current liberal peacebuilding model that dominates the sector, where peace processes are often externally designed, forcing locals into implementing roles instead of being in charge of their design and planning. Participants further criticised the way that interpretations of local ownership continue to be channeled through a Western lens, often disconnected from local realities and undervaluing local knowledge. As a result, international actors tend to work only with peacebuilding actors who reflect their standards and values, who in turn act as gatekeepers to genuine inclusivity. Other significant barriers to local ownership include the short-term support provided by external aid frameworks, poor integration of grassroots peace processes within the formal ‘top down’ peace process, a lack of effective coordination between established peace structures, and few opportunities for open community feedback on the process.

In turn, Global South practitioners argued that genuine local ownership requires going beyond providing them with consultative and participatory roles and instead giving them the ability to have “the first and final decision-making power over how a peace process is defined, negotiated, implemented and evaluated.”³¹ This can be achieved by prioritising local leadership, which can bring much-needed legitimacy to peace processes, as local communities feel they are being represented and can therefore identify more with the process itself. Local leaders can act as intermediaries to connect complex local ecosystems to the larger process, ensuring that reciprocal information and feedback loops are in place to highlight local priorities and raise awareness about the process with local communities. Tied to this, there is a need to establish joint coordination mechanisms that can co-design peace initiatives across all levels, linking up established peace structures and mitigating against gatekeepers and the duplication of peace efforts. Moreover, international actors need to play a more passive role, facilitating and supporting the process via technical and financial support to local actors and acting as arbiters for real inclusivity. More broadly, participants called for a ‘re-imagined relationship’ between local and international actors based on trust-building and responsibility-sharing.

While some progress has been made, Principles for Peace is continuing to look at practical pathways for restructuring peace processes to enable greater equity and inclusion of local peacebuilding actors.

“Ownership creates a sense of belonging and confidence for local people...From an ethical point of view, it is common to hear “nothing about us without us” as a slogan from local communities around the world. People generally don’t like other people trying to solve or impose solutions to their problems. From a strategic point of view, the people closest to a context are most likely to understand local capacities for peace and local drivers of conflict. To exclude them is a costly mistake.”

Anonymous participant

Dimitri Kotsiras

Peace Direct

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- 29 A peace process consists of a series of negotiated agreements, actions and mechanisms that aim to definitively resolve an armed conflict and restore peace.
 - 30 Gates, et. al. “Conflict Recurrence. *Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Policy Brief: 2016*. <https://www.prio.org/publications/9056>
 - 31 Kotsiras, D. (2021). Local Ownership in Peace Processes: Findings from a Global Online Consultation. Principles for Peace: <https://principlesforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/P4P-2021-Local-Ownership-Summary-Report-02-November.pdf>

The Assumed Neutrality of the Global North

The notion of neutrality and/or impartiality holds particular importance in conflict resolution and transformation. Key forms of third-party interventions, such as mediation and peacemaking, were for a long time predicated on the belief that the third party is a neutral actor in the conflict. This is changing, and many in the sector are arguing whether neutrality is useful, ethical, or even possible.³²

Participants in the consultation rejected the notion of Global North actors being neutral in conflict contexts, not in their motivations for intervening, nor in their engagements with the various actors in a conflict. Atiaf Alwazir shared a sobering example of the impact of international actors, particularly those who are White and/or from the Global North, lack of impartiality, regarding the conflict itself and also often regarding non-White, Southern countries which have experienced conflict:

“Many years ago, I was living in Yemen and an EU ambassador asked me why I wasn’t vocally supporting a “one-man” presidential election that the international community poured LOTS of money towards. I said, “would you accept if you had a presidential election with only one candidate in YOUR country?” He responded: “In my country, people aren’t trying to kill each other.”

There was no war at the time in Yemen, but there was still this assumption that Yemenis are inherently violence unlike the civilised Europeans. Therefore, Yemenis must accept half solutions (such as a one-man election). The international community’s intervention, and support of illegitimate actors exacerbated the tensions.

Another participant, Amira Warren-Yearby noted:

“Speaking from the context of the global north, neutrality or objectivity is often white-centered or focused. For example, you can have an all-white jury in America but you could never have an “all-Black/Asian/Brown” jury for fear of bias. What makes the lens of one group more unbiased or trustworthy than the other? Does living outside of a context offer more humility than living within a context? This is the same framework that many INGO’s still operate out of. We must not assume that “international” means impartial or neutral especially if the identities of the organization are homogenously European.”

32 Regan, P. “Third Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts”, Binghamton University 2000. <http://web.worldbank.org/archive/website01241/WEB/IMAGES/THIRDPAR.PDF>

Clement Ironongu, another participant, took the argument further stating that not only are international interventions not impartial but that:

“ *Mostly, international interventions are done by traditional relationships established during colonialism.* ”

He continued, shifting his focus to the relational aspect of peacebuilding, sharing that:

“ *international actors have their local agents who have been empowered through colonial mentality and thus approach dealing with the local peacebuilders with similar attitude as masters thus employing the same methods that tend to perpetuate the unequal global power dynamics. For instance, the local agents of international actors normally wear the lens of the international peace actor in terms of conflict analysis and which also affects the design of interventions and without local inputs* ”

Ironongu’s points highlight a belief that was common throughout the consultation that not only are international actors informed primarily by their own interests and biases, but their lens then becomes internalized and replicated by local actors.

Pascal Richard spoke to the complicated nature of the topic, highlighting how every actor in a peace process has their own interests, saying:

“ *I have seen local as well as international processes perpetuating or challenging unequal global-local power dynamics - largely also determined by the ultimate outlook they had in mind. So are peace processes aimed at achieving ‘stability’? Or ‘positive peace’? And who is in a position to determine those goals?* ”

Atiaf Alwazir highlighted another example where the application of local practices shifts power from the global to the local but reinforces other harmful unequal power dynamics:

“ *In Yemen where tribal law has really had tremendous success in mediation for thousands of years, however, it is highly patriarchal, and often excludes women (there are of course exceptions). In the case of Yemen, this is being challenged by young women from the country.* ”

Alwazir’s example calls our attention to a challenge that the peacebuilding sector has faced as it attempts to shift power to local actors and adopt traditional or indigenous approaches to conflict resolution. In many cases, the indigenous approaches are also built upon power dynamics that discriminate and marginalise certain communities. As the sector works to centre leadership from the Global South, there must be intentional consideration as to the limitations, as well as the opportunities, of traditional and indigenous approaches.

In a similar vein, Ntang Julius Meleng argued that the occurrence and priorities of international interventions are set by global powers saying:

“*International peace interventions as we all know are authorised by the UN Security Council. The members (particularly the big 5) have an upper hand in what happens where, when and how in the world.*”

Meleng then argued:

“*This simply means that they can rise against wars by preventing them through the ban in the production and commercialisation of arms, but since personal interest takes primacy, they will prefer to create more jobs and sell arms by allowing wars to occur for peace missions to be sent on the pretext on peacekeeping. Generally, we have seen peace missions prevail down south while the west creates the impression that all is well up there.*”

Throughout the consultation, participants echoed Meleng’s comments, arguing that international interventions were often motivated not by a desire to build peace but by the geopolitical concerns of intervening powers. Research suggests that states do use peace interventions to serve their own geopolitical interests, even when they are also motivated by humanitarian motives.³³ Therefore, not only are international actors not impartial, but their very participation is political.

Participant Riyad Boumtari asked whether the peacebuilding sector reinforced the prioritisation of international geopolitical interests above those of the local conflict-affected community, suggesting that:

“*Perhaps the basis that we need to discuss frankly, is whether the intersecting international interests support the mechanisms of peace building and international intervention in general? Specific and limited frameworks sometimes work to achieve these interests, which makes international financing go in specific directions and targets specific groups according to the interests and conditions that those countries are looking for and works to support their allies on the ground and enable them to control everything.*”

Boumtari’s comment highlights how the prioritisation of funders’ interests can be in service of external geopolitical motivations and not only to fit certain agendas and theoretical frameworks.

33 Kim, Sang Ki, “Third Party Interventions in Civil Wars: Motivation, War Outcomes, and Post War Development”, University of Iowa, Autumn 2012. <https://iro.uiowa.edu/esploro/outputs/doctoral/Third-party-intervention-in-civil-wars-motivation/9983776973302771>



Case Study

A Review of Peacebuilding Funding in Tunisia: From Empowerment to Fragility

Partners vs. Implementers: The Dichotomy of Uncertainty and Dependability

Tunisia had no sense of a free and independent civil society prior to the 2011 Arab Spring revolution, other than a few charitable organizations that were forced to serve Ben Ali's authoritarian regime. However, with the onset of the uprising, associations quickly formed with good intentions to assist in the country's transition to democracy in the areas of countering violent extremism, resilience, reconciliation, and participatory decision making. One of the factors contributing to this phenomenon was the attention that the country had received from international organizations, development institutions, and other donors who expanded their portfolios and offered technical and financial assistance to both governmental institutions and local community organizations.

Dozens of multi-million-dollar programs were launched with a focus on topics such as counterterrorism, peacebuilding, transitional justice, and trauma recovery, among others. Inevitably, these large-scale programs were always implemented by international non-governmental organizations that competed for bids first, before sending their expatriate managers to oversee the activities.

However, local organizations, especially youth-led ones, were victims of international development organizations' funding approaches that treated them as implementers of minimal activities rather than partners who are capable of digesting all management, operations, and research and development processes in pursuit of creating lasting impacts. Because of this, local communities were left with vulnerable and insecure financial structures that could not survive without the seed funding of international organizations. This issue has been further aggravated by government neglect and marginalization.

A number of international institutions have invested in large budgets dedicated to tackling diverse topics within Tunisia. Unfortunately, these projects were severely compromised, because they prevented investments in construction services that would have helped, for example, build youth centers and upgrade infrastructure, instead conducting brief, limited, and short-term impact-driven activities in fancy hotels. Given the controversy around bilateral agreements with the government for approving such funding frameworks, this point still needs to be discussed. There is a need to develop clear agreements between the government and civil society to redirect big chunks of funding towards building [peace infrastructures such as] youth centers that can serve as an incubator for innovation and peacebuilding for years to come.

International organizations may have some positive impact in Tunisia within a working framework built upon good intentions; however, they must acknowledge the way the peacebuilding funding stream has exacerbated the country's vulnerability. It is necessary to incorporate ample research into how to restructure their funding mechanisms and further free them from the shackles of the white gaze, which does not comprehend how local organizations will be able to responsibly manage any funds allocated without international interference. In addition to benefits and pay that can sometimes be blocked by expatriate privileges peacebuilding and stability assistance must offer full equality with regard to management, project design and supervision. To that end, decolonization should be unpacked so that local partners and NGOs can participate in financial decision-making without feeling constrained by a white-savior management approach.

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This case study starkly illustrates many of the problems associated with the funding for peacebuilding, from donor prioritized efforts, to the role of INGOs in dominating the funding environment and the short-term nature of most funding. These issues surfaced throughout the consultation, pointing to a persistent problem that donors appear unable or unwilling to tackle. Many of the problems are linked to the attitudes that are held by government donors, which, as Ahlem Nasraoui noted, leads to INGOs receiving preferential access to funding. However, other problems are also widely acknowledged, including the bureaucracy of funding processes, which are borrowed from the international development funding sector and which are ill suited to the more complex, messy situations that characterize most conflict contexts. A low tolerance for risk, short timeframes and unrealistic results frameworks were only some of the many issues that hamper peacebuilding practitioners, in addition to inaccessibility of funding. The low and opaque prioritization of peacebuilding funding was an issue that generated a lot of comments from the consultation participants. Many participants raised the response to the conflict in Afghanistan as indicative of the international community's continued prioritisation of external geopolitical interests above those of the affected communities. One participant, Themrise Khan argued that:

“*Afghanistan is a prime and current example of how international interventions for peacebuilding are fallacy we continue to hold on to. We say peace is brokered. This means we are saying that to attain peace you have to give up something else. In the case of Afghanistan, it was giving up control to foreign powers in the hope of peace. How can you call negotiations with the Taliban a “peace process”? And now the result is there for all to see.*”

She continued, questioning the selectivity of international interventions asking:

“*And if international intervention is so important, why does it pick and choose where to intervene? Why hasn't it intervened in Palestine for instance? Why hasn't it intervened in the Kashmir issue? Or in Tigray? Because interventions are political. For purposes of geopolitical peace rather than an inherently peaceful society overall. So that conflict doesn't spill over borders. That's how peace is now defined. It's all about containing conflict. Not ending it. But only when it suits the peacemakers.*”

The suggestion by Khan that the international community is often simply interested in stabilization rather than genuine sustainable peace is a concern raised by many Global South actors. The proliferation of 'stabilisation units' within government departments adds weight to the argument that Global North governments are, at best, preoccupied with a very narrow conceptualisation of peace, 'negative peace', which is far from the holistic understanding of peace held by most Global South peacebuilders.

There is also a growing number of peacebuilders who argue that many of the conflicts should be understood as a specific consequence of the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and other systemic forms of oppression and subjugation. They suggest that the responsibility that the international community, in particular former colonial powers, have in supporting sustainable peacebuilding efforts overseas is not solely a moral responsibility but also a historical one. Atiaf Alwazir, elaborated on this point saying that she found that there was:

“ a] moral superiority, and lack of self-reflection on the European role in perpetuating conflict inside and outside or addressing historical injustices is absent, because there is this colonial idea that westerners know best, and this is why Western mediators are sent to countries that have had mediation for thousands of years, long before western-mediation tactics were invented, and yet the western-centric mediation tactics are seen as somehow ‘revolutionary’, and western tactics are seen as ‘unbiased’ because of the flawed narrative that in the Global South violence is ‘normalised’ ”

What emerged from the discussion with participants was that, due to the selective interests of the international community in certain conflicts over others and with the rising concerns over the geopolitical tensions between various great power states, no third-party interventions in peace processes were believed to be impartial.



Case Study

Ownership of Peace Processes in Cameroon and Beyond

Internal conflicts are generally caused by a complex set of dynamics that may not be understandable to international organisations willing to intervene. They require a nuanced understanding of the discrimination, marginalization, insecurity, human rights violations, gender-based violence and abuses and their relationship with the political and social history of the country.

In a country with more than 250 ethnic groups like Cameroon, the world may only know some of the factors that caused the ongoing Anglophone conflict since 2016. The intricacies of such a crisis with regards to previous inter-tribal and ethnic tussles may not be understood by foreign intervention, especially from the Global North. In order to avoid leading to disillusionment, resentment, and further radicalization, such peace processes have to be home grown, owned and led by the local populations themselves, mainstreaming all concerns.

There are many ways in which to do this. First, international intervention in local peace processes must aim at providing technical and financial support, building local capacities in structuring negotiations, understanding the tradeoffs involved, the different issues to be resolved, and the different parties and levels of negotiations involved. It should consider such initiatives as components of a continuous process that brings people together as family, neighbors, colleagues, friends in the same community.

Second, the funding of peace processes should support the work of local, younger organisations with emerging and innovative initiatives. The principles of the Generation Equality Forum, UNSCRs 1325 and 2250 on women/youth peace and security respectively should apply to ensure equality between men and women; and women and women to give women with emerging and innovative ideas an equal opportunity to participate in not only peace processes but also in political life and decision-making at all levels. The launch of the [“She Builds Peace” Campaign](#) by Caryn Dasah in the Far North Regions and some of the difficult to access areas in the South West Regions in Cameroon is illustrative of how determined emerging organisations can achieve their vision and gain visibility in return.

Finally, some international organisations with country offices in conflict countries literally hijack peace processes to advance their own agenda, thereby ignoring the above precautions to the detriment of the suffering grassroots masses who bear the brunt of the conflicts. They use “popular and eloquent” voices which make peace processes elitist and restricted to the metropolitan cities, excluding the enclaved areas most ravaged by the conflict.

To avoid disadvantageous international interventions in peace processes, best practices applied by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), Swiss Peace, the government of Canada, and others which work to ensure that local peace initiatives are home grown, owned, led, participatory but supported, monitored, evaluated and reported should be emulated.

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While critical of the international community's involvement in peace efforts, some participants voiced a belief that it was nevertheless effective when actors from states with significant geopolitical power worked in favour of peace, if only because that drew international attention to the situation.

One participant, Megan Greeley, argued that:

“ *The role of international community should be to use their inherited privilege and power to center the needs of and create space for communities impacted by violent conflict to engage in knowledge sharing and generation to uncover ways to dismantle the power imbalances that led to the current situation, including the international community taking responsibility for their own involvement in creating those power imbalances.* ”

Greeley's final point about the responsibility of the international community towards conflict-affected communities is a matter that many participants raised. The international community's effect on conflict at the local level can likely never be distilled to 'helpful' or 'unhelpful', but it is necessary to consider how many of the approaches have potentially had a negative impact.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As with “Time to Decolonise Aid,” participants emphasised throughout this consultation that they felt excluded from leadership and decision-making in peace efforts in their contexts. As the discourse around decolonising and shifting power to Global South actors gains momentum, the peacebuilding sector has struggled to move beyond the preliminary acknowledgement of the existence of structural racism and the unequal power dynamics between the Global North and Global South.

For most practitioners and policymakers from the Global North, the path to decolonisation is unclear because what is necessary is uncharted territory. However, the peacebuilding sector continues to sideline local peacebuilders who are most affected by and most proximate to conflicts. The peacebuilding sector cannot continue to exclude local actors from spaces of leadership and decision-making, nor can it continue to ignore the bias inherent in their efforts.

Our first report “Time to Decolonise Aid,” resulted in some detailed recommendations for various stakeholders. Throughout the consultation process, many of the recommendations that emerged from the conversations reflected those from the first report. This provided us with an opportunity to revisit many of those recommendations to better respond to the peacebuilding specific challenges raised by participants. To that end, the following recommendations are a combination of revisited recommendations from “Time to Decolonise Aid” and new recommendations that are exclusive to peacebuilding.

Recommendations

Summary Table

Key

- ◇ Global North actors, including International Organisations (UN, World Bank, OECD etc), governments, INGOs and think tanks
- Global South actors
- All actors

Recommendations

Worldviews, norms and values

- Acknowledge that structural racism exists ◇
- Reframe what is considered as expertise ◇
- Consider that Global North knowledge may not be the most relevant ◇
- Interrogate the notion of “professionalism” ◇

Knowledge and attitudes

- Acknowledge, value and learn from indigenous experiences and knowledge systems ◇
- Mind your language ◇
- Avoid romanticising the local ◇
- Reflect on your identity □
- Remain humble, open, and imaginative □
- Re-imagine the peacebuilding sector □

Practice

- Decentre Global North decision making ◇
- Recruit differently ◇
- Stop and look closely before acting ◇
- Invest in local capacities for peace ◇
- Establish meaningful partnerships for peace ◇
- Develop safe and inclusive spaces for conversations about power ◇
- Create space for change ◇
- Fund courageously and trust generously ◇
- Support the work of marginalised local communities ◇
- Expect and insist on the partnership behaviours that matter to you ○
- Recognise the power of local solidarity ○

Full Recommendations

Worldviews, Norms and Values

➤ Acknowledge that structural racism exists.

Acknowledgement of the problem is an essential first step, as it underpins all subsequent efforts to re-shape the peacebuilding sector. Without acknowledgement, both internally and externally, all subsequent change efforts are likely to fail.

For funders and INGOs, acknowledging the reality of structural racism in peacebuilding in existing and/or past efforts could involve examining what ingrained racist, discriminatory and/or other biased assumptions underpin the organisation's preferred Theory of Change models and peacebuilding approaches. It could also involve reflecting on how unexamined biases manifested in how the donor or INGO establishes relationships with local actors, especially if local actors hold or represent communities with multiple intersecting marginalised identities.

Acknowledging structural racism within peacebuilding does not imply personal guilt. However, it does imply a collective responsibility to build new norms and retire or reshape existing approaches that have perpetuated the global dominance of Global North thinking and leadership in peace efforts.

➤ Reframe what is considered as expertise

For local leadership to be truly rooted in the experiences and priorities of an affected community - donors, IOs, INGOs, and policymakers need to expand the definition of what makes an individual an expert on a given issue. This will involve valuing contextual expertise as highly as technical or thematic expertise, as well as acknowledging the value and perspectives of partial insiders to a conflict and not just impartial outsiders.

Donors, IOs, INGOs, and policymakers should also reflect on whether their own claim to expertise in a particular area obscures and undermines the role and agency of peacebuilding actors in the Global South and whether their desire to promote this expertise to certain stakeholders limits the opportunity for a re-evaluation of roles between Global North and Global South Actors.

➤ Consider whether Global North knowledge is relevant for each context

Non-Western, indigenous knowledge systems and beliefs around peace and conflict may differ greatly from the prevailing knowledge held by the Global North about how peace should be built. Be open to the possibility that Global North knowledge may not be as important as you think it is.

➤ Interrogate the notion of “professionalism”

Donors, IOs and INGOs should reflect on why and how the sector has evolved into one that is committed to sterile efficiency and professionalism at the expense of genuine transformative peacebuilding.

As the peacebuilding sector works to decolonise, donors and INGOs should consider who they are excluding through their work culture and to consider what requirements in the name of professionalism are in fact serving to exclude marginalised populations, including non-White practitioners, women, and youth.

Knowledge and Attitudes

➤ Acknowledge, value, invest in and learn from indigenous experiences and knowledge.

The peacebuilding sector is not unique in its struggle to include indigenous approaches to research and knowledge. These knowledge systems and methodologies tend to not fit within existing Western approaches and frameworks. However, this can no longer be used as an excuse to maintain knowledge production and consumption that is dominated by Global North actors.

The inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems provides the peacebuilding sector with a unique opportunity to develop approaches that are culturally resonant to the conflict-affected area, and which will ideally continue to be relevant long past the end of any donor funded peacebuilding programme. When donors, IOs and INGOs fund and support the inclusion of indigenous approaches, they are removing the dependence on researchers and practitioners from the Global North, serving to redress some of the unequal power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South.

➤ Mind your language

Be careful not to use language that diminishes the agency of people and communities in the Global South. Be mindful of the exclusive terms and jargon that you use, and how such terms may serve to exclude others. Consider auditing the language and terms your organisation uses through a 'decolonising' lens to determine how it should change.

➤ Avoid romanticising the local

It is important to note that just as there are problems with knowledge systems rooted in Global North thinking, so too are some indigenous knowledge systems and peace approaches rooted in beliefs that could be discriminatory to certain marginalised communities, often women, youth, and the LGBTQIA individuals.

Adopting local approaches with little consideration may not shift power within the local population. Indigenous knowledge systems are valuable not because they are without critique, but because they are how many people may conceptualise peace in their contexts and without that understanding, any peacebuilding effort is likely to overlook certain key considerations. Avoiding romanticising the local will enable a more honest, clear headed appreciation of what local groups can bring, as well as their limitations.

➤ Reflect on your identity

Every practitioner – both those who are locally based and those who work internationally – must reflect on their motivation for being involved in this work. Questions to be asked include: What privileges do your identities afford you? In what ways have you reinforced the 'White gaze' of the sector?

Beyond those initial questions, practitioners should also be engaging with the issue of decolonising peacebuilding through educating themselves. There are many discriminatory and/or racist beliefs and biases that we each hold. It is important that no one considers themselves immune from blind spots or at 'the top of their career' and therefore unlikely to learn anything new. Instead, we should all be ever more aware of ourselves and in solidarity with our colleagues and with those affected by conflict.

➤ **Remain humble, open, and imaginative**

Decolonising peacebuilding requires international practitioners to approach their work with greater humility. It is vital that they remain open to criticism and feedback from actors in the Global South, and that they reflect on those comments.

For practitioners from the Global South, it is important that they remain open to the idea that the sector can change. It is important that across the sector, everyone from funders to practitioners are committed to decolonising but also that they are all equally committed to the fact that there is not one path. What the peacebuilding sector is attempting is something that has not been done before. There is no guidebook, no way of knowing what the perfect next steps are.

➤ **Reimagine the peacebuilding sector**

The decolonising process is a process of collective dismantling of the old and construction of the new. There are many norms and beliefs that are integral to the sector that when performed, though unintentionally, do reinforce notions of the superiority of the Global North over the Global South. These need to be dismantled.

Part of the process needs to be in reimagining new ways of engaging between the Global North and Global South in situations of violent conflict. Imagining a future peacebuilding sector when conflicts rage across the planet is difficult, and where established ways of doing things are so entrenched. But reimagining what peacebuilding based on mutuality, respect and trust between Global North and Global South actors is essential.

Practice

➤ **Decentre the Global North in decision making**

Decision making should be decentred from current power holders in the Global North. The first step in this process should be to devolve power from Global North capitals to Embassies and offices in the host country. In many cases, this is already happening among bilateral donors as part of a push for greater subsidiarity and deconcentration. However, it needs to go further. Embassies and donor country offices should consider establishing mechanisms which involve shared or devolved decision making on issues of funding and prioritization. A practical example of this are the Advisory Boards set up by philanthropic organisations that are either thematically or geographically focused, comprised of local experts. Such an approach can also work at a country level, and can involve local community representatives, thereby providing greater diversity of perspectives into critical decisions.

➤ Recruit differently

Diversifying the staff, management and Board of Global North organisations is an essential step in Decolonising Global North structures and attitudes. Diversifying Boards and other governance structures is arguably the most difficult but most important step an organisation can take, as this sends an important message throughout the organisation of the value placed on hiring people from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences at the highest level of the organisation. This entails rethinking what type of people are considered ‘worthy’ of sitting on Boards – moving away from the traditional and very narrow set of predominantly White high profile thought leaders and towards a Board more representative of the communities and constituents served by the organisation.

Recruitment policies for staff positions needs to be reviewed through a ‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion’ lens to ensure that under-represented groups are encouraged to apply. This includes a re-evaluation of what constitutes expertise (see earlier recommendation).

➤ Stop and look closely before acting

Crises such as the outbreak of conflicts tend to provoke in donors and the wider international community the impulse to respond as quickly as possible. This is often based on the humanitarian desire to alleviate suffering. Yet, intervening quickly in a conflict situation can do more harm than good, especially if donors seek external partners with no prior experience of the conflict context. Rather than intervening as quickly as possible and then practicing ‘Do No Harm’ or conflict sensitivity, donors, IOs and INGOs are asked to stop and consider carefully whether they should intervene directly, particularly if they don’t have the relevant contextual knowledge.

➤ Invest in local capacities for peace

Local peacebuilding capacity exists in every conflict context. Donors, IOs, INGOs, and policymakers should commit to investing in that capacity first, before considering the role and utility of external actors such as INGOs. In addition, donors and INGOs should refrain from identifying ‘implementing partners’ for activities designed far from the conflict context. Such activities are rarely effective and such partnerships are rarely meaningful or transformative.

Expanding the number of relationships with practitioners, activists, advocates and researchers based in the Global South will ensure that donors and policymakers can more regularly turn to local actors to lead the production of contextually relevant frameworks and the development and running of programmes. Ultimately, this will ensure not only the inclusion of local voices from the Global South, but will ensure that the peacebuilding sector is actively engaging in redistributing power to those groups.

➤ Establish meaningful partnerships for peace

While investing in local capacities for peace is an important step, such partnerships should be long term and based on mutuality, co-learning and respect. Donors, policymakers and INGOs also must learn to listen carefully to what Global South actors have to say and offer, as well as what is not being said by their new partners so that a new era of partnership begins to be forged. Practicing these listening skills is an important part of establishing sustainable partnerships for peace.

➤ **Develop safe and inclusive spaces for conversations about power**

As explored in *Time to Decolonise Aid*, conversations about power, who holds it and how it is wielded will not often be raised by local groups. Thus, external actors need to allow opportunities for a critique of their power and practices, and how the use of this power influences peacebuilding efforts. This could start by asking grantees and local partners to complete an anonymous survey that solicits their perceptions of the relationship. This can then be built on by gathering more detailed feedback over an extended period through your regular interactions with partners/grantees. Such a process could both form the basis of a conversation and create the conditions that would allow for this.

➤ **Create space for self organisation and change**

The changes needed in the system will be driven by actors across the spectrum, so it is important that donors, IOs and INGOs create spaces and opportunities for local groups, organisations, partners and grantees to share experiences, self organise and strategise together. It is especially important to create spaces centred around those with more marginalised identities, such as LGBTQ+, women, youth and disabled people, among others. While such strategising may lead to groups challenging an organisation's or individual's power, they must be prepared to accept this, however uncomfortable. For this to be possible, Global North actors need to recognise and move past current approaches which are often consciously or unconsciously self-serving.

As organisations commit to decolonising, it is vital that they frame the inevitable critiques and power challenges as positive steps towards retiring the global-local dynamics that emerged from the colonial era and instead, creating a more horizontal global peacebuilding system where information, resources, and feedback travels reciprocally between Global North and Global South actors.

➤ **Fund courageously and trust generously**

While funders have made various commitments to ensuring that more funding goes directly to local actors, grants remain inflexible and short term, precisely what is not needed in conflict and post conflict contexts. Grant processes used by most bilateral donors, which are mostly adapted from the humanitarian and development funding modalities, are woefully inadequate for peacebuilding. Entirely new funding processes are needed, based on the principles of accessibility, adaptation, trust and flexibility. In addition, modifying the power dynamics between funders and grantees requires more than increased inclusion and accessibility to funds; it requires grantees be entrusted to determine their own priorities and this requires a fundamentally different way of structuring grants so that local actors aren't locked into prescribed activities and outputs that are no longer relevant to the context.

For funders and INGOs committed to decolonising, there has to be a willingness to work with local leaders to create grant parameters that better reflect and respond to the needs and priorities of the local community. There are many examples of toolkits, including those by ICAN and the Peace and Security Funders Group (PSFG) that highlight alternative approaches to funding that would enable funders to be more participatory in their decision-making.

➤ **Support the work of marginalised local communities.**

The power dynamics that privilege global actors over local actors, especially when based in the Global North are often replicated in local contexts. For local actors committed to decolonising, they need to recognise that peace efforts likely privilege actors with more proximity to the Global North. This includes those who speak English or another of the three so-called global languages, those who have had the opportunity to study in the Global North, those who are able to comfortably navigate the compliance processes of the peacebuilding sector, among others. As they seek to shift power from the global to the local for a more horizontal, non-hierarchical, anti-racist peacebuilding process, it is vital to consider who is currently being excluded due to the preferential treatment of some local actors over others.

➤ **Expect and insist on the partnership behaviours that matter to you**

As the peacebuilding sector begins to decolonise, there will likely be growing pains as Global North actors experience the discomfort of actively relinquishing power and control over the wider sector. It may cause mention to feel threatened in their role within peacebuilding.

Regardless of the challenges of the decolonising process, the way the sector decolonises is just as important as the final outcome. To that end, it is important that international actors are respectful, that there is regular, quality communication, that local actors are consulted throughout the process if not leading it and that the engagement is done from a perspective of collaboration and equity, and not condescension or dictation.

Every local actor should determine what partnership behaviours matter to them when engaging with international actors. Then, when developing relationships with international funders, IOs and INGOs, local organisations can return to those markers as expectations for the partnership, giving the international actor something concrete to strive for and giving themselves something concrete to critique should that be necessary.

➤ **Recognise the power of local solidarity.**

When local organisations form networks, they hold more power when advocating to Global North decision-making institutions. It is important in the decolonising process to reject the idea that other local organisations are necessarily competitors for funding and instead consider the opportunities that could arise from collective action.

Local actors should invest in strengthening local networks. This could include creating opportunities for communal organising, the development of common policy goals, or spaces for discussing different perspectives and needs and how they might be met. There are networks and groupings that support this agenda, such as the [NEAR network](#), [CIVICUS](#) as well as more informal groups of local actors who may already be working collaboratively raise issues at the national and international levels.

Glossary of Terms

Anti-racism: the policy or practice of opposing racism, promoting racial tolerance and equity.

Brown (racial category): Brown is used figuratively to refer to people of colour from the Global South who are neither Black nor White. This includes Asian people, Latine and Hispanic people, etc.

Decolonisation: the action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent

Decolonising aid and peacebuilding: refers to deconstructing and dismantling colonial-era and neo-colonial ideologies regarding the superiority of Western thought and approaches. It also refers to the redistribution of power acquired during colonial times and which has accumulated since.

Ethnocentrism: Refers to the evaluation and judgement of other cultures according to the perspectives, standards, and customs of your own culture.

Global North: consists of the richest and most industrialised countries, which are mainly in the northern part of the world.

Global South: an emerging term, used by the World Bank and other organisations, identifying countries with one side of the underlying global North–South divide.

Intersectionality: a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

Methodological

Whiteness: A way of reflecting on the world that fails to acknowledge the role played by race in the very structuring of that world, and of the ways in which knowledge is constructed and legitimated within it. It fails to recognise the dominance of Whiteness as anything other than the standard state of affairs.

Minoritised Groups: refers to identity groups and communities that have been pushed to the margins. This term captures how identity groups are communities are not truthfully “minorities” in the sense of numbers but rather, that they are made harmed by the socio-cultural hierarchies and power unequal dynamics that position certain people as the centre and others at the margins.

Neocolonialism: the practice of using economics, globalisation, cultural imperialism, and conditional aid to influence a country instead of the previous colonial methods of direct military control or indirect political control.

Power: An entity or individuals' ability to control, discipline and direct others based on an influence that is predicated on perceived legitimacy.

Post-colonialism: the critical study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands.

Racial prejudice: a set of discriminatory or derogatory attitudes based on assumptions deriving from perceptions about race/skin colour.

Structural/institutional racism: a system of structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantage individuals or groups on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group.

Unconscious bias: a term used to describe the associations that we hold which, despite being outside our conscious awareness, can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviour.

White Privilege: inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterised by racial inequality and injustice.

White/imperial gaze: a process where people and societies are viewed under the scope of white ethnocentrism, which assumes that whiteness is the only referent of progress.

White/imperial gaze of development: a process where people and societies are viewed under the scope of White ethnocentrism, which assumes that Whiteness is the only referent of progress, a term coined by Robtel Pailey.

White Saviour Complex: refers to a complex where a white person provides help to non-White people in a self-serving manner.

Why are ‘Black’, ‘Brown’, ‘Indigenous’ and ‘White’ capitalised?: Peace

Direct has decided to capitalise the colloquial racial designations ‘Black’, ‘Brown’, ‘Indigenous’ and ‘White’. We are aware of the debates surrounding whether it is appropriate to capitalise these terms and our decision was made after numerous discussions. The main reason driving this choice is to acknowledge that these racial designations refer to social categories. This means that they are not adjectives but nouns, serving as shorthand for the complexities of groups that hold a collective identity, shared experiences and shared histories. When the first letter is capitalised in Indigenous, this refers to Indigenous communities. When not capitalised, the term describes communities that are originally from the region² – the term ‘local’ is used interchangeably with this secondary definition. We acknowledge that whether to capitalise ‘White’ is a controversial aspect of this debate. Given that we understand these racial designations as nouns used to describe identity groups, it is consistent to capitalise ‘White’ so as to correctly frame Whiteness as a racial construct that emerged in opposition to the constructs of Blackness, Brownness, Indigeneity, and other racial identities.

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