

## What priorities should be addressed to strengthen the work of the United Nations on peacebuilding and sustaining peace?

The 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on 'Peacebuilding and sustaining peace' (A/74/976-S/2020/773) affirms that ***"Civil society engagement and participation is indispensable to peacebuilding."*** As the UN faces new, complex conflict challenges, there is growing recognition that locally-led actors and actions are a critical, indispensable part of impactful, sustainable peacebuilding. Many entities are recognizing and adopting 'locally-led' approaches because they are proving more effective due to local actors' knowledge of context, legitimacy, accountability, and their adherence to principles of inclusion, local agency, and rebalancing of power structures and decision-making toward those most impacted by conflict.

Though the discourse in the UN has improved, implementation has been meager and inconsistent. The UN needs to shift from the prevailing paradigm to recognize and utilize the vast potential of civil society to contribute to long-term peacebuilding by drawing on their cultural and historical knowledge, deep investment, and lived experience -- all absolute imperatives for sustaining peace. Two key modalities are proposed:

- deep, sustained, consistent and ongoing, committed, two-way, local-level ***community engagement***, and,
- shift operations toward truly locally-led approaches to peacebuilding and development which normalizes ***localisation/locally-led peacebuilding*** as the primary form of engagement.

A December 2022 donor statement<sup>1</sup> on localisation commits Member States, foundations and other donors to rethink their role, value local knowledge and capacity, and to:

- **shift and share power** to ensure local actors have ownership over and can meaningfully and equitably engage in development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programmes;
- **work to channel high quality funding as directly as possible** to local actors; and,
- **publicly advocate** for locally led practices.

As awareness of localisation is growing the impetus to engage is gaining ground, but this is still nascent and requires fundamental changes to partnership<sup>2</sup>, implementation, and funding approaches. It requires a re-shaping of attitudes, policies and practices of UN entities to recognize community engagement and localisation as the 'sine qua non' of any effective and successful peacebuilding.

### How to implement?

- 1) *Examine attitudes and policies*: develop a robust protocol and practice to listen and be responsive to change; build mutual trust and develop deeper relationships; be willing to share power and co-create solutions.
- 2) *transform practices*: be transparent, reliable and accountable with clear communication and give regular access to civil society, plus make conscientious effort to identify and eliminate barriers (including previously unquestioned, seemingly sacrosanct UN procedures) that have prevented

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<sup>1</sup> Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development, Effective Development Cooperation Summit, Dec 2022 <https://www.usaid.gov/localization/donor-statement-on-supporting-locally-led-development>

<sup>2</sup> Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation: [www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships](http://www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships)

the full participation of local people in the peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and sustaining peace work that is often done unilaterally by the UN in their communities.

The future of the UN's prospects for success in peacebuilding and sustaining peace is inexorably tied to engagement with local communities and locally-led peacebuilding efforts. It would be an immense, practical and substantive step forward for the UN to reflect and advance this in its work.

Peace Direct, Sept 2023