Towards locally-led peacebuilding
Partnership approaches

peace direct

This brief is part of a series called 'Towards locally-led peacebuilding' intended to highlight gaps in current policy and practice.

Importance of partnerships

Peace Direct believes local people should be at the centre of defining and driving peacebuilding in their communities and countries for peace to be sustainable. Partnerships between international and local organisations are vital to supporting this.

A range of international frameworks and government policies now recognise the importance of partnerships.[1]

Conventional approaches to partnerships however often disempower local actors. Ensuring sustainable humanitarian, developmental and peace outcomes, therefore depends on how partnerships between international and local organisations are formed, implemented and ended.

Nine principles

Peace Direct has identified nine crucial principles for successful partnerships that maximise local ownership, impact and sustainability. These are drawn from Peace Direct's 15 years' experience working with local peacebuilding organisations, regular 'Peace Exchanges'[2] with local peacebuilders and recent research.[3]

1. **Challenging power imbalances:** Central to discussions on partnerships is the unequal power dynamics inherent in the aid sector which play an important role in shaping relationships between international and local organisations. Power imbalances and the negative impact these can have on partnerships and inclusion is continuously flagged by local peacebuilders.[4] International partners need to recognise and acknowledge inherent power imbalances and seek to understand and address how biases may affect the nature and success of partnerships.

2. **Confronting prejudice:** Internationals often view local organisations as particularly susceptible to violence and corruption, who need to be carefully managed. This perpetuates perpetuates the idea that peace can and should be externally driven. International partners must confront their own prejudices in order to develop meaningful and impactful partnerships.

3. **Local leadership:** Peace Direct challenges the dominant assumptions about the roles of outsiders and insiders - particularly the belief that local peacebuilders are 'lacking' in knowledge or skills,

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and that international peacebuilders can fill this gap. Local organisations should lead in setting the strategic direction and design of peacebuilding programmes; with international partners playing a supportive, accompaniment role and acting as a critical friend.

4. **Mutual accountability:** The onus of accountability should not be placed only on local organisations; rather international and local organisations should be mutually accountable and transparent. Peace Direct, for example, reports to all its partners quarterly, sharing key updates, publications, staff changes and highlighting the impact of different partners on a rotating basis.

5. **Long term partnerships:** Partnerships should not always begin and end with a project or programme, rather they should form a relationship beyond specific funding or project support. Peace Direct, for example, has three-year partnership agreements with most of its partners. The agreements provide a framework for a relationship that is not limited to a specifically funded project, for example, to support partners to raise their own funds or raise awareness where relevant.

6. **Unrestricted and core funding:** Funding is increasingly project-based, short-term and inflexible. But the sustainability of local partners depends on more than project costs. Strong partnerships take into consideration the various resourcing needs faced by partners. Covering core costs and providing unrestricted funding ensures that partners can continue to pay staff and cover essential costs during crises, as well as allow for flexibility to respond to evolving contexts.

7. **Adaptability and resilience:** Closely linked to the importance of unrestricted and core funding, is the issue of adaptability and resilience. Funding patterns and partnership models need to support and promote flexibility to reinforce local organisations' autonomy and resilience. Programmes should also be designed in a way to facilitate and enable adaptive project management and organisational learning. Local organisations' adaptability (financially and programmatically) to rapidly changing contexts or risks, is crucial for achieving impact as well as their safety and security.

8. **Importance of nonfinancial resources:** Non-financial resources such as office space or training opportunities allow partners to remain resilient against shocks, increase their skill set and gain autonomy over their work. This resilience contributes towards the ability of our partners to engage in long-term planning, be more effective in their work, and have greater ownership of the peacebuilding process.

9. **Partnership transitions:** How a programme, project or partnership ends is important. While approaches to exits vary across organisations, successful exits require collaborative planning from the start of a partnership. A recent learning project found two-way dialogue, working with individual champions and two-way learning are crucial to successful transitions.[5]

Based on 15 years' experience working with local peacebuilders, Peace Direct believes these nine principles are crucial to meaningful and effective partnerships. As partnerships commence, evolve and come to an end, they offer an opportunity to support locally-led approaches and achieve sustainable outcomes.

Endnotes

1   For example Sustainable Development Goals 17 is dedicated to global partnerships; the Sustaining Peace Agenda calls for closer strategic and operational partnerships; and the recent UN/World Bank Pathways to Peace report refers to conflict prevention as a "collective endeavour".
2   'Peace Exchanges' provide a platform and opportunity for local peacebuilders to share their perspectives, analysis and recommendations on a given topic. Peace Exchanges can occur on-line or in-country over three days to inform joint analysis.
3   For example, see Renoir, M. and Guttentag, M. (2018). https://www.issuelab.org/resources/30588/30588.pdf
4   For example, Peace Direct & IPTI (2019). Civil Society and inclusive peace; Peace Direct & UNOY (2019). Youth and Peacebuilding.
5   See Stopping as Success for more information.