Peace Direct Youth Action for Peace Programme Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

September 2022

Acknowledgements

Disclaimer

In response to UN Security Council Resolution 2250 which calls for young people to have a greater role in peacebuilding efforts, Peace Direct co-created a three-year programme with five local youth organisations across four conflict-affected countries. With funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Youth Action for Peace Programme (YAPP) supported promising young activists to design and lead their own peacebuilding initiatives at a local level.

The YAP programme distributed $1 million USD through 218 small grants to local young peacebuilders, reaching over 305,293 people directly and an estimated 950,375 indirectly in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and Pakistan.

Peace Direct believes that those who are directly impacted by conflict are best placed to seek out and implement solutions, if only they are afforded the resources, decision-making power, and space to do so. YAPP's flexible funding model enabled 218 emerging young peace actors– whether individuals, informal groups, or registered organisations – to design and manage innovative peace projects.

These projects were grounded in young grantees own lived experience of conflict, embedded in their communities, and adapted to rapidly changing and nuanced local conflict dynamics.

Communities were astonished that such informal and relatively inexperienced groups would be entrusted with international funds, but young people and their communities rose to the challenge, held one another accountable and created ripple effects, often far beyond what was initially envisioned.

The result has been a tapestry of varied approaches to peace and conflict, innovative project designs that challenge conventional silos of aid, and emerging examples of sustained community investment in youth-led initiatives.

Meanwhile, there is evidence that young peacebuilders are building a track record in project management and community credibility that is positioning many of them to go on to expand their work and successfully approach new donors for support.

Peace exchanges organised by URU in CAR (left) and NPCYP in DRC (right), bringing together peace actors and young peacebuilders

Global Summary

Total Number of Grants Awarded: 218
Total Funds Distributed: $998,823
People Reached Directly: 305,293
People Reached Indirectly: 950,375
Smallest Grant: $124
Largest Grant: $17,253

Country	Number of Grants	Average Grant Size	Smallest Grant	Largest Grant
CAR	37	$5,343	$2,232	$17,253
DRC	78	$3,940	$550	$12,000
Mali	64	$4,444	$124	$10,579
Pakistan	39	$5,370	$885	$13,213

YAPP Hub Organisations

AJCAD
(Association des Jeunes pour la Citoyenneté Active et la Démocratie), Mali

CDA
(Chanan Development Association), Pakistan

HIVE Pakistan

NPCYP
(National Partnership of Children and Youth in Peacebuilding), Democratic Republic of Congo

Organisation URU
Central African Republic

Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation is a composite of 5 independent evaluations commissioned locally by each YAPP hub organisation. The findings are enriched by the results of a Peace Direct internal reflection process, a thorough document review, partnership review discussions, and an online reflection meeting bringing together Peace Direct and hub organisations to validate cross-cutting themes.

Cross-Cutting Themes

The diversity of evaluation approaches in each context provided a multifaceted view of a complex programme and illuminated cross-cutting themes that offer insight into the contributions of YAPP's flexible funding model.

Youth Action and Empowerment

Elevating Young People as Peacebuilders

YAPP has reached promising young peacebuilders who otherwise would not have had access to funds, increasing their credibility and visibility. Youth are playing more prominent roles within their communities. Informal groups have been supported to officially register as organisations, and in some cases, they have gone on to access funding from other sources.

Inclusion of Marginalised Groups

Marginalised groups can be under resourced and less likely to conform to strict eligibility requirements set by funders. YAPP's selection process prioritised innovative ideas and applicants' credibility within their communities over conventional due diligence requirements such as organisational legal standing, financial accounting experience and governance structures.

> **The empowerment of women and youth as both the main beneficiaries and the actors in the implementation of social cohesion and peacebuilding activities is a major innovation in the Central African context.**
>
> URU Evaluation, CAR

Learning and reflection session with young peacebuilders in Bamako, Mali (AJCAD)

> **Such flexible funding opportunities, which did not require a lot of documentation and compliance requirements, are like a breath of fresh air for us. We are a small organisation and often are not able to meet the comprehensive documentation requirements of the funding organisations...the main impact of this project was in providing our organisation with an opening. Now we are working on many projects. We are in negotiation with many donor organisations. All this was made possible because of the [YAP] Project. They believed in our idea and gave us the start which we needed.**
>
> Trans Rights Organisation, local grant recipient in Pakistan

Impact of the Flexible Funding Approach

Innovation: Defying Conventional Silos

Projects funded through small grants worked at the intersection of conflict drivers, bucking conventional funding silos and more closely reflecting young people's lived reality. Projects often combined environmental, health or income generation aims with social cohesion and intercommunal dialogue, leading to sustained interest and investment from communities.

> **" The YAP project has done what others have failed to do. Today through my job I am reintegrated into the community. "**
>
> 18-year-old male former child soldier, DRC

Evolving, Shifting and Responsive Strategies

Without strict log frames and pre-established outcomes to adhere to, young grantees had the flexibility to adapt to their rapidly changing contexts and as a result many had unintended outcomes that exceeded initial expectations. YAPP took a learning approach with local grant recipients, allowing them to shift and sharpen their strategies as they grew in experience and confidence.

Flexibility with due diligence

Flexibility and a trust-based approach did not mean that due diligence was downplayed or compromised. In prioritising young people's innovative ideas, the programme still aimed to hold each grant recipient to account – both to the funders and to the community. The programme sought to broaden and contextualise due diligence. For example, community credibility in complex conflict settings can be more indicative of an applicants' likelihood of managing funds responsibly than formal registration or governance structures. Hub organisations rooted locally can more readily access the local knowledge needed to assess prospective grant recipients beyond conventional and externally imposed indicators of applicant capacity.

> **" Contrary to the international grants, this model of funding focused more on the organic network building through various set of activities, instead of adopting an outcome-based model with limited flexibility. This is one of the key reasons that many projects were able to adopt newer implementation strategies. "**
>
> HIVE Evaluation, Pakistan

Capacity of Hub Organisations and Local Grant Recipients

Role of Hub Organisations

The flexibility, support, training and capacity building offered by hub organisations to young grantees was a key component of the programme. Many grant recipients were very new to accounting, reporting, and project management, but they had good ideas, energy and the trust of their communities. They needed more accompaniment than had originally been planned and most hub organisations went above and beyond to ensure the success of the supported projects.

Trust-based partnership approach

YAPP's flexible funding model stemmed from a partnership approach based on international solidarity, accompaniment and mutual accountability. It entrusted local, often unregistered groups and individuals with international funds. It also inspired hub organisations to take a similar approach with young grantees, and in some cases, to push for similar treatment from other international partners.

> **Young girls have been forgotten for a long time in the process of positive transformation of conflicts…. But we have the capacities and knowledge to bring our stone to the building of peace!**
>
> Young female local grant recipient, DRC

Partnership Transitions and Sustainability

Assessment of Sustainability

Short-term YAPP grants were designed to jump start initiatives by supporting innovative ideas, and there is evidence that some of these grants have had a ripple effect that has lasted months beyond the life of the project. Communities have invested land, volunteer time, and financial resources. Young activists are now directly involved in peacebuilding mechanisms in their communities and regions. Some projects have received further funding. For example, a student debate project in Pakistan – Speak Karachi – received its first ever grant through YAPP. It has since received two $50,000 USD grants from USAID to continue and scale up the project.

Short-term Nature of the Funding

Survey respondents queried the short-term nature of the grants (most were 1-6 months in duration), as many projects dealt with long-term intractable problems. There are compelling examples of projects continuing with community support, external funding, or volunteerism, with gains expected to last beyond the life of the programme. However, all country evaluations indicated the potential value in granting in several phases over a longer period to allow those gains to be fully embedded, and to build on the increasing confidence and skills of the local grant recipients.

Shifting Power, Accountability and Power Dynamics

Accountability to Communities

One aim of the YAPP was to reverse the directional current of predominant accountability structures, so that accountability to communities was as important as to the funder. The novelty for local groups to be entrusted directly with funds inspired a level of responsibility and care for the resources, as well as a pressure to demonstrate the value to the community.

> **❝ Thanks to the YAPP project, we have awarded micro-grants to more than 70 initiatives without any incident of fraud and have accompanied them to the end and even to the sustainability of these initiatives. Thanks to this project, the community agrees with us that youth can play a great role in positively changing the context of our country for its development and stabilisation. ❞**
>
> Steven Malaki, NPCYP Executive Secretary, DRC

Conclusions

YAPP has been as much about investing in young people and ideas as it has been about investing in peacebuilding initiatives. Young people have grown in confidence and skill, and in every country, there are reports of youth being increasingly seen as agents of peace rather than violence. Whether through community mediations, neighbourhood watch initiatives, youth councils, government advisory boards, or innovative art projects, emerging young peacebuilders have been elevated into positions of leadership and visibility because of their involvement in YAPP.

The evaluation has identified several key ingredients for success:

1. The **flexible model** – with no strict log frame or predetermined outcomes – enabled the testing of innovative ideas, building trust with young peacebuilders, adapting projects to rapidly changing contexts and attracting community investment.

2. Some of the most successful and sustainable grants were given to young people with no prior experience of managing projects. **Investment in skill building and accompaniment by hub organisations** provided essential mentoring to help young peacebuilders craft their ideas into achievable projects

3. **The flexible funding model allowed due diligence to be redefined** beyond documentation and governance, centring community credibility, relevance and innovation in the selection criteria.

4. **Accountability to local communities is a stepping-stone to sustainability.** Projects designed by community members were viewed as relevant and communities were watching to see if these young people deserved the investment, allowing projects to take root.

5. **Successful projects engage with diverse stakeholders in the local communities, not just young people.** Intergenerational relationship building enhances youth credibility and leads to longer term changes. For young people to be respected as key agents for peace, they needed to bring elders and others along.

Recommendations

A) To international and local organisations:

Programme design

✔ **A co-design process** at the outset involving all partner organisations (INGO, local hubs) is critical in establishing relations of trust and mutual and tailoring the flexible funding model to the realities of the country and conflict context. It is also a space for unlearning harmful practices and actively listening and learning from one another.

✔ During co-design, develop strategies for **gender and inclusivity mainstreaming.** Place specific efforts on mapping and reaching out to young girls, women and marginalised groups at early stages of the design, with a view to integrating them as key leaders and stakeholders of local projects.

✔ Place as much emphasis on **capacity development,** day to day accompaniment of subgrantees and peer to peer learning as on the initiatives supported through small grants. This is crucial to both sustainability of groups and their initiatives and increases connectedness between groups with potential for joint action.

✔ **Include finance staff** in the co-design process, to build buy-in of the trust-based partnership approach and to develop financial reporting systems at all levels (INGO-hubs-local grant recipients) that build capacity and embody a trust-based ethos**.**

✔ **Do not underestimate the staff time and resources** required to effectively manage, deliver and monitor a programme designed to be adaptive, flexible and locally-led. Invest in local hub organisations staff and organisational development priorities, contributing to their sustainability as dynamic, local civil society actors beyond the funding period.

✔ On **small grants,** publish transparent selection criteria and offer feedback to unsuccessful local grant applicants. Put in place clear procedures to report, investigate and respond to any allegations related to the selection process. Consider extending the duration for initiatives funded through small grants, with grant recipients eligible to apply for more than one cycle. Include flexibility in the grant ceiling to allow investment in innovative ideas, including those that may use technology in new ways in communities.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

✓ A flexible, locally-led model requires a new way of approaching MEL. **Design participatory processes** with local hub organisations that encourage local grant recipients and their communities to think about and identify impact in meaningful ways, using locally relevant, indigenous ways of learning and harvesting outcomes. Co-design a shared monitoring system that allows evidence from impact stories and inclusion data to inform ongoing reflections on strengths and weaknesses. Explore innovative use of **technologies and social media** used and promoted by young people.

✓ **Build in regular learning and reflection spaces** during programme implementation at all levels: funder, INGO, local hub organisations and local grant recipients.

B) To funders:

✓ **Invest in local civil society:** Bridge the gap between donors and marginalised communities by entrusting and directly funding well-established, credible local organisations. Consider flexible, institutional support to support local civil society over the longer-term. Acknowledge that peace takes time to build and foster.

✓ **Increase access to funding for young people:** Remove barriers by reducing the administrative burdens of applying and reporting, while also investing in skills development young people may need to apply for and manage larger grants.

✓ **Adopt flexible approaches:** Be willing to take joint risks with your grantee to fund innovative and responsive programmes with potential for high impact.

✓ **Move away from rigid MEL frameworks:** Remain open to innovative and transformative approaches to MEL. Recognise that conventional models such as log frames are not well-suited to local realities and rapidly changing conflicts and are often imposed on local partners from top-down. Support grantees to invest in and capture learning from adaptive, context-sensitive and responsive project implementation approaches.

✓ **Support inter-generational approaches:** Youth-centred work also requires an intergenerational lens to enhance community buy-in, youth credibility and project success. Projects that support youth should be co-created by and with youth-led CSOs and young people, and may also need to include elders, parents and others in project design.

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