

Concept Note

Local Ownership and building national capacities for conflict prevention

Peace and Development Advisors Fellowship Programme: 2nd Cohort

Introduction:

As part of its Peace and Development Advisors (PDA) Fellowship Programme hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Oslo Governance Centre (OGC), the 2nd cohort on the topic of *'promoting local ownership and building national capacities for conflict prevention'* is being organized in partnership with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Joint UNDP- DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention.

As part of this fellowship, selected PDAs and other conflict prevention specialists working at the country level will be expected to explore this topic in-depth and in so doing:

- Reflect on the impact of their work supporting capacity development at the local and national level, and how this translates into strengthening the local ownership of ongoing peace and dialogue efforts, and identify both the added value and challenges that they have observed;
- Contribute to developing recommendations for improving local ownership, based on the experiences and context of the PDA's own work; as well as recommendations on how the PDA's role and context of deployment can be better leveraged or adjusted to meet this goal;
- Generate new insights and knowledge on this topic;
- Present their understanding and inputs through the deliverables (mentioned at the end of this concept note).

'Local' can be understood at various levels (i.e. National, sub-national and community level). For the purpose of this concept note, 'local' is interpreted as the range of actors / people / the community located in a specific geographic area that are affected by, and have an interest in resolving that conflict. The term could also be used for conflict prevention and addressing potential conflict drivers.

'Ownership' is used as a relative term that describes the varying capacity of the actors based at the local level to lead or participate in conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities¹.

This note takes forward the following basic understanding of 'local ownership':

- A recognition that communities have the right to make decisions about their own future, and that they have knowledge and capabilities that should be the starting point of any efforts to assist them;
- International conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts should empower local communities in such a way that they can meaningfully address the challenges they face; and
- Local communities should be encouraged to increasingly and effectively take control of their own destiny.

¹ Schirch, Lisa and Mancini-Griffoli, Deborah (Eds.). (2015) *Local Ownership in Security: Case Studies of Peacebuilding Approaches*. The Hague: Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC, Kroc Institute.

Context:

It is now widely recognised that inclusive local ownership is relevant in all contexts – from prevention to post conflict peacebuilding. If this is the case, then it is important to understand how it is uniquely relevant in different contexts. From the point of view of PDAs and conflict prevention specialists who work mostly to prevent conflict or to ensure that situations don't escalate negatively, it could be argued that the success of their efforts fundamentally depends on inclusive local ownership and building national capacities. The prevalent theory of change is that the social cost of conflict and violence can be reduced, if not completely avoided, through investing in strengthening the resilience of communities and societies, so that they are able to prevent and manage conflicts and tensions, before they become violent. Resilient societies are those where different groups can constructively interact with one another to address potential drivers of conflict and have effective state, local and community institutions that can work together and deal with political and other challenges in an inclusive and peaceful manner. Reducing the likelihood of violence, or managing outbreaks of violent conflict and emerging from it with the minimum cost to lives and livelihoods, requires adopting a strategic- or forward-looking approach to institutionalizing prevention into community and national structures, strengthening local and national capacities and processes, and improving dialogue and mediation skills. The success of prevention and peacebuilding efforts, and especially their sustainability, are understood to be closely linked with the degree to which such efforts are locally owned.

In the context of post conflict work, it has been widely recognised that peace cannot be imposed from outside, but must be genuinely and gradually built by a process of accommodation on the part of domestic stakeholders, public and private.²

In order to ensure that prevention and peacebuilding capacities are systematic and anchored in society, they need to be integrated into local social institutions, infrastructures for peace need to be developed and put in place, which can consist of 'a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills held by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation; prevent conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society.'³ Promoting local ownership can encourage local communities to engage in a set of peacebuilding processes such as dialogue, negotiation, mediation and joint problem solving. These peacebuilding processes enable local people to participate in identifying challenges, jointly developing and implementing strategies, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure that such strategies works to provide safety and prevent conflict for everyone in their community or society⁴.

Recognizing the role of inclusive local ownership and building national capacities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, the UN and UNDP has been active in developing specific guidance related to its different dimensions. This guidance has included - how to set up effective infrastructures for peace (I4P); supporting insider mediation and dialogue processes amongst others. In this regard, a recently co-produced paper argues that I4P can help reconcile tensions that can arise from simultaneously addressing the dynamics of political, social and economic transformation, especially in contexts where the capacities to deal with conflict in a peaceful manner are weak.⁵

² United Nations (2015) *The Challenge of Sustaining Peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture*, UN Doc. A/69/968-S/2015/490, June 30, 2015, p. 21.

³ United Nations Development Programme issue brief: *Infrastructures for Peace*

⁴ Schirch, Lisa and Mancini-Griffoli, Deborah (Eds.) (2015) *Local Ownership in Security: Case Studies of Peacebuilding Approaches*. The Hague: Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC, Kroc Institute.

⁵ Hans J. Giessmann (2016) 'Embedded Peace Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lessons Learned', UNDP, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Berghof Foundation

Another UNDP Guidance note on supporting insider mediation draws the strong link with institutions or individuals that are seen as “insiders” within a given context and their advantages of being considered trusted and respected individuals, who bring with them a higher legitimacy, cultural closeness and an ability to convene all relevant stakeholders. Insider mediation again recognizes the primacy of local actors and their inherent and proven ability to make meaningful impact in a number of ways – be it - in ensuring peaceful elections; facilitating dialogue, breaking political deadlocks and establishing the groundwork for formal peace negotiations in a number of countries.⁶

The section on guiding questions (later on in this concept note) enquires to how useful or relevant this kind of guidance has been for the PDAs and conflict prevention specialists.

Deployed under the overarching goal of strengthening conflict prevention capacities at the national and local level, and with a unique mandate, the **PDA role** is designed to support the UN System in promoting inclusive, local and sustainable approach to peace. More specifically the approach taken by PDA’s work can be presented as follow: through regular conflict and political analysis based engagement with local stakeholders; PDAs support RCs and UNCTs to better adapt to sensitive contexts by informing decision-making and conflict-sensitive engagements, and identify/create entry points create sustainable conditions for national actors to carry the work forward. Similarly, other UN conflict prevention and peacebuilding specialists may have comparable or complimentary roles to the one of the PDA.

For a PDA (and PDA like conflict prevention specialists) this means investing in building relationships with local actors, that may involve facilitating training, providing advice; accompanying key national peacebuilders and actors; designing and facilitating the revitalization of existing conflict prevention systems; and building synergies and cohesion among local actors.

Building on this experience, the aim of this fellowship is to understand the role that PDAs (and PDA like conflict prevention specialists) have played in establishing strategies and engaging in capacity building, and capture some of the lessons and best practices in overcoming the several challenges, in particular in the promotion inclusive ownership. Some of the questions / issues that may need further reflection and analysis are available in this concept note and it is hoped that in examining these (and other questions that can be added by the Fellows) through the course of this fellowship can help in holistically examining, from their perspective, why and how best to promote local ownership for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Sustaining Peace and Agenda 2030 for peacebuilding:

During the past two years the United Nations has been going through a period of critical reflection on its performance in supporting peace and security, recognising that many of the structures, practices and policies for addressing or preventing violent conflict maybe outdated, insufficient or simply inadequate. One of the outcomes from this process was the parallel resolutions passed in the UN Security Council (UN SCR 2282: On post conflict peacebuilding) and the General Assembly (A/RES/70/262: Review of the UN Peacebuilding architecture) that, among other things, introduced a new conceptual framework of ‘sustaining peace’. This concept is broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account and emphasizes that it is a shared task and responsibility that needs to be fulfilled by the Government and all other national stakeholders.

With the sustaining peace concept, the UN approach to peacebuilding now puts UN member states

⁶ UNDP Guidance Note (2014) ‘Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence’

and their populations in the lead; it further puts politics and political solutions front and center, gives prevention an uncontested home, and leverages the UN's three pillars—human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development—in a mutually reinforcing way.⁷

The new UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, who took office on 1 January 2017, has embraced these developments and made prevention and sustaining peace a central theme of his office. In his first statement to the UN Security Council on 10 January 2017 he noted the strong support for an integrated approach that connects development, human rights and peace and security in both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace.

In addition, with the adoption of Agenda 2030 and specifically Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, current international development efforts are geared to working with national counterparts in implementing this goal. The implementation and monitoring of SDG 16 will create new opportunities for global dialogue and coherence on peacebuilding goals and how these goals could be pursued.⁸

However, as the understanding of this concept permeates down through the UN system and among international and national actors it will bring with it the need for policy and process adjustments. PDAs (and PDA like conflict prevention specialists) are at the frontline of this approach – combining political, peacebuilding and development work – both leveraging and supporting different parts of the UN System, while directly engaging with national stakeholders. This experience can offer critical insight on how the sustaining peace approach has and can be further implemented. However, going forward this will also require a structural adjustment to how they work with other actors (both UN and others) at the country level.

Building national capacities and promoting local ownership – issues related to implementation:

The importance of local actors has been acknowledged since the mid-1990s, with peacebuilding activities being conceptualised not as a top-down process, but as a form of engagement involving the entire society⁹. Peace reviews have repeatedly shown that as conflicts take place within societies, it is within the conflicting societies that peacebuilding measures must be rooted. The UN high – level independent panel on peace operations recommended that peace operations go beyond merely consulting communities, and actively include them in their work (UN 2015:66).

However, the Advisory Group of Experts who reviewed the UN's peacebuilding architecture in 2015, and who's report led to the sustaining peace resolutions, point out that:

“...frequently, “national ownership” is defined too narrowly and unthinkingly...in the aftermath of violence, neither a cohesive nation state nor an inclusive or effective system of governance should be taken as given. Much as peace cannot be imposed from outside, peace cannot simply be imposed by domestic elites or authoritarian governments on fractious populations that lack even minimal trust in their leaderships or each other. Too often “national ownership” is equated with acquiescing to the strategies and priorities of the national government. In divided post-conflict societies, such an approach risks perpetuating exclusion....¹⁰

In the context of the **work of a PDA (and PDA - like conflict prevention specialist)**, it remains to be seen if there is adequate clarity on how the process of promoting local ownership can be

⁷ Mahmoud, Youssef and Súilleabháin, Andrea Ó (2016) ‘With New Resolutions, Sustaining Peace Sits at Heart of UN Architecture’, IPI Global Observatory.

⁹ Miall, Hugh and Ramsbotham, Oliver and Woodhouse, Tom (1999) Contemporary Conflict Resolution

¹⁰ United Nations (2015) The Challenge of Sustaining Peace: Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture, UN Doc. A/69/968–S/2015/490, June 30, 2015, p. 21.

effectively evolved by finding the right balance, knowing who to work with and how to practically include locals in peace processes. Based on a literature review on the subject, given **below are some possible challenges** in promoting inclusive local ownership. Given the experience of the PDAs (and PDA – like conflict prevention specialists) it is hoped that more such issues can be flagged for attention based on their experiences and lessons learned, adding to this list.

- ***Finding the balance:*** Recent research has shown that for national peace and dialogue processes to become self-sustainable, resilient social institutions need to emerge from within, i.e. informed by the local culture, history and socio-economic context. International peacebuilders can assist this process, but if they interfere too much they end up undermining the self-organising processes necessary to generate and sustain resilient social institutions. A complexity informed approach to sustaining peace suggests that international peacebuilders focus their efforts on safeguarding, stimulating, facilitating and creating the space for societies to develop resilient capacities for self-organisation. The key to successful peacebuilding thus lies in finding the appropriate balance between international support and local self-organisation, and this will differ from context to context.¹¹ Therefore, the question before us is whether this calls merely for increased participation or for complete “ownership” of the peace process and how this balance can be achieved.
- ***Ownership of peace and dialogue processes:*** While there is wide consensus on the value of this principle, there are studies that show that in terms of working with local actors there can be serious challenges in its practical implementation. Given the current structures of international cooperation and power asymmetries, there are question marks whether it can be seriously implemented on the ground. For instance, the New Deal implied that more international funds will be channeled through national treasuries, but this has not materialized, partly as a result of fears related to loss of control and oversight by donors. The question being asked is how much local ownership is appropriate, and whether at a granular level it means the literal ownership of all foreign funded projects or simply a readjusting of the nature of the relationship between the two (pointing to a need for change in international cooperation).¹²
- ***Who takes the local ownership?:*** There are many local players that PDAs (and PDA-like conflict prevention specialists) will encounter as part of their work, such as local and national government, traditional leaders, civil society, private sector, religious leaders, youth and women’s groups and even militia and ex-combatants. In such a scenario, how do PDAs (and PDA-like conflict prevention specialists) decide who to work with, and how do these choices that they have to make affect local power relations and thus local ownership.
- ***Differences in perception:*** In addition, while most actors would agree on the value of this principle, there are likely to be vast differences in the perception of the consequences of full support of local actors and in particular its implications for third parties. For instance, in some cases national state actors argue that they should be the sole entry point for international actors; while in other cases civil society argue that their national government is unable or unwilling, and that they should be the international communities’ counterpart.

*UN practice, policy and guidance on local ownership and national capacities
Insider mediation and Infrastructures for Peace*

This concept note recognizes that there is existing guidance on promoting local ownership and building national capacities and is there an opportunity for participating PDAs (and PDA-like conflict prevention specialists) to reflect on how useful this guidance is and how well it can be

¹¹ de Coning, Cedric (2016): From peacebuilding to sustaining peace: Implications of complexity for resilience and sustainability, Resilience, DOI: 10.1080/21693293.2016.1153773

¹² Reich, Hannah (2006) “Local Ownership” in Conflict Transformation Projects: Partnership, Participation or Patronage?

applied practically on the ground in different contexts. Through the course of the Fellowship a number of UN/ UNDP (and other guidance) will be discussed with the fellows to help understand their effectiveness and any recommendations on helping improve them in the future. Some of the guidance already mentioned earlier include:

- The UNDP, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Berghof Foundation paper on 'Embedded Peace Infrastructures for Peace: Approaches and Lessons Learned'.
- UNDP Guidance Note on 'Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence'

Specific questions for PDAs, PDA-types and UN conflict prevention/peacebuilding practitioners:

In continuation of the background, context and challenges mentioned earlier in this note, there are some questions that are specifically linked with the work of the PDAs and other UN conflict prevention and peacebuilding practitioners. In exploring the implications of building national capacities and promoting inclusive local ownership for peacebuilding efforts, it is hoped that these questions could be used as points of reflection and a basis for further conversation during the fellowship. These include:

- How are the terms 'building national capacities' and 'local ownership' understood and to what extent they contribute to building or strengthening these local capacities, processes and mechanisms?
- How do efforts to set up Infrastructures for Peace; supporting insider mediators; supporting dialogue processes, etc. contribute to stronger local ownership of conflict prevention and peace efforts? What are the challenges? How does the engagement take into account gender imperatives? Is existing guidance useful or relevant?
- What are the different ways these practitioners contribute to (and may have benefitted from) building local capacities, including direct forms of capacity building such as trainings (national stakeholders and UN internal), establishment of institutions, processes and networks (I4P), as well as more diffuse impact they may have while acting as 'advisors, bridge builders, facilitators, connectors'?
- What are some of the lessons learnt and good practices when building relationships and networks with government, national or local partners, civil society? How are existing competencies and networks that would need the extra support to thrive, mapped/identified? Are there any specific lessons to engaging with women and youth groups? How do these relationships and entry points lead to building capacities and local ownership?
- How can these practitioners find the balance between effectively promoting inclusive local ownership and finding a role for 'external' actors in this process, including themselves as externals or nationals? How can working with /being a national UN staff and further engaging with partners strengthen the impact of their work?
- What steps can be taken to ensure inclusive local ownership in taking on board local concerns in defining the problem and implementing solutions?
- What are the 'structural' measures linked to how PDAs are positioned in the country and how they work vis-à-vis other actors that require adjustment to make UN's sustaining peace efforts more locally owned and driven?

- How can the Joint Programme (and UN System) more effectively channel the comparative advantages of the various UN entities at the country level, to allow the UN to more systematically and coherently address these challenges?

For the purpose of this Fellowship, participants are encouraged to use this concept note as a guide to further explore the various dynamics around the issue of promoting inclusive local ownership for sustaining peace in the context of their own experience and work and for the initial framing of their research questions.

Expected products:

Ahead of the Fellowship, the Fellows will be invited to draft and submit a short and succinct case study outlining their experience in supporting or promoting inclusive local ownership using their experience and understanding and providing an initial reflection to the key questions to be raised subsequently during the Fellowship. More information about the case study will be shared with the Fellows selected for the cohort.

By the end of the Fellowship, the Fellows will produce jointly the following products:

- A 4-6 page individual research paper / issue brief that builds on the initial case study and aggregates the reflections, lessons and best practices discussed during the course of the 2 week Fellowship. Here the Fellow could choose a key question related to the cohort topic and explore it in-depth.
- Contribute to the preparation of a joint (along with the other participating Fellows) output that will reflect on the extent to which their work in practice is directed and leads to building national capacities; consider how the PDA's (and PDA-like conflict prevention specialists) work differentiate with other type of assistance and its value added in practice, and provide recommendations on how the programme and the PDA's working methods, mandate, or other can be adjusted for a stronger impact.
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- Note: The participating Fellows are required to submit by the end of the 2-week fellowship, a near finalized draft of the above mentioned products and any further refinement / approval / finalization must be submitted within 2 weeks after the end of the programme.

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