

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THEMATIC REVIEW ON LOCAL PEACEBUILDING



Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding, commissioned by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) in partnership with PeaceNexus Foundation and UN Volunteers (UNV) programme, provides a comparative analysis of local-level peacebuilding initiatives funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) from 2015 to 2021, and situates the Fund's work against global research and practice of local peacebuilding. Informed by four case studies led by young researchers recruited through National UN Volunteers modality in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, and the Western Balkans, the Review offers insights into how local peacebuilding is conceptualized and operationalized in a range of contexts and regions, with emphasis on the involvement of young people and volunteers in local peacebuilding initiatives. The Review outlines practical recommendations for the PBF and its fund applicants and recipients as well as the community of peacebuilding practitioners at large to help guide the design of future local peacebuilding programming.

What is local peacebuilding?

The definition of 'local peacebuilding' may seem intuitive, but in practice there is a lack of clarity about what distinguishes local from other types of action. Although a clearer distinction between local and national levels within UN policy documents has begun to emerge in recent years, the terms 'local' and 'national' are still occasionally used interchangeably. Consequently, the voices, goals and concerns of actors within conflict-affected communities may become muted while national leaders speak on their behalf. In contexts where tension between national authorities and local communities is the driving force behind conflict, conflating 'national' with 'local' peacebuilding in this way threatens to contribute to underlying exclusion and grievance. Within PBSO, local peacebuilding is commonly described as efforts at the sub-national level or as actions that engage local civil society. This should be distinguished, however, from the narrower definition of 'locally-led' peacebuilding which entails that peacebuilding interventions are both designed and implemented by local actors - the definition that applies to a smaller proportion of PBF-funded projects. Consultations with local actors as part of the Thematic Review also showed that local actors in areas not affected by recent fighting frequently reject the term 'peacebuilding' altogether and instead focus on ways in which legacies of past conflict may still be at play. Given these sensitivities, initiatives that explicitly label themselves as 'peacebuilding efforts' and employ jargon or associated fuzzy concepts such as 'social cohesion' frequently face resistance or incomprehension by those local communities.

Fostering more meaningful partnerships between implementing agencies and local peacebuilders:

While the approval of projects with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as direct recipients of PBF funds has risen steadily over the years, CSOs still receive a smaller fraction of overall PBF support, which reflects the primary mandate of the PBF to drive more effective, more strategic, and more cohesive peacebuilding action of the UN Country Teams. While the PBF as a centrally managed, global instrument may not be the ideal donor for small, grassroots organizations, the Review recommends the PBF to identify ways in which it can foster stronger and more meaningful partnerships between its fund recipients and local peacebuilders, enhancing system-wide accountability to conflict-affected populations. The Review found that the majority of PBF-funded projects are designed by fund recipients in a top-down fashion, without significant influence by local actors on project priorities and objectives. In pushing for greater engagement of and mutual accountability with local communities, the PBF and its fund recipients must be sensitive to questions about which organizations or actors get to speak on behalf of which communities.

Identifying local implementing partners and conducting participatory analyses:

While most PBF-funded projects do involve local CSOs or other local peacebuilding partners in the implementation of project activities, most proposals typically lack information on the nature of local implementing partners, how those partners were selected and whether or how they have contributed to proposal design. The exception to this finding is proposals received through the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) annual competitive call, which places a greater emphasis on transparency around local partnerships. The Review recommends the PBF to extend the lessons learned from the GYPI competitive call to its regular programming in order to hold fund recipients more accountable to inclusive and transparent project design. The Review also reveals that frequently, the same implementing partners – who are not always representative of relevant groups and social strata – are tapped over and over by the fund recipients, thus risking exacerbating unequal power dynamics, enabling corruption, or creating participation fatigue among the local stakeholders. The Review therefore emphasizes the need for a wider practice of conducting local stakeholder analyses, which are essential to be able to fully map and assess local actors' contribution to conflict or peace and to identify those who may potentially oppose the project's aims.

Measuring impact of local peacebuilding initiatives:

The Review notes that many PBF-funded local peacebuilding projects focus on measuring change narrowly at the activity level (such as the number of people trained), or at the output level (for example, whether training participants learned new information measured through pre- and post-training tests) and miss the more meaningful peacebuilding change that those actions were meant to produce. It is important, however, to be able to identify the strategic contribution of a given project to a larger peacebuilding landscape at the outset of a project development. The Review also notes concerns about the quality of indicators used to measure local peacebuilding which often miss the mark in measuring peacebuilding change that is meaningful to community stakeholders.



The Review therefore recommends the PBF and recipient agencies to support community-led processes of measuring peacebuilding change at the local level, including through encouraging the bottom-up development of 'everyday peace indicators', conducting community-led perception surveys, as well as amplifying the voices of beneficiary communities by meaningfully engaging them in peacebuilding community-based monitoring and evaluation processes. The Review also recommends that PBF-funded projects should recognize volunteerism and the contributions of volunteers to help build sustainability, promote local ownership and leverage the networks and knowledge of local actors.

Approaches to PBF-funded local peacebuilding programming:

The Review identifies two predominant approaches used in PBF-funded peacebuilding projects at the local level: (1) supporting local peace structures, and (2) improving inter-community and state-society relationships. While **local peace structures** supported by PBF-funded projects have been mostly effective at resolving local conflict, these mechanisms often have limitations on the type and number of conflicts they can resolve. Nonetheless, through training and key action-oriented activities, and in the context of a structured mechanism, members often build their confidence and skills to resolve localized conflicts. To create sustainable change, the Review recommends the PBF to ensure that there is an alignment between 'the local' and 'the national' in project proposals regardless of where most activities will take place, and emphasizes that local-national linkages need to be deliberately built into projects and sufficiently resourced.

The Review also highlights that PBF-funded local peacebuilding projects that aim to **improve inter-community relationships** primarily focus on creating individual-level change, therefore, the impact of such interventions with regards to scale and contributions towards long-term conflict resolution remains unclear. However, such initiatives often bring together diverse groups of individuals for the first time which, in turn, helps elevate the role of particular segments of society such as women or youth. Local volunteerism also helps enhance inter-community trust, build social capital, promote inclusion, and enhance overall effectiveness of local-level relationship building interventions by international or national actors. The Review further notes that **state-society relationship building** is often difficult, particularly in circumstances of conflict where the state has eroded the social contract or has been the perpetrator of harm. The Review finds small grant facilities particularly helpful to build trust between citizens and government representatives as they work on co-creating concrete and tangible initiatives. Nonetheless, the Review warns about sustainability concerns, pointing out the extreme fragility of the trust that is built during the relatively short duration of projects which do not always provide enough time for this new trust to take root.

Full report of the Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding will be available in May 2022 on www.un.org/peacebuilding