

Local Networks for Peace: Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding

EDITED BY LESLEY CONNOLLY AND LAURA POWERS



Cover Photo: Meeting organized by Women for Peace and Good Governance in Badulla, Sri Lanka, 2010. Sujeewa de Silva/Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH.

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Suggested Citation:

Lesley Connolly and Laura Powers, eds., "Local Networks for Peace: Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding," New York: International Peace Institute, September 2018.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors would like to thank Andrea Ó Súilleabháin for her conceptualization of and work on the initial stages of this project, including the preparatory workshop in South Africa.

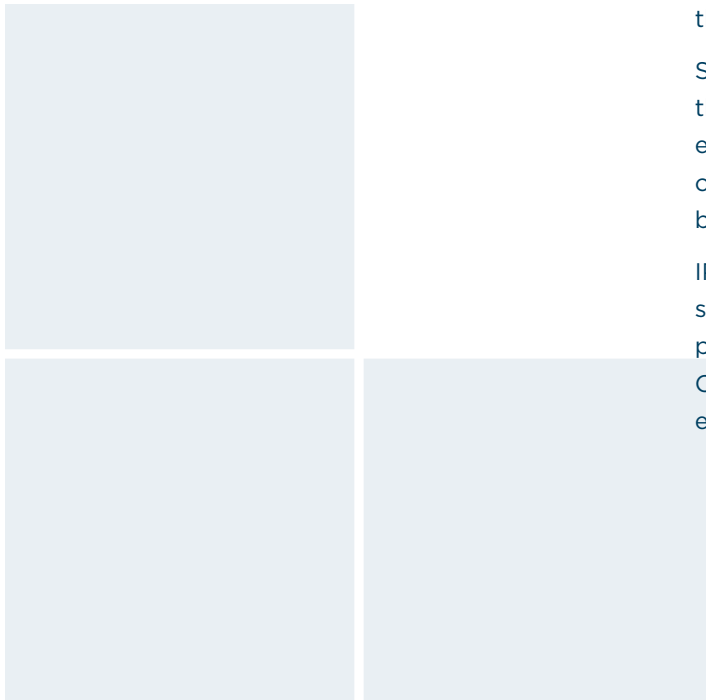
The editors would also like to thank the individual authors of the case studies, who spent the better part of a year researching and writing them and sharing their valuable thoughts and time.

A big thanks goes to the reviewers of the case studies, John Ahere, Harley Henigson, Liezelle Kumalo, Amanda Lucey, Priyal Singh, Sarah Taylor, and Janneth Vargas, whose excellent feedback on the papers contributed to their overall strength.

The editors would like to thank the Center for Peace Operations team for their support during this project. Specifically, the role of Jake Sherman in the final stages of the project helped improve the compilation.

Special thanks goes to the IPI editorial team, whose thorough contributions, time, and energy have greatly enhanced the quality of each of the case studies and the overall shape of the publication. The team went above and beyond to create an excellent final product.

IPI owes a debt of thanks to all of its donors, whose support makes publications like this one possible. This publication was made possible by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.



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Executive Summary

In recent years, there have been increasing calls to ensure local ownership of peacebuilding design and practice, to take local knowledge fully into account in designing peacebuilding programs and assessing conflicts, and to strive for the meaningful participation of local peacebuilding actors. In the search for new approaches to connect local-level initiatives to international programs and to move local knowledge from the bottom up, community-led peacebuilding networks may have a key role to play.

This volume includes eight regionally diverse case studies of community-led peacebuilding networks to identify approaches for more inclusive and integrated peacebuilding. The case studies—on Burundi, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe—reflect a wide range of contexts. The networks covered are also varied in aim and approach, size and demography of membership, geographic reach, and organizational structure. Many of them focus on marginalized groups, particularly women and youth.

The cases underscore the organizational, political, and financial advantages and risks to operating as part of a broader network. Organizationally, networks expand civil society organizations' geographic reach and allow them to access more diverse knowledge, expertise, and constituencies. They also help them expand their horizontal relationships (with one another) and vertical relationships (with national, regional, and international organizations). Moreover, networks can help organizations respond to shifting needs and realities more flexibly and rapidly and adopt more holistic approaches. However, managing network members' diverse opinions, expectations, and capacities can be challenging.

Politically, networks can face challenges in determining when and how to partner with governments, how to avoid state capture, how to stay impartial while advocating for change, and how to work in constrained or closing political space. At the same time, participation in a network can be a source of resilience, particularly in the face of political violence. Through networks, civil society organizations can also more easily form strategic alliances with governments to advance the peacebuilding agenda.

Lack of predictable and sustainable funding and increased reliance on project financing, mainly from international donors, is one of the main challenges facing most peacebuilding networks. This can create competition for scarce resources among network members, or between members and the network secretariat, and can cause networks to align their projects with donor agendas. But networks can also open up access to international funding to smaller organizations that lack the capacity to navigate complex donor requirements on their own.

Greater understanding among international peacebuilding practitioners and policymakers of peacebuilding network structures, including their comparative advantages and challenges, should guide efforts not only to incorporate local knowledge and expertise into international initiatives but also to identify how these efforts can support and magnify local efforts. By better understanding how local peacebuilding networks operate in their communities, the international community can begin to better understand the challenges local organizations face, how to support and strengthen peacebuilding work on the ground, and how such initiatives contribute to building and sustaining peace.

Introduction

In recent years, there have been increasing calls to ensure local ownership of peacebuilding design and practice, to take local knowledge fully into account in designing peacebuilding programs and assessing conflicts, and to strive for the meaningful participation of local peacebuilding actors. This has been called “the local turn” in peacebuilding policy and practice.¹ In the search for new approaches to connect local-level initiatives to international programs and to move local knowledge from the bottom up, community-led peacebuilding networks may have a key role to play.²

International donors, the United Nations, and other international organizations have echoed and responded to this call, repeatedly affirming the need for inclusivity and national and local ownership in peacebuilding and institution-building efforts. Indeed, the secretary-general’s 2012 report on peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict emphasized that inclusive processes can reduce the risk of relapse into violence and that exclusion is one of the most consistent factors behind the breakdown of peace.³ Secretary-General António Guterres’s 2018 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace highlights the need to support locally owned peacebuilding initiatives that empower those with knowledge of their communities to design and implement approaches tailored to their specific needs: “Developing participatory approaches, involving civil society and local communities, is instrumental in peacebuilding.... This is already taking place in different forms in

many contexts but should be continuous and systematic.”⁴

John Paul Lederach has described participatory approaches that promote citizens’ agency as the “long-term infrastructure” for peace and argues that third-party engagement in peacebuilding should focus on supporting the efforts of national actors and coordinating those of external actors.⁵ Among international policymakers and practitioners, however, recognition of the importance of locally led peacebuilding approaches has not been matched by efforts to integrate these into their peacebuilding work. Previous IPI research has found that despite “a growing consensus on the importance of locally focused approaches..., translating these principles into practice—in terms of peacebuilding mechanisms, statebuilding processes, and programs on the ground—is an ongoing challenge for international organizations and nongovernmental organizations.”⁶

Moreover, as Webster Zambara notes in this volume, “Ownership of peacebuilding efforts remains within an overall state-centric framework where national political elites are mistakenly considered to be representatives of local populations.” As a result, priorities for peacebuilding are often set by national elites and international stakeholders without adequately consulting or incorporating local knowledge and expectations, without sufficiently recognizing the often significant influence and reach of local civil society organizations, and without creating adequate space

1 See Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, “The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013). These approaches are also core components of the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals national and international actors committed to in 2011 in Busan, South Korea, as part of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.

2 “Networking may be broadly defined as a structured communication for the achievement of similar goals in the conditions of interdependence. It is especially applicable to peacemaking NGOs which, being deliberately designed by their founders to deal with problems requiring collaborative action, may not seriously hope to be successful in their activities without cooperation and management of interdependence with other NGOs and social agents.” Anton Ivanov, “Advanced Networking: A Conceptual Approach to NGO-Based Early Response Strategies in Conflict Prevention,” Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, October 1997, available at www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Papers/Occasional_Papers/boc11e.pdf.

3 See UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/67/499-S/2012/746, October 8, 2012. The secretary-general’s 2014 report reaffirms this idea, linking inclusive peacebuilding to the development of positive state-society relations: “Where peacebuilding efforts are rooted in inclusive societal consultation and efforts to minimize exclusionary practices, they generate trust and legitimacy in the State and its institutions.” *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/69/399-S/2014/694, September 23, 2014, p. 7.

4 UN General Assembly and Security Council, *Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/72/707-S/2018/43, January 18, 2018.

5 Thania Paffenholz, “Understanding Peacebuilding Theory: Management, Resolution and Transformation,” *New Routes* 14, no. 2 (2009), available at peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ConflictTransformation_NewRoutes2009.pdf.

6 Andrea O Súilleabháin, ed., “Leveraging Local Knowledge for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in Africa,” International Peace Institute, March 2015, available at www.ipinst.org/2015/03/leveraging-local-knowledge-for-peacebuilding-and-statebuilding-in-africa.

for their participation in—if not leadership of—peacebuilding processes. This can weaken the effectiveness, sustainability, and legitimacy of these endeavors.

Overview of the Volume

This volume is a compendium of eight regionally diverse case studies undertaken by the International Peace Institute (IPI) with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The cases investigate community-led peacebuilding networks to identify approaches for more inclusive and integrated peacebuilding, drawing on the insights of experts and practitioners from around the world.

This two-year project has four goals:

1. To document and publish the experiences of local peacebuilding networks and reflect on the challenges they are facing in the field;
2. To inform peacebuilding policy and practice by examining the local approaches of community-led peacebuilding networks and their impact on sustainable peace;
3. To facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences of peacebuilding both among scholars, experts, practitioners, and policymakers from the global South and between them and their counterparts from the global North; and
4. To make knowledge of successful experiences of local peacebuilding more accessible to local and international peacebuilding policymakers and practitioners.

The research explores how community-led peacebuilding networks in a variety of contexts function and navigate complex spaces. By examining two network structures in each country, these case studies seek to: (1) contribute to the repository of locally driven knowledge of the experiences and work of local peacebuilding civil society organizations and networks; (2) outline local innovative practices in peacebuilding; and (3) identify the benefits and challenges of using network structures in peacebuilding. These case studies provide best practices for other local organizations looking to increase their outreach and impact. They also provide national and international actors recommendations on how best

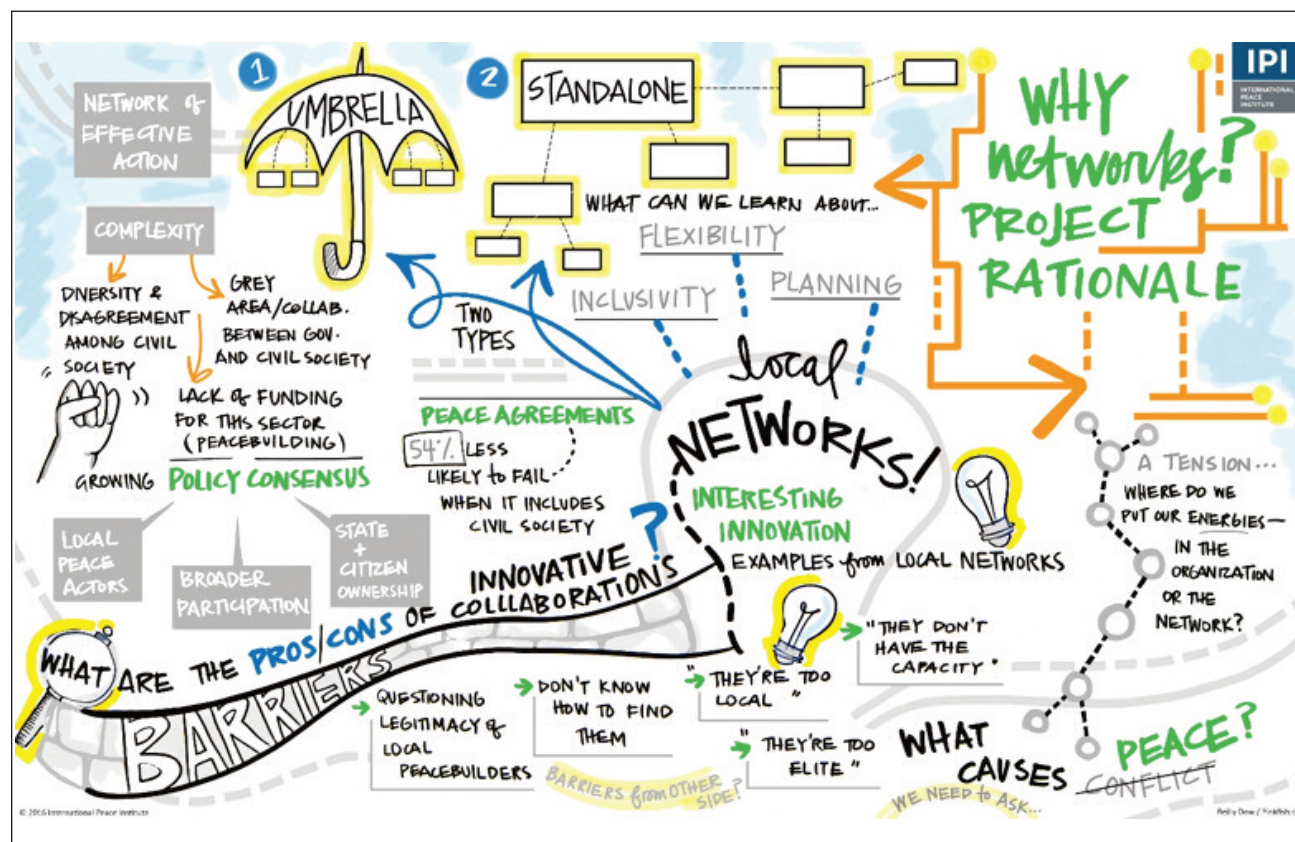
to support network organizations to increase the efficiency and efficacy of local peacebuilding initiatives.

The case studies, which draw on both empirical research and secondary sources, are written by authors working on or in the selected countries. They draw on both empirical research and secondary sources. The authors gathered at two preparatory workshops—one in South Africa in June 2016 and one in New York in October 2017. These workshops aimed to facilitate a conversation among the authors on the benefits and challenges of network structures and the comparative experiences of peacebuilding networks in their countries (see Figure 1). They also introduced their findings to experts, practitioners, and policymakers working on peacebuilding. The authors selected the specific networks studied, including the following:

- In **Burundi**, the Network of Youth Organizations Working for Peace, Reconciliation, and Development (*Réseau des organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la paix, la réconciliation et le développement*, or REJA) mobilizes youth groups across the country to engage in dialogue on peacebuilding and build capacity to resist and prevent violence. The Dushirehamwe women's network encourages women to play an active and leading role in post-conflict reconciliation, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.
- In the **Central African Republic (CAR)**, the Central African Inter-NGO Council (*Conseil Inter ONG de Centrafrique*, or CIONGCA) coordinates civil society organizations across ten thematic focal areas related to peacebuilding and development. The National Council of Central African Youth (*Conseil national de la jeunesse centrafricaine*, or CNJCA) provides a bridge between youth and national decision makers in an effort to reduce and prevent young people's involvement in violence and to promote their role in mediation and peacebuilding initiatives.
- In **Colombia**, the National Network of Citizens' Initiatives for Peace and against War (*Red Nacional de Iniciativas Ciudadanas por la Paz y contra la Guerra*, or Redepaz) uses civic education to encourage civic engagement in political processes to promote peace and reconciliation in the country. The Women's Pacifist Route (*Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres*, or

- Ruta) mobilizes women in conflict-affected territories to speak out about their experiences during the war and seeks to put an end to sexual and gender-based violence.
- In Kenya, the Peace and Development Network Trust (PeaceNet Kenya) engages in peace-building, conflict prevention, and conflict transformation, often using innovative technologies to reduce and prevent electoral violence. Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL) seeks to increase the number of female elected officials and advocates for women's human rights, economic empowerment, and leadership.
 - In Liberia, the Security Sector Reform Working Group (SSRWG) integrates former and current security professionals with members of civil society to advocate for security sector reform. The Peace Huts are an informal network based on traditional forms of dispute resolution. They bring communities together around issues such as domestic violence, access to justice, and land rights.
 - In South Africa, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation's (CSVR) Community Action Groups (CAGs) use community outreach to support victims of violence and educate communities on the drivers of violence.
 - In Sri Lanka, Women for Peace and Good Governance (WPGG) works on women's issues, including the challenges women face participating in politics. Sarvodaya Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade) connects youth from various ethnic groups and religions to engage in dialogue on peace, democracy, and good governance.
 - In Zimbabwe, the Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET) promotes civic education to increase political participation, especially voter turnout. The Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe (PBNZ) tracks and monitors conflict to coordinate interventions with other civil society actors and engages in trauma healing and reconciliation within communities.

Figure 1. Visual depiction of discussions on the benefits and challenges of local networks among the case study authors in South Africa in 2016



A Diverse Typology of Peacebuilding Networks

The diversity of networks included in this volume reflects the diversity of environments in which they have emerged. The countries where these networks operate have experienced different types of armed conflict and violence (e.g., civil wars, political transitions, popular uprisings, election-related violence). The networks vary in aim and approach, size and demography of membership, geographic reach, and organizational structure. They are inclusive, engaging marginalized groups such as women, youth, and religious minorities, and work on issues ranging from reconciliation and human rights to economic empowerment and access to justice. Many of them use innovative approaches, including new technologies and social media.

Some of the countries examined, including South Africa, Colombia, and Liberia, have comparatively long histories of robust civil society engagement. Many of the networks, like Redepaz in Colombia and the Peace Huts in Liberia, emerged from grassroots social movements in response to violence, injustice, political and economic marginalization, or lack of effective or equitable service delivery by the state. Elsewhere, such as in CAR and Burundi, civil society organizations remain nascent as a force for social change. Rather than emerging organically at the grassroots level, civil society networks may be the result of local NGOs collaborating with and receiving support from international NGOs, the United Nations, or the national government. The Central African Inter-NGO Council, for example, was created following discussions between the government, donors, and civil society to create a platform to advise them on projects and programs.

The civil society networks range in size and reach from a few member organizations operating in a handful of communities to nationwide networks such as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, which has over 3,000 village-level societies and some 1,500 full-time employees. Liberia's Peace Huts started as part of a campaign by the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, an informal network with an estimated 23,000 individual members, the majority of whom are women. Regardless of their size, grassroots organizations are at the core of each network's structure

and play a central role in its decision-making processes.

Some of the civil society networks examined in the cases focus on specific issue, like the Security Sector Reform Working Group, which was created to fill a gap in domestic expertise on this subject in Liberia. Most have adopted a holistic approach to peacebuilding, drawing on the diverse skills and needs of their members and the communities in which they work.

They also exhibit a range of organizational structures, from umbrella organizations uniting members around a common issue or challenge to single organizations made up of chapters, district offices, or village committees. They are often a mix of formal and informal structures. Members generally elect officials to head a central secretariat and are represented in the network's decision-making bodies. However, the extent to which the secretariat directs the operations of provincial and local structures and the degree of grassroots influence on central strategies vary, as does the extent to which networks' decisions are binding or voluntary for members. Redepaz in Colombia, which comprises hundreds of peace and development organizations, has several national and regional administrative bodies, but local nodes constitute its core. PeaceNet Kenya started as an umbrella organization but became an independent entity increasingly engaged in direct programming. In other cases, like the Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe, a network may be coordinated by a single member but have all members collectively make decisions.

Advantages and Risks of a Network Approach to Peacebuilding

The cases underscore many advantages and risks to operating as part of a broader network for civil society organizations working on peacebuilding. These include organizational, political, and financial factors.

ORGANIZATIONAL ADVANTAGES AND RISKS

Networks expand civil society's geographic reach by linking the areas of operation of multiple, often smaller community-based organizations. As

Stephen Kirimi notes in the case study on Kenya, “By functioning as networks, organizations are... able to penetrate communities and areas that would otherwise not be easy for single entities to reach, especially if they are non-local.” The increased reach of networks can further incentivize new members to join. In Colombia, Nicolás Chamat Matalla notes that, “As networks have increased their territorial presence, more organizations and initiatives have decided to join, further increasing the number of members and diversity of the programmatic agenda.”

Networks can also allow organizations to access greater diversity of knowledge and experience (e.g., of varied local contexts), expertise (e.g., in human rights, gender, the environment, economic development, law), and constituencies (e.g., different ethnic and religious groups, youth, women). At the grassroots level, for example, individual members are often deeply embedded in, and residents of, the communities where they work; by coming together in a network, they can share with each other this access to, legitimacy in, and understanding of different parts of the country. The diversity of backgrounds brought together in networks can result in richer discussions and insights, leading to more innovative and resourceful decisions and actions. In Liberia, writes Aaron Weah, ethnic diversity in the membership of networks has encouraged members to overcome stereotypes by realizing their shared experience. This is echoed by Hasini Haputhanthri, who similarly describes Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim women in Sri Lanka identifying their shared struggle with cultural barriers and patriarchy. At the same time, she cautions, “Cohesiveness among community-level groups does not automatically translate into strong solidarity among the communities in which they work that face similar issues.”

The civil society networks covered here help their members build both horizontal and vertical relationships: community-level organizations build relationships with one another and establish links with national, regional, and international organizations. Working horizontally increases outreach, influence, and impact, especially for small or informal grassroots organizations with limited reach. Citing a study of peacebuilding organizations in Sri Lanka, Haputhanthri notes that

networking can enable marginalized or disenfranchised groups to gain visibility by working together, provide them a sense of agency, and enable those who were voiceless to speak: “Networks were more effective than organizations working individually, had greater impact, offered platforms for sharing lessons learned, and created a collective spirit that made partners feel they were part of a larger process.”

Working vertically allows network members to access and be heard in higher-level events and decision-making platforms, whether national legislative debates, national peace processes, or international policy fora. Chamat Matallana observes that “networks can realize bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding by linking local initiatives with national and international efforts.” In Colombia, Ruta and Redepaz have formed international and regional partnerships, and civil society networks have provided a potential broad-based platform for citizens to engage in ongoing peace talks with the ELN, underscoring their potential to raise community concerns in other peace processes. As “multi-level mechanisms,” networks can make community-level work more visible and involve more voices in advocating for policy and raising awareness at the national and international level. This can also help national and international peacebuilders better adapt the design and implementation of their peacebuilding programs to local realities. However, as discussed below, alliances with international NGOs can also be risky for organizations in contexts where the government, armed groups, or other power holders view their work as inimical to their interests.

As networks grow in membership and geographic reach, managing the diversity of opinions and expectations of member organizations can become more challenging. Smaller organizations risk being dominated by larger ones, which can become gatekeepers in the geographic region where they operate or on a particular thematic issue. This is particularly likely when leadership is centralized and the network’s secretariat is not inclusive. As noted by Kessy Ekomo-Soignet in the case study on the Central African Republic, “Working under the same banner or on the basis of a shared agenda is advantageous only if the network’s leadership values the diversity and expertise of each member

in the implementation of its initiatives and advocacy work.” Weah similarly warns of overly centralized leadership structures that do not reflect the diversity of the network’s membership and consolidate decision making in the hands of a few people.

For these reasons, it is important that network decision-making structures level the playing field, ensuring that smaller organizations have a voice and influence. Institutional arrangements that promote non-hierarchical and consensus-based decision making can give all members a say and help ensure that the network’s strategies consider their most pressing needs. Redepaz in Colombia, for example, allows member organizations to opt out of network activities without any negative repercussions and provides them flexibility to pursue agendas outside the network’s strategic plan. In this way, the network has been able to sidestep controversial issues that might split its members. For example, while certain members are active on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues in their individual capacity, the network does not directly address these issues due to their sensitivity.

Network organizations often have diverse memberships with a wide range of capabilities and capacities, which can sometimes lead to difficulties in implementing projects. One member’s failure to deliver can threaten the legitimacy of the entire network. To avoid this, larger members with more resources can build the capacity of other members with limited resources and capabilities. This can take the form of training, sharing lessons learned, or even sharing resources. In the case of Sri Lanka, smaller networks such as Women for Peace and Good Governance have strong local reach but “lack the capacities to work with other organizations on a common platform, especially when there are dominant and powerful organizations that are network members.” Haputhanthri suggests that “support is needed to help smaller organizations build the know-how and skills necessary for multi-stakeholder collaboration, such as negotiation, active participation..., and collective leadership.”

Another advantage of operating in a network is that it can allow organizations to respond more flexibly and rapidly to shifting political realities and needs. Pooled knowledge of a broader context and proximity to a wider area can enable networks to

quickly adapt their strategies. As Senzweshile Ngubane and Patrick Kanyangara observe in their study of networks in Burundi, “CSOs operating in networks are either able to respond rapidly through advocacy or have the capability to address challenges across the country by virtue of having access to timely information.” Networks engaged in conflict analysis, early warning, and rapid response can share information on and knowledge of local-level situations among their members. For example, the Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe monitors and assesses conflict trends and develops coordinated interventions at the local, regional, and national level. In Burundi, the Dushirehawme women’s network verifies and transmits “accurate and reliable information on the political and security situation to avoid misinformation and rumors, which often exacerbate intercommunal tension and increase the possibility of violence.” A similar role is played by networks in CAR and Liberia. The cases suggest that, by conducting joint conflict analysis with local networks, international actors would gain more accurate insight into drivers of conflict and sources of resilience within communities.

Mobilization, decision making, coordination, early warning, real-time sharing of information, and regular communication between the network secretariat and grassroots organizations have been aided by social media. Several of the cases note that it is challenging to ensure fluid communication and information flow among network organizations and individual members in different parts of a country. Networks have used communication platforms like Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook to facilitate and speed up the decision-making process, though poor connectivity can still make online interaction difficult.

In many of the networks studied, the diverse expertise of member organizations facilitates a more inclusive, collaborative, and holistic approach to peacebuilding that integrates different disciplines such as humanitarian relief, development, public health, education, and human rights. As Chamat Matallana points out in Colombia, “The flexible organizational framework of networks not only promotes knowledge sharing among members but also encourages an integrated approach to pursuing political, social, economic and cultural change.” Reflecting this holistic

approach, many of the networks, including Ruta in Colombia, Rural Women Peace Link in Kenya, the Community Action Groups in South Africa, and the Peace Huts in Liberia, respond to structural violence by providing psychosocial support to conflict- and crisis-affected communities.

POLITICAL ADVANTAGES AND RISKS

Political challenges for networks include when and how to partner with governments, how to avoid state capture, how to stay impartial while advocating for change, and how to work in constrained or closing political space for civil society.

Many of the cases illustrate the challenge civil society networks face in nurturing, building, and maintaining working relationships with the government while retaining sufficient distance and independence to avoid political capture or politicization of their agenda. Many networks struggle with being used by political actors to enhance their own interests. This can decrease the effectiveness of networks by limiting their independence. As Kirimi notes in the Kenya case study, being influenced by party politics “damages the credibility of the network in the eyes of the community.”

Most networks emphasize their political nonpartisanship (and in some cases their religious non-affiliation) so, as Chamat Matallana notes, they can “criticize allies when necessary, including the government and international donors.” In Colombia, Both Ruta and Redepaz described their interaction with the government as “an ongoing negotiation in which their territorial coverage, human capital, and local know-how add to their bargaining power.” Ruta has sought to isolate itself from any political party or candidate to prevent political capture. The Central African Inter-NGO Council requires its members to sign a charter, pledging to remain apolitical. When members are perceived as partial, networks can push them out to protect themselves. As Ekomo-Soignet suggests, “The leaders of networks must coordinate and safeguard their members for the well-being of the network.”

Advocacy and community organizing around peace have led to crackdowns on civil society, including forced closure of projects and organizations and violence against individual members, in

countries including Burundi, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe. Ngubane and Kanyangara observe that in Burundi, some networks have taken on the role of “government watchdog” to pursue international funding; this strategy, however, risks being seen as engagement in political action against the government and therefore of provoking the government to limit their operations. In Colombia, Redepaz members have been violently attacked by paramilitary groups seeking to disrupt activities promoting participatory democratization. In Zimbabwe, a historic link between civil society networks and opposition politics led the government of former President Robert Mugabe to be hostile toward civil society organizations, accusing them of trying to orchestrate “regime change.” As Webster Zambara notes, “The success of CIVNET and other progressive forces to mobilize people to exercise their civil rights to participate in elections and other processes was met with violence by the ruling party.”

Restrictive or ambiguous legal frameworks provide another avenue for governments to suppress peacebuilding networks and their members. In Burundi, the adoption of a new NGO law in early 2017 imposed more stringent statutory requirements, stripping many NGOs of their legal status; the membership of the Network of Youth Organizations Working for Peace, Reconciliation, and Development fell from 164 to just 13 community-based organizations. In Kenya, local networks similarly face government scrutiny. According to Kirimi, there is no legal framework providing for their registration as “networks”—all peace and development networks are therefore registered as trusts, NGOs, or companies, which can create legal complications.

Yet the cases also underscore that participation in a network can be a source of resilience in the face of political violence. The flexibility and dynamic membership of networks may make it more difficult for the state or armed groups to target a single person or organization. The Burundi case study suggests that it may be easier for networks than for individual organizations to lobby officials and take action in countries with limited democratic space; by dispersing activities among their members and unifying their messaging, they can make it harder for the government to silence them. Nonetheless, both Burundian networks

studied have had to carefully approach their programming so as not to trigger adverse reactions from the government.

In Colombia, Chamat Matallana further notes that horizontal distribution of leadership may help “reduce the visibility of, pressure on, or violence against a single person or member organization.” In Zimbabwe, legal organizations within the peacebuilding network have provided representation to other members targeted by government action aimed at silencing or otherwise limiting their role. According to Haputhanthri, small peacebuilding organizations in Sri Lanka, overpowered by shrinking space for civic activism and dissent from 2005 to 2015, sought each other out to collaborate and pursue joint action. As she notes, “Working in challenging circumstances on politically sensitive topics requires the collective strength of many.”

Through networks, civil society organizations can also form strategic alliances with governments to advance the peacebuilding agenda. Redepaz temporarily allied itself with the administration of former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos to promote and support the final signing of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC rebels. This “limited alliance” with the government focused on a specific agenda. Elsewhere, as in South Africa, civil society initiatives have sought formal relationships with the government to increase their legitimacy and obtain regular funding. Limited partnerships can also be beneficial for governments. In Burundi, write Ngubane and Kanyangara, though there is limited space to operate, the government acknowledges civil society when it is “incapable of intervening or unwilling to do so or when it deems activities by such groups to be complementary and therefore not a threat to its own.” This is especially true of networks, as their extended geographic reach can often fill gaps when the government is unable to access every corner of the country.

FINANCIAL ADVANTAGES AND RISKS

Across the board, the case studies reveal that a key challenge facing local networks is the lack of predictable and sustainable funding and increased reliance on project financing, mainly from international donors. This funding is increasingly short-term and project-based, as fewer donors provide

core funding. As a result, networks risk competing with their members or other peacebuilding networks for scarce resources.

Such competition is particularly likely when network secretariats start implementing their own projects. For example, PeaceNet Kenya gradually evolved to operate more as a single organization than as a network. As its secretariat emerged as a competitor for the same limited funding as member organizations, the sense of unity eroded.

In pursuit of international funding, networks and their member organizations may also end up tailoring their strategies or aligning their projects with donor priorities and objectives. This can undermine networks’ flexibility and responsiveness to community needs—one of their principal advantages. Moreover, as noted above, where governments, armed groups, or other stakeholders are suspicious of or hostile to foreign agendas, international funding can increase the security risks networks face.

The process of accessing international funding is often arduous and complicated, and many local civil society organizations do not have the capacity to undertake it or fulfill reporting requirements. Smaller organizations—particularly community-based organizations—are often outcompeted by larger organizations in the network that have greater capacity to write proposals oriented toward international donors and to meet financial and oversight requirements.

But at the same time, international funding for networks can level the playing field for smaller organizations by helping them receive a share of the network’s overall funding. When such funding is for network secretariats rather than individual members, it can help reduce competition over resources and allow networks to decide how to allocate their own funds.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL NETWORKS

The UN and other international actors are playing catch up in their effort to identify local voices and integrate them into their work to end conflict and build and sustain peace. As the case studies in this volume demonstrate, communities affected by violence and political turmoil are often several steps ahead of the international community in mobilizing for political change, building bridges across divided communities, helping those dealing

with trauma and loss to heal, seeking redress for injustice, and giving voice to those made invisible. International efforts often do a great disservice to local civil society organizations in failing to recognize existing sources of resilience in the face of crisis.

Greater understanding among international peacebuilding practitioners and policymakers of peacebuilding network structures, including their comparative advantages and challenges, should guide efforts not only to incorporate local

knowledge and expertise into international initiatives but also to identify how these efforts can support and magnify local efforts. By better understanding how local peacebuilding networks operate in their communities, the international community can begin to better understand the challenges local organizations face, how to support and strengthen peacebuilding work on the ground, and how such initiatives contribute to building and sustaining peace. We hope this volume will contribute toward this improved understanding.

Women- and Youth-Focused Peacebuilding Networks in Burundi

Senzwesihle Ngubane and Patrick Kanyangara¹

Introduction and Context

The period from late 2014 to early 2015 was one of the most challenging in Burundi's recent history.² The country found itself experiencing an interlocking political and security crisis due to the political contestations that emerged prior to the 2015 election, when the incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for reelection despite a constitutional term limit.³ This decision, supported by the ruling party and approved by the country's highest court, raised the ire of a number of civil society groups, opposition political leaders, and a few leaders from within the ruling party. These opponents criticized the move as a signal that the ruling party was bent on undermining the constitution, as well as the spirit and letter of the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.⁴

Nkurunziza's decision contributed to a dangerous rift in opinions within the country, leading to widespread pro- and anti-government protests, with youth and women at the forefront. Violence became the order of the day, whether perpetrated by the state or by protesters in the name of self-defense.⁵ As a result of the conflict, tens of thousands of citizens were internally displaced or forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries.⁶

This political debacle undid much of the country's previous progress (especially gains made since 2005) to advance and consolidate peace and reconciliation. Further, the events of 2015 brought about uncertainty about the future political trajectory of the country that is still evident today and continues to cripple the dividends of previous efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence. Signs of escalating tension—including hate speech, growing hostility between different identity groups, mistrust, social discord, and fear (perceived or real) of large-scale massacres—have taken hold over aspirations for a better future.⁷

In order to find solutions to the root causes of this political instability, the government, non-state actors, and subregional organizations have undertaken dialogue initiatives in Burundi. Key among these was the East African Community's dialogue initiative, led by the former president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa. However, despite these efforts, the dialogues have not yet resolved the impasse.⁸ Indeed, efforts to find a durable solution may have been thwarted by perceptions that the current political impasse is not close to being overcome. These perceptions were reinforced by the outcome of the referendum on May 17, 2018, which amended the constitution of Burundi to allow the incumbent president to run

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2 The current political situation in Burundi—but more specifically the events that emerged in the lead-up to the 2015 general elections—adds to the series of crises that the country has experienced since its independence and whose paroxysm was reached in 1993 following the assassination of the first democratically elected president and the ensuing intense violence.

3 International Crisis Group, "Burundi: A Dangerous Third Term," May 20, 2016, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi/burundi-dangerous-third-term.

4 For the constitution of Burundi and details about the election of the president, see www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Burundi_2005.pdf. For the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement see <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/arusha-peace-and-reconciliation-agreement-burundi>.

5 See, for instance, Human Rights Watch, "Burundi's Human Rights Crisis," 2016, available at www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/burundi_compendium_2016_web_version_4.pdf.

6 Thijs Van Laer, "Why Burundians Continue to Flee," *African Arguments*, August 24, 2017, available at <http://africanarguments.org/2017/08/24/why-burundians-continue-to-flee/>.

7 Anna Dubuis, "Burundi's Last Civil War Killed 300,000. A New One Is Coming," *GlobalPost*, March 28, 2016, available at www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-28/burundi-s-last-civil-war-killed-300000-new-one-coming.

8 The dialogues were marred by various concerns, especially from opposition political parties claiming that they were not inclusive enough. The dialogues were also impacted by a lack of participation of some stakeholders who were living in exile. Many of these individuals expressed fears and concerns that some of their leaders were still facing arrest warrants for allegedly orchestrating the attempted coup to oust President Nkurunziza in May 2015.

again in 2020 and 2027.⁹ Ultimately, those taking part in political dialogue were unable to move away from the abyss given the varying views they hold about the genesis of the current crisis (if they even agree there is a crisis) and how to resolve it.

The post-2015 political debacle has also strained Burundi's relations with some of its regional and international partners, including the AU, UN, and European Union.¹⁰ The AU Peace and Security Council, for instance, decided to deploy a peace support operation to Burundi, though this was not endorsed by the January 2016 summit of heads of state and government.¹¹ Instead, the AU deployed a human rights observation mission with a mandate to document and report on violations of such rights.¹² Another sign of strained relations with the international community was the government's announcement of its withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC) on October 27, 2017, thus complicating any future legal processes related to human rights violations within the ambit of international law.

The current situation in Burundi calls into question some international efforts to support, advance, and contribute to peacebuilding in countries coming out of conflict. In 2005, Burundi was one of the first countries to receive international support through the UN Peacebuilding Fund.¹³ Over a period of about ten years, Burundi was allocated \$65 million from the fund, which was intended to support programs in such areas as security sector reform, rule of law, human rights, and reconciliation.¹⁴ Additionally, the country's

mediated transition enjoyed the support of the AU through the African Union Mission in Burundi, deployed in 2003.¹⁵ This was "re-hatted" as the UN Operation in Burundi in 2004.¹⁶ As the country navigates a complex political situation, the question is what the international community may have gotten "wrong" in Burundi that could have contributed to some of the challenges being experienced today.

This case study focuses on the experiences of two local networks in Burundi that are undertaking work in the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. These networks focus on two stakeholders considered critical during a country's post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding phases: women and youth. Whether it is the United Nations with its renewed focus on conflict prevention through "sustaining peace" or the AU's governance architecture, the international community seems to largely agree that any process to advance peacebuilding requires specific engagement of women and youth.¹⁷

The networks chosen for this case study are the Réseau des organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la paix, la réconciliation et le développement (the Network of Youth Organizations Working for Peace, Reconciliation, and Development, or REJA), a network of organizations dealing with issues affecting youth, and the Association Dushirehamwe, a women's network. Their programs focus largely on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, human rights, development, and social cohesion. Both networks seek to reposition their

9 "Burundi Approves Referendum Extending Nkurunziza's Rule until 2034," IOL, May 21, 2018, available at www.iol.co.za/news/africa/burundi-approves-referendum-extending-nkurunzizas-rule-until-2034-15091860. While the amendments make the current president eligible to stand again, should he so choose, after the referendum media reported President Nkurunziza's indication that he would not run in 2020. See, for instance, "Burundi's President Says He Won't Seek Another Term," New York Times, June 7, 2018, available at www.nytimes.com/2018/06/07/world/africa/burundi-president-pierre-nkurunziza.html.

10 The UN's latest concern over the situation in Burundi was communicated through a Security Council presidential statement on April 5, 2018, available at www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13278.doc.htm. On the EU, see, for instance, Council of Europe, "Burundi: EU Closes Consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement," March 14, 2016, available at www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/14/burundi-eu-closes-consultations-cotonou-agreement/.

11 "African Union Decides against Peacekeepers for Burundi," *Al Jazeera*, February 1, 2016, available at www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/01/african-union-decides-peacekeepers-burundi-160131102052278.html.

12 "Burundi Agrees to Accept African Union Human Rights Monitors," *Deutsche Welle*, February, 27, 2016, available at www.dw.com/en/burundi-agrees-to-accept-african-union-human-rights-monitors/a-19079345.

13 In 2005 the first post-transition election was held in Burundi following the protracted mediation that led to the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, as well as subsequent cease-fire negotiations with several armed groups in the country.

14 For a detailed account of this support, see www.unpbf.org/countries/burundi/.

15 See, for instance, Henri Boshoff, "Burundi: African Union's First Mission," Institute for Security Studies, June 10, 2003, available at <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/5841/3103.pdf;sequence=1>.

16 For a detailed account of UN peacekeeping missions in Burundi, see UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "The United Nations in Burundi: Peacekeeping Mission Completes Its Mandate," December 2006, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/onub/photos.pdf>.

17 For example, UN Resolutions 1325 (on women, peace, and security) and 2250 (on youth, peace, and security) serve to confirm the international community's focus on the role of these two stakeholder groups on issues relating to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, among others.

respective target groups—women and youth—as drivers and agents of change in Burundi, thus enabling them to find solutions to their own challenges rather than being led by external actors.

These networks, like others currently operational in Burundi, find themselves working in a sociopolitical context that is both challenging and unpredictable. The relationship between the government, some of its international partners, and internal stakeholders, in particular some of the opposition political parties, is vexed. The two networks were selected as case studies on the basis of their ongoing engagement with youth and women from different political, social, and economic backgrounds who are actively contributing to peacebuilding and development at the local and national levels. The information on their organizational structure and activities was collected through desk research and key informant interviews conducted with the networks' leaders and field staff.¹⁸

The case study outlines the genesis of these two networks, including their working modalities, programs, activities, and engagements, but without aiming to compare their work. It concludes with some recommendations for networks operating in Burundi, directed to other network organizations, as well as to international actors, including donors.

Mapping Local Networks for Peace¹⁹

NETWORK OF YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS WORKING FOR PEACE, RECONCILIATION, AND DEVELOPMENT (REJA)

The Réseau des organisations des Jeunes en Action pour la paix, la réconciliation et le développement (Network of Youth Organizations Working for Peace, Reconciliation, and Development, or REJA) was created in 2001, subsequent to the signing of the 2000 Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, as a network intent on serving the

needs of young people. It was officially recognized by the government on July 11, 2003.

During the years immediately after its formation, the network comprised 164 community-based organizations that operated in different parts of the country. However, this changed following the promulgation of Law No. 1/02 on the Organic Framework of Non-profit Making Associations on January 27, 2017, which went into effect in October of that year.²⁰ This law reduced the number of REJA's members to only thirteen. This was because most of its member associations had yet to fully comply with and fulfill all the statutory requirements that arose from the new law.

At the national level, REJA has a National General Assembly, and at the regional level it has provincial general assemblies. The National General Assembly is composed of the presidents of the provincial executive committees, which elect the members of the executive committee at the national level. The members of the provincial executive committees are elected by the provincial general assemblies, whose members are the leaders or focal points of the associations in all the provinces and communes. This elaborate organizational structure affirms the national as well as the community-based reach and character of REJA. REJA has received funding primarily from international donors, including the UN Peacebuilding Fund, UNESCO, and the EU.

REJA seeks to mobilize and support youth organizations to work collaboratively, to build and strengthen their capacities, and to raise funding for their projects. It works to build these organizations' capacity through projects such as the Responsible Youth Citizenship project and Youth Employability and Advocacy project. These projects have provided platforms for local and national authorities and political actors and young people to debate issues such as job creation, quality education, and participation in political and peacebuilding processes. In this regard, REJA focuses on building a "new society" in Burundi by reinforcing mutual respect and the well-being of all

¹⁸ Due to the security sensitivities in the country, some interviewees have requested to remain anonymous.

¹⁹ This section of the paper draws from interviews (written and verbal) conducted with representatives of REJA and Dushirehamwe. It also draws from other sources (including websites and various reports) that the authors managed to access during the information-gathering stage of this paper.

²⁰ Law No. 1/02 of January 27, 2017, on the Organic Framework of Non-profit Associations repealed Legislative Decree No. 1/11 of April 8, 1992, on the same subject. Compared to the 1992 decree, the new law is perceived to be quite restrictive on the operations of NGOs. Article 82, for example, stipulates that all activities of nonprofit associations must be endorsed by the Ministry of Home Affairs or Ministry of Security, without which they risk a penalty.

citizens, and youth in particular.

Furthermore, as part of its contribution to peacebuilding through the prevention of violence, REJA focuses on raising awareness among young people about the sources of violence. It mostly does this during important political periods such as the run-up to elections, because it is at such times that young people are most susceptible to being coerced into violent action.

REJA regularly conducts advocacy activities to better inform decision makers and political actors on the needs of young people. For example, it undertook a study and produced a report with a view to sensitizing candidates on the priorities and needs of young people in the lead-up to the 2015 elections. It was hoped that candidates would develop social projects that addressed the specific needs of youth. To be more effective, REJA has begun to improve its advocacy strategy by building the capacity of its member organizations to carry out advocacy actions under their own leadership.

Since late 2017, REJA has initiated activities aimed at fostering critical and creative thinking through a methodology called “Think Tank Isôko.”²¹ This methodology involves multiple facilitated, interactive conversations among REJA member organizations, academics and researchers, the media, representatives from other civil society organizations (CSOs), representatives of different state institutions, and the private sector. These conversations are intended to guide the search for solutions to the problems raised by young people. Think Tank Isôko also contributes to the creation of fora for discussions between young leaders and different state and non-state actors, further providing young people with a creative space to express their aspirations for their future and well-being.

REJA often organizes fora for dialogue between leaders of youth wings of political parties and young leaders in CSOs, particularly those working on youth issues. The fora focus on issues related to democracy, governance, peace, security, political

participation, and local development. Through practice and experience, REJA has been able to improve its approach to the dialogue fora by integrating two innovations: first, the dialogue fora are community-based instead of being imposed from outside or from “the top”;²² and second, the debates are conducted and led by the youth themselves. These fora achieve three main outcomes. First, they reinforce in the participants a culture of constructive debate and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Second, they strengthen citizens’ understanding of issues affecting youth and how youth can be engaged in their communities. Third, they make youth feel that their voice can be heard. Some fora have resulted in participants setting up joint monitoring and advisory committees comprising youth from both political parties and civil society.

REJA holds oversight trainings for young people to communicate that, during an electoral process, the exercise of citizens’ rights is not limited to voting but extends to monitoring and civic oversight of the programs and actions of elected officials. These trainings reinforce young leaders’ understanding of and appreciation for the need to hold public representatives accountable.

Instead of imposing top-down messages on training participants, REJA has adopted an approach of “action research” to enrich its various training modules. To advance this approach, it organizes focus groups with young people to involve them in the analysis of the context and the definition of key messages. These are further developed by experienced national trainers, at times with the support of consultants. This approach allows for the development of context-specific messages and promotes ownership of content by current and would-be beneficiaries. Additionally, this approach has enabled REJA to introduce new themes such as the peaceful resolution of conflicts, responding to and dealing with misinformation, and organizational skills in its *Manual on Classical Education for Young People on Civic Education*. However, implementation of these

21 The information in the following paragraphs is sourced from a report obtained from REJA entitled “Rapport d’activité sur la formation au module ‘Nawe Nuze’ dans le cadre de la mise en œuvre du projet ‘Participation citoyenne des jeunes,’” April 2018. It is also drawn from interviews conducted with members and representatives of the organization.

22 From an interview with one REJA representative, this was understood to mean that, instead of the national-level members (or experts) implementing solutions, participants from local-level communities (including young people) are encouraged to identify, analyze, and engage in dialogue on the issues they face in an attempt to find solutions.

trainings is difficult in the prevailing political and security context in Burundi.

Since 2011, REJA has set up and supervised solidarity groups of young people who have been the beneficiaries of its activities at the community level.²³ Through these groups, young people are organized to adopt savings and credit schemes that allow them to acquire capital to start their own income-generating activity. Additionally, they are taught financial management skills. REJA seeks to initiate activities that connect these young people to financial institutions, thus opening up opportunities for their broader financial inclusion.

REJA has achieved two particularly notable outcomes. First, in 2010, CCFD-Terre Solidaire and the Scouts et Guides de France worked with REJA and the Association of Scouts of Burundi on a project aimed at creating a political climate conducive to a credible electoral process, with funding from the EU. As one its core outcomes, the project was able to ensure that 72,326 Burundian youth between the ages of 18 and 35 exercised their right to vote, and in cases where they needed to voice their concerns, they did so through nonviolent protest during the 2010 electoral process. The project evaluation concluded that “it is unanimous that synergy has worked and has indeed yielded positive results; specifically, it has increased youth resilience and independence, reduced the vulnerability of youth to manipulation, and decreased their involvement in election-related violence.”²⁴

Second, at the local level, REJA organized a “caravan for peace” campaign, mobilizing young people in the solidarity groups and REJA action clubs from the province of Gitega. The campaign contributed to shifting the local government’s perceptions of REJA, evidenced by the fact that it is now classified by the Gitega provincial administration as the second most important civil society partner after the Red Cross. In addition, community development activities by youth participants in the peace campaign have shifted the perceptions of the communities where they reside; instead of seeing young people only as actors in

violent conflict, communities shifted to considering them as active agents of peace. REJA has also set up community fora for young citizens in six communes of Gitega and in the three communes of Bujumbura city. These young activists have been facilitating youth mobilization actions for peace at the community level.

DUSHIREHAMWE WOMEN’S NETWORK²⁵

Dushirehamwe is an association of women recognized by Burundian law and registered as a nonprofit organization on May 6, 2002. It is a network of 302 member organizations with strong community foundations in fourteen out of eighteen provinces. Dushirehamwe is organized through committees at the provincial and community levels. Through the support of international and local partners, it pursues its main objective of empowering women to play an active and leading role in post-conflict reconciliation, peacebuilding, and development programs. In this regard, its key projects focus on issues such as gender equality and women’s rights, mediation, and reconciliation, as well as combating violence against women.

Dushirehamwe has provincial and municipal committees for each of its community-based foundations or associations. This structure is backed by a clear organizational vision with a focus on development outcomes. In order to design effective programs to implement in its aforementioned areas of work, the network continuously conducts participatory, community-based needs assessments to identify local development priorities and local challenges to social cohesion and peace. This method, according to the network, contributes to advancing local ownership of development and peacebuilding projects. Through financial support from local and international actors, as well as technical support from other implementing partners, Dushirehamwe has been able to be flexible in its programming. This allows it to adapt to the country’s shifting political context, thereby increasing its relevance and

23 This program, thus far, is only operational in Gitega Province, although REJA has indicated that it intends to implement it in other provinces as well. Information was not made available as to when this roll-out might be initiated.

24 REJA and EU, “Rapport d’évaluation du projet ‘Mobilisation des jeunes pour une culture de la paix au Burundi,’” February 2011.

25 This section draws from interviews conducted with representatives of Dushirehamwe, as well as follow-up written submissions from their intervention on women in mediation.

allowing it to better achieve outcomes.

The network's thematic focus and reach are demonstrated by its 158 trainers in gender and conflict transformation, 390 women leaders specializing in grassroots or community-level reconciliation, and 352 groups with more than 10,000 members operating as an early warning network and reporting on violence against women. As a result of its initiatives relating to conflict resolution, peacebuilding, gender equality, and socioeconomic development targeted at women, in 2009 the organization earned the Best Civil Society Award in Burundi.

In response to the growing need for reconciliation and social cohesion in Burundi after more than two decades of civil war, and particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 elections, Dushirehamwe, through the support of UN Women, initiated an ambitious project aimed at creating a countrywide network of women peace and dialogue activists. Under this project, a community-based network of 420 women mediators and fourteen focal points was established, which has been operating in 129 municipalities across fourteen provinces. In spite of the tense political and security context, the women mediators network has embarked on mitigating political, family, social, and land conflicts at the community level. These women have gained the confidence and practical skills to deal with a growing number of sensitive conflict issues.

Through their interventions, women peace mediators have contributed to violence prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding at the community level. For example, during the 2015 post-election protests and riots, they managed to alleviate tensions and mitigate violence by promoting dialogue and conducting mediation sessions between security forces and protesters. On an ongoing basis, women mediators have been promoting nonviolent methods and dialogue to solve political and social conflicts. Given the national spread of this network, they have been able to verify and transmit accurate and reliable information on the political and security situation

to avoid misinformation and rumors, which often exacerbate intercommunal tension and increase the possibility of violence. In 2015 alone, women mediators dealt with more than 5,000 conflicts at the local level and initiated dialogue with political actors, security forces, and civil society across fourteen provinces.

Analysis²⁶

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKS

The actions of these two networks demonstrate how networks can effectively reach out to a larger group of people by working with and through community-based organizations. The work done by Dushirehamwe on women mediators, for instance, would have been limited in scope had its members not functioned or operated as a network.

Related to this, members of both networks strongly shared the view that networks provide an opportunity for more flexible and rapid responses. This makes them more effective instruments for mobilizing people for peace and integrated development. Often when a crisis emerges, as in Burundi in 2015, it is CSOs operating as networks that either are able to respond rapidly through advocacy or have the capability to address challenges across the country by virtue of having access to timely information.

Both these organizations were of the view that it is comparatively easier for CSOs organized into networks to advocate and take action within the limited democratic space in the country. Representatives of both REJA and Dushirehamwe believe that democracy is no longer just about citizens casting their votes but about effective and active participation by the citizenry in influencing governance. Their interventions include direct pressure from local CSOs and NGOs on public officials and lobbying of parliamentarians on issues that affect peace, respect for human rights, and development policy. In Burundi, given the many challenges facing the political opposition in the last decade, it was mostly local NGOs and CSOs that emerged as a counterweight to the ruling party. For instance, when CSOs and NGOs (including one of

26 Although this section of the paper draws from interviews with both networks, care has been taken not to ascribe direct reference to those interviewed. Thus the authors have drawn on their own understanding and experiences of working in Burundi and the Great Lakes region to compile this section.

those interviewed for this paper) took action to publicly denounce the government's violations of human rights, the government and public administration refused to acknowledge the criticism but conceded the important role of non-state actors in peacebuilding.

CHALLENGES FACING NETWORKS

Conversely, it was noted that one of the challenges facing local CSOs is how to nurture, build, and maintain working relations with the government, on the one hand, and the international community (especially donors), on the other. On paper, non-state actors in Burundi are able to operate under the 2017 Law on the Organic Framework of Non-profit Associations. This law further enables recognized local NGOs to work with international NGOs and multilateral partners in Burundi and to benefit from their financing.²⁷

However, the prevailing political mood in the country has meant that relations between the government and some CSOs remain strained.²⁸ For instance, as a result of this law, some of REJA's member organizations have not been able to fulfill all the regulatory requirements to continue operating. Both organizations acknowledge that they have approached their programming carefully in order to support efforts of local CSOs and communities in a manner that would not risk adverse reactions from the government.

These strained relations result from the fact that the government can easily regard the actions of some CSOs as having a political focus or impact and therefore as interfering in the space of political parties. This tension has resulted in the implementation of various measures by the government to restrict meetings, speech, and public demonstrations, most of which violate the civil and political rights of citizens. This has shrunken the space for civil society.

In this context, one of the interlocutors opined that the real value and significance of the campaigns by NGOs operating as networks is overestimated and their influence, if any, depends

upon the space the government allows them to occupy. It was observed that the government only acknowledges interventions by CSOs and networks when it is incapable of intervening or unwilling to do so or when it deems activities by such groups to be complementary and therefore not a threat to its own.

Furthermore, the prevailing mood in the country, especially the strained relations between the government and some international partners, has led to a situation whereby some international NGOs are either barred from operating in Burundi or choose not to do so. This has meant that some networks are unable to operate simply because they depend heavily on donor support, which in the current context may be limited. Some networks find themselves undertaking activities that put them in the role of being a government "watchdog," which makes them more likely to attract international funding. However, this has the unintended result of the government seeing them as engaging in political action and thus may take steps to limit their operations. The two networks covered here, however, though they may have less funding than what they require for all their programs, seem to have been able to navigate the pitfalls of being seen as engaging in political action and have been able to continue operating in the country.

One interlocutor noted that some networks in Burundi suffer from weak organizational capabilities due to the "one-man NGO" or "one-man network" syndrome. That is, some networks are "known to exist" in Burundi but in reality have mostly worked off of the initiator's charisma and enthusiasm without any real teamwork, sharing of ideas, and collective decision making. It is questionable whether such networks are sustainable. In the view of one of the members of a network interviewed, this syndrome could be addressed by ensuring that there are proper internal processes of vetting and checking the bona fides of association members, drawing up clear terms of reference for membership, and creating

27 Within the current political climate in Burundi, this law also enabled the government not to recognize some of the international organizations that had been working in Burundi, and other organizations opted to withdraw from the country as they deemed that the law would not allow them to operate freely. This had an adverse effect on some of the local CSOs that relied on collaboration with international CSOs.

28 As noted in the preceding sections of this paper, the negative impact of this law on REJA was that its membership base was substantially reduced, which in turn negatively impacted the organization's reach. The law also means that some networks (including those interviewed) have to be circumspect about the types of issues they can advocate for and the timing for doing so.

internal structures of accountability such as general assemblies.

Another issue related to organizational capability is coordination. It was observed that there is limited coordination among networks and NGOs conducting activities in the same thematic areas and targeting similar groups. As a result, these organizations often end up being seen as competitors rather than partners. For example, both networks we interacted with noted that there is a multitude of programs for young people and women by several organizations grouped together in networks within the same areas of action. Both networks acknowledged that they are not familiar with the other's programs in the same thematic areas.

Another challenge is the scarcity of well-documented information on the results of the actions of civil society organizations in general and those grouped in networks in particular. These two networks communicated that one of the “recent phenomena in Burundi is that the work being done by non-state actors in areas of peacebuilding, socioeconomic development, etc., is more valued by the international community.” This is because non-state actors are often regarded as less bureaucratic than state actors and more effective in dealing with social challenges such as poverty. However, both REJA and Dushirehamwe lamented the fact that there is still a lack of analysis and research that could measure the real impact of the work by non-state actors, especially NGOs and CSOs—whether operating as networks or independently—in certain areas. This situation is partly due to the current tendency of donors to expect concrete, measurable, short-term results, even in a fluid field like peacebuilding, which is even more difficult in a political context such as Burundi's.

Interlocutors noted that some networks in the country struggle to secure their long-term sustainability (or that of their programs) due, among other things, to lack of technical capacity to adequately manage their projects and finances. They observed that while CSOs and NGOs are often critical of the lack of transparency in the activities and decision-making processes of government agencies, many networks and their member organizations also do not operate transparently. One of the interlocutors strongly believed that financial transparency,

coherence of action on the ground, coordination among development actors, and recognition of past mistakes should be expected not only of bilateral government donors but also of CSOs.

Another difficulty is the lack of skills and “know-how” to navigate difficult political situations while preserving the independence of a network. Particularly since 2015, actions by non-state actors, including networks, have been perceived as having significant impact on the lives of people in Burundi and are thus held in high regard, enjoying support from the general public and different stakeholders. Such confidence, however, has sometimes been undermined, for instance when protests organized by Burundian CSOs were hijacked by political party interests and ended in violence. A case in point was the 2015 protests initiated by CSOs that ended up being “appropriated” by political opposition parties, thus negatively affecting some of the CSOs. Both networks interviewed opined that there is a need to avoid the pitfalls of being seen as politically aligned—either with the ruling party or with the opposition. In the face of deteriorating relations between the public authorities and Burundian CSOs, this has made it difficult for most CSOs to freely voice their concerns, as this might cause a harsh government reaction.

Interlocutors from both these organizations also noted that networks in Burundi are often formed on the basis of common themes and target groups. However, with less support from implementing partners and donors, local CSO networks suffer from a glaring shortage of full-time personnel. For these networks to survive and achieve their objectives, they must constantly find ways to make themselves financially sustainable and independent through income-generating activities.

Both these networks, especially REJA, expressed a general concern that there have been insufficient attempts to document and publish each of their experiences and reflect on their challenges. This has meant that there is a limited repository of locally driven knowledge about the experiences and work of CSOs and networks. The default position for most local CSOs and networks has been to rely on reports from the evaluation of their work following the conclusion of a funded project. This knowledge gap was said to be exacerbated by what is perceived as a lack of, or very limited, interest from donors to support projects that are

exclusively research-focused.

Conclusion

This case study shows that there are no easy and straightforward answers about what makes for a sustainable effort to advance peacebuilding. What is clear, however, is that local CSOs, especially those working in peacebuilding, should adopt a network-based approach. This need arises from the reality that funding, geographic reach, and the prevailing political context in a country have an impact on whether the work being done contributes to tangible efforts to sustain peace.

However, while having networks is one thing, having a political environment conducive to their efforts is another. What clearly emerges from the Burundi context is that international efforts are needed not only to work with local CSOs but also to ensure that the government is made a partner in any peacebuilding programs. The lack of a working relationship between the government and other local stakeholders (political parties included) negatively affects progress to consolidate peace. In this context, it is commendable that, in spite of a difficult political climate, there are still CSOs actively undertaking various initiatives in Burundi to drive forward the agenda for peace.

With this in mind, this paper makes the following recommendations in relation to conflict prevention and peacebuilding work being undertaken through network approaches:

FOR LOCAL NETWORKS OPERATING IN BURUNDI

- **Improve coordination among networks:** Although the network approach can avoid duplication, the proliferation of networks in Burundi has resulted in the very problem they sought to mitigate. Accordingly, there is a need to devise ways to improve coordination among existing networks, for instance by having regular interactions to search for synergies and update each other on respective areas of work. This could assist in avoiding a diffusion of efforts and fragmentation of results.

FOR CSOS OPERATING IN NETWORKS

- **Strengthen the organizational capacity of network members:** Networks that operate as umbrella organizations—precisely because they

bring together community-based partners with different levels of expertise, organizational knowledge and capacities, ethos, and modus operandi—should invest in institutional support programs. That is, the “main” organization in such a network or the national structure created to manage the operations of the network need to have programs aimed not only at meeting the intended outcomes but also at strengthening the organizational capacity of other associations and members of the network, especially those deeply rooted in communities.

- **Build networks between institutions, not individuals:** There is a need to ensure that networks are built on relations between institutions and not on individual connections. Institutional connections allow network members to share legacy and history, enhance their sustainability, and transfer capacities to each other and toward the beneficiaries of their activities at the grassroots level.
- **Improve coordination within networks:** It is necessary to invest both time and resources in further studies on how best to advance what has been called “networks-within-networks” or coordination of networks. Such studies would help point to the best mechanisms for dealing with one of the issues that emerged from this research: more than one network focusing on the same issue. While this is not a challenge in and of itself, the objective of sustainable peace may not always be met if the efforts of already “networked” organizations are either duplicated or not complementary.
- **Ensure programs are coherent, context-specific, and conflict-sensitive:** Whereas our interlocutors lamented the lack of coordination among actors (i.e., addressing how networks work), networks must also ensure the coherence of their work (i.e., addressing what works). Peacebuilding work can only deliver the desired outcomes if actors deliver their programs in a coherent manner. Further, they must consider the political context in which they are operating and must implement their activities in a conflict-sensitive manner.
- **Deepen interactions among peacebuilding actors in the same region:** There is a need to deepen interactions among peacebuilding actors

in the same subregion or continent. The perception is that there are many interactions between national networks in a developing country like Burundi and international peacebuilding actors. However, the same cannot be said of networks from different developing countries, which need to deepen, streamline, and institutionalize their interactions. As a result, lessons and experiences that can contribute to “peer learning” are not easily shared among peacebuilding actors from within the same region.

FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTORS AND DONORS

- **Ensure genuine local ownership:** There is a need to demystify the practice of peacebuilding, and to constantly search for ways to improve its implementation. Some of the interlocutors mentioned their experiences of talk about and commitment in principle to “local ownership” and “local engagement,” but with little follow through. In fact, it was communicated that it is common that local actors are “brought in” by international actors and expected to follow their prescripts. This point is underscored by a study published in 2015 entitled “White Paper on Peacebuilding,”²⁹ which observed that peacebuilding interventions under the control of external actors are no longer viable, either politically or practically. The failure to deepen local ownership is particularly felt in situations like in Burundi where the international community starts to “withdraw” or become unresponsive to the challenges on the ground, leaving local actors on their own.
- **Create predictable and effective funding models for peacebuilding activities:** The key observable challenge in Burundi is that local CSOs and NGOs may not always possess the technical know-how required to meet the stringent and often inflexible donor-driven demands for proposal writing, accounting, and reporting. This lends itself to a situation where some local networks end up unable to mobilize funding—not because they are not able to deliver, but because they do not meet the expected and often complex donor requirements.

29 Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, 2015, available at: www.gppplatform.ch/sites/default/files/White%20Paper%20on%20Peacebuilding.pdf.

Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding Networks in the Central African Republic

Kessy Ekomo-Soignet¹

Introduction and Context

The Central African Republic (CAR) has been in the midst of intercommunal conflict since the Séléka, a majority Muslim coalition, launched a coup d'état in 2013. Despite the implementation of a transitional government and the organization of democratic elections in March 2016, CAR remains unstable. Rebel groups, notably the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka, control a large part of the east and north of the country. Forced displacement, rape, and crime continue to define the lives of much of the population. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which lost five peacekeepers during attacks by rebel groups in May 2017, seems to have been overtaken by a permanent state of crisis. The government in Bangui is in permanent dialogue with armed groups and is struggling to get the support of international partners.

In November 2016, national authorities from CAR attended a donor roundtable organized by the European Union in Brussels to present their new National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, developed with support from the EU, UN, and World Bank. This document presents a five-year plan (2017–2021) to rebuild and consolidate peace based on five pillars: (1) supporting peace, security, and reconciliation; (2) renewing the social contract between the state and society; and (3) ensuring the economic recovery and revival of the productive sectors. The implementation of this plan requires \$3.161 billion.² After the roundtable, CAR received promises of \$2.28 billion in donations for the period 2016–2020, but there remains a long delay

between pledges and disbursements.³

The National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan is principally based on the recommendations of the Bangui Forum, which took place from May 4 to 11, 2015. This historic event aimed to bring together Central Africans from all regions of the country to find sustainable solutions to years of instability. The forum was a major national event and a big step toward peace in the country. Most importantly, it was the first time the government organized a national consultation to gather the perceptions, wants, and needs of the population and other key national stakeholders in terms of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The recommendations emerging from the forum were rooted in popular consultations organized across the country since 2015. Key recommendations included:⁴

- The disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of armed groups;
- The establishment of a Special Criminal Court charged with judging persons suspected of having committed war crimes or crimes against humanity;
- The creation of an environment favorable to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons;
- The restoration of basic social services throughout the country; and
- The creation of a justice, truth, reparations, and reconciliation commission.

The hardest recommendation to implement remains the DDRR program, which aims to allow ex-combatants to obtain decent employment or

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2 Government of the Central African Republic, *Plan national de relèvement et de consolidation de la paix (2017–2021)*, available at https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/car_main_report-a4-french-web.pdf.

3 EU External Action Service, "Brussels Conference for the Central African Republic," November 18, 2016, available at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/15244/Brussel%27s%20Conference%20for%20the%20Central%20African%20Republic.

4 *Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation and Reconstruction in the Central African Republic*, Bangui, Central African Republic, November 5, 2018, available at <https://peacemaker.un.org/Republican-Pact-CentralAfrica-2011>.

engage in revenue-generating activities and to ensure that those from neighboring countries can return home. During the donor roundtable in Brussels in 2016, the government of CAR presented the DDR program as one of the key conditions for returning to peace. However, its implementation is challenging due to insufficient financing and lack of cooperation by armed groups that claim to accept the program but continue to extend their influence and to commit abuses against the civilian population in the north and east of the country.

Moreover, many new militias have emerged from the principal groups implicated in the crisis (the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka) and are fighting for control over certain strategic mineral-rich regions. Another challenge is thus to identify a clear chain of command or a leader capable of speaking on behalf of these groups. This makes negotiation and mediation difficult for local peacebuilders, the government, and MINUSCA.

In addition, as recommended during the Bangui Forum, a Special Criminal Court has been set up. This court benefits from the support of international personnel, including at least twelve international judges (one of whom is the special prosecutor) and an international clerk, as well as thirteen national judges (one of whom is the president of the court), not including support personnel. During its five-year mandate, the court will investigate, examine, and judge serious violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law committed in CAR since January 1, 2003. The creation of the court has given hope to many victims and was a victory for local peacebuilders and national civil society organizations that had highlighted the importance of justice and concrete actions to end impunity during the Bangui Forum.

The current context, however, demonstrates a change in the understanding of instability and conflict in CAR. Instead of focusing on communal and religious cleavages, national and international peacebuilding actors now look at how economic interests and exploitation of natural resources by armed groups drive tensions and violence against civilians.⁵ Indeed, the areas controlled by armed groups are the richest in natural resources, and

these groups have rejected government efforts to redeploy social services, especially in the east (Haute-Kotto), center (Ouaka), and southeast (Mbomou).

Despite these challenges, some civil society organizations are continuing to work to build social cohesion, to develop platforms for implementing the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, and to respond to the humanitarian crisis in areas under the influence of armed groups. This case study focuses on two networks working to build peace in CAR: the Conseil Inter ONG de Centrafrique (Central African Inter-NGO Council, or CIONGCA) and the Conseil national de la jeunesse centrafraine (National Council of Central African Youth, or CNJCA). Based on interviews with members of these networks and the beneficiaries of their activities, the study highlights, among other things, these networks' organizational structures, their evolution, their strengths, and the challenges they face working in the midst of a crisis.

Mapping Local Networks for Peace

CENTRAL AFRICAN INTER-NGO COUNCIL (CIONGCA)

The Conseil Inter ONG de Centrafrique (Central African Inter-NGO Council, or CIONGCA) was created in 1995 after months of discussions between the government, donors, and civil society. The principal idea behind its creation was to construct a space bringing together different civil society actors to develop a credible platform capable of supporting and advising the government, international institutions, and international NGOs on the implementation of their projects and programs.

Before the creation of CIONGCA, many NGOs and national associations submitted funding proposals individually, which created a coordination problem. It also gave Central African civil society a negative image as lacking in structure and credibility. This perception hurt organizations in terms of the funding they received and their activities on the ground.⁵

5 Interview with Célestin Ngakola, former coordinator of CIONGCA, Bangui, CAR, December 2016.

CIONGCA began with twenty-five NGOs and national associations working primarily to promote local development and improve the population's access to basic services. The network benefited from the support of international partners, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, UN Volunteers, and governmental bodies like the Ministry of the Economy, Planning, and Cooperation. These partners were present from the start with the primary goal of helping to structure the network and put in place a coordination strategy. After six months, the network comprised 250 members (NGOs and national associations), a large enough number to begin taking on its role as an independent umbrella organization bringing together civil society to interact with the government and international partners through a common platform. CIONGCA had an office with a president and a secretariat consisting of the directors of its members.

Through its members, CIONGCA extended its network by setting up branches in the country's sixteen prefectures. These branches replicate the structure of the head office in Bangui: a local secretariat composed of network members in each prefecture (local branches of national NGOs and local associations), which sign a charter pledging their shared commitment and political neutrality and an office headed by a president elected by the network members and in charge of managing the structure and its relationship with the head office. Based on reports produced by its branches and head office, CIONGCA developed strategies to influence the agendas of national decision makers and international partners in the areas of development and the fight against poverty.

The 2012–2013 crisis had an important impact on the organization's strategy. The crisis brought to the forefront humanitarian needs, social cohesion, and the protection of the population—issues that required extensive experience and subject-matter expertise and new approaches. To respond to these specific needs of the population arising from the crisis and position itself more strategically in the eyes of donors, the organization decided to structure its members into ten thematic groups: communication, governance, social cohesion, gender, the environment, health, agriculture and microfinance, education, development aid, and

humanitarian intervention. By categorizing its activities thematically, the organization facilitated collaboration and coordination of activities among members working in similar areas, thereby avoiding duplication of programming. This also improved its work on the ground and simplified its appeals for capacity-building training from partners and experts.

Among these ten thematic groups, those most active in peacebuilding were the groups on communication, social cohesion, gender, humanitarian intervention, and governance. The members of these five groups still collaborate on the ground, which allows them to implement joint projects under the same banner. This has allowed these groups to gain credibility in the eyes of donors and the trust of the population, increasing support for and the impact of their activities.

This dynamic is illustrated by two concrete examples. First, CIONGCA played a part in the organization of the Bangui Forum. Through its network across the country and its capacity to foster collaboration among its members, CIONGCA was able to gather the needs and aspirations of communities and local and traditional authorities in the most isolated regions of the country and to integrate them into a report that fed into the forum's agenda. Moreover, it broadcast the recommendations from the forum in Sango (the national language of CAR) and other local languages on national radio and on community radio stations in the majority of the accessible prefectures. This helped spread the results of this historic forum.

Second, CIONGCA helped disseminate the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan presented at the donors roundtable in Brussels in November 2016. After the roundtable, CIONGCA took the lead in disseminating the document to make it available to local and traditional authorities so they could develop clear, targeted proposals for putting in place its recommendations.

CIONGCA serves as a clear example of how civil society organizations can effectively adapt and structure themselves into tight-knit groups to support local ownership and national inclusivity. It is also an example of how a network's branches outside of the capital can contribute to ensuring the concrete participation of the most forgotten Central African citizens.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CENTRAL AFRICAN YOUTH (CNJCA)

The Conseil national de la jeunesse centrafricaine (National Council of Central African Youth, or CNJCA) was created in 2010 in response to repeated attempts by political parties to manipulate youth for political gain over the previous ten years. The idea of creating a national youth council originated in 1998 after the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in Lisbon, during which a key recommendation for member states was to create a national platform specifically dedicated to youth. This platform was mandated to serve as a bridge between youth organizations, as well as youth in general, and national decision makers.

Before the creation of the CNJCA, there was a federation of youth called the Fédération nationale des organisations de la jeunesse centrafricaine (National Federation of Central African Youth Organizations, FNOJ) based in Bangui.⁶ The FNOJ's main limitation was its location; all its activities were concentrated in Bangui, automatically excluding youth living in other parts of the country.

After the meeting in Lisbon, the government put forward the idea of creating a platform with broader reach, but the FNOJ was fiercely opposed to this proposal. This led to national-level discussions on how the government should interact with youth organizations and the risks of total autonomy for these groups. Because youth represented more than 50 percent of the total population, these discussions were crucial. However, the government's indecision led to the cancellation of the series of conferences aiming to establish a national youth council.

Nine years later, in 2007, a conference organized by the French-Speaking World Conference of Ministers for Youth and Sports allowed the debate to reopen. This led to the creation of prefectural youth councils in CAR, and the government organized a national congress in 2010, ending the FNOJ and establishing the CNJCA as the umbrella organization for Central African youth.

The CNJCA is directed by an executive committee elected by the presidents of the prefectural and local youth councils. The committee is headed by a board of directors and a group of program managers who work to design projects in line with the chosen themes. These themes are voted on every three years during a congress bringing together the presidents of the prefectural and local youth councils.

Every three months, the head office in Bangui gathers the reports produced by the presidents of the prefectural and local youth councils to put in place a strategy. Outside of the capital, the presidents of the prefectural councils supervise the network's work with youth leaders from sub-prefectures and villages. This means that the key projects developed in the head office are based on the needs and aspirations of youth across the country.

In terms of peacebuilding, the CNJCA plays an important role in bringing together youth in a representative structure that they recognize, respect, and trust to make their voices heard. This confidence and recognition allows the CNJCA to effectively mediate and prevent community-level tension involving youth. In certain prefectures, the CNJCA has put in place early-warning strategies based on its network of members across the country with the main goal of preventing the involvement of youth in violence. This strategy has helped reinforce a growing sense among youth living outside of the capital that they belong to a national peacebuilding movement.⁷

The CNJCA was very active during CAR's transition period (2014–2016). It used its network to influence national authorities to include youth in the July 2014 Brazzaville Forum (in the Republic of the Congo), which aimed to reach a cessation of hostilities agreement between the government and armed groups. The CNJCA succeeded in sending five representatives of Central African youth, who first consulted informally with their peers in and outside of Bangui. During this forum, the youth representatives reaffirmed that peace in CAR is not possible without the concrete participation of

6 Interview with Jean Félix Riva, former president of CNJCA, Bangui, CAR, February 2017.

7 Interview with Eric K., member of the CNJCA, Dekoa, May 2017.

youth. They also called on the belligerents to stop violence against innocent people, to stop recruiting youth into armed groups, and to find a concrete solution to the conflict. The CNJCA was similarly active during the Bangui Forum, during which it fought for a seat on the organizing committee to ensure the participation of youth in the process.

One of the CNJCA's initiatives, called the "Débat Ngoundja," aims to bring together youth from different neighborhoods and villages to cook *ngoundja*, a national dish.⁸ The goal is to get youth to interact and exchange their vision for CAR's future. These informal encounters engage participants in being peacebuilders and models in their communities.

In interviews with youth in underprivileged neighborhoods in Bangui, most affirmed that since the start of the crisis in early 2012, they have been in contact with armed groups or other self-defense groups.⁹ They explained that the permanent presence and neutrality of the CNJCA team dissuaded them from joining these groups because they felt that they were part of a positive dynamic and "guardians of peace."

The main difficulty of a network like the CNJCA is its lack of financial autonomy. Donors tend to directly fund the Ministry of Youth Promotion and Sports rather than the CNJCA. The government and most donors do not consider the organization's proposals to fall within the scope of their funding for youth participation.¹⁰ The CNJCA generally proposes projects tied to fighting corruption and nepotism at the national level, which are not covered by the programs and projects of partners "who prefer to avoid supporting youth on projects that could anger the government."¹¹

Analysis

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKS

In a context like the Central African Republic where funding is difficult to access but necessary to carry out interventions on the ground, operating as a network is the best way to access funding and

have a seat at the decision-making table. The structures discussed here succeeded thanks to their capacity to organize a network, to use their collective influence, and to gather information and data from the population that are often difficult for the state and international partners to collect because of the logistical and administrative burden. Both CIONGCA and CNJCA have the expertise and capacity to analyze the realities on the ground—sorely lacking in the analytical framework of leaders and partners—giving them a place as players at the decision-making table.

Being inclusive reinforces networks' effectiveness and their credibility in the eyes of the population. For example, they can address the needs and aspirations of marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, women, youth, religious minorities, and indigenous peoples. In cases like CAR where the state is unable to exert control over its whole territory, networks may also have greater capacity to access geographically marginalized populations.

Working under the same banner or on the basis of a shared agenda is advantageous only if the network's leadership values the diversity and expertise of each member in the implementation of its initiatives and advocacy work. This is necessary to avoid misrepresentation or favoritism that could hinder the evolution, credibility, and viability of the network.

CHALLENGES FACING NETWORKS

Three broad challenges facing networks relate to donors' perception of them. First, donors often perceive certain civil society organizations in CAR as not neutral in regards to certain political actors. Networks tend to push such organizations aside, seeking to protect themselves from stigmatization or political labels that might negatively impact their credibility. The leaders of networks must coordinate and safeguard their members for the well-being of the network.

Second, donors often underestimate these organizations' expertise, instead consulting international experts to draw the conclusions that

8 *Ngoundja* is a national specialty. It is affordable and made from manioc leaves.

9 Interviews with youth in the seventh arrondissement of Bangui (Boy Rabe) and PK5 (a majority-Muslim neighborhood), Bangui, CAR, March 2017.

10 Interviews with people working for international donors in CAR, Bangui, CAR, February 2017.

11 *Ibid.*

will inform their strategies and determine how they interact with networks and local organizations in CAR. Oftentimes, donors even select certain organizations as “trusted partners” and create their own platforms. This not only conveys a negative image of Central African civil society but also creates divisions within it. This was the case in 2016 when an international NGO decided to create a platform bringing together organizations it selected from existing networks and presented it both locally and internationally as a network of credible local organizations. This led to the expulsion of these organizations from their original networks.

Third, donors and national authorities’ perception of youth is an important limitation. Donors stigmatize youth in the same way as the government, treating them as passive beneficiaries and expecting them to listen to the “adults.” Youth often propose initiatives outside of decision makers’ typical frames of reference, and donors should consider this in deciding how to disburse their funding by making it easier to access. This would help implement projects that speak to the reality on the ground and reduce the participation of youth in violence.

It is important to emphasize that Central Africans’ relationship with international donors will not be the same as with local actors, and the information they provide will thus differ. This is why in CAR there is permanent tension between donors and civil society. Moreover, it is not easy to think outside of the framework put in place by

foreign donors when these donors provide the funding; in the context of CAR, where the government is not receptive to civil society or lacks the means to provide funding, networks depend on support from donors. This limits their capacity to respond to urgent needs.

Within networks, the main problem is the lack of confidence among members that leads to leadership conflict. Bringing together different organizations is difficult, because each wants to brandish its own banner and build its own leadership. This has become apparent when, as a local practitioner, I have had to deal with members of networks and they have chosen to promote their own initiatives more than those developed with the network. This sometimes makes it difficult to build the credibility of local networks because of attacks from their peers on social media or in the press.

In terms of communication, networks are limited to the national level, so giving them the opportunity to present their work and challenges abroad can be valuable in advocating for increased support for their country. Unfortunately, they generally do not have the expertise or strategies to do this.

While funding is an important limitation facing networks, their activities do not always depend on funding. Through their interaction with communities, networks are capable of doing more than we expect. Shining a light on local networks is perhaps one of the most valuable things the international community can do to affirm their initiatives and the impact of their activities on the ground.

Multi-Level Collective Efforts for Building Peace amid Conflict in Colombia

Nicolás Chamat Matallana¹

Introduction and Context

The signing of the peace agreement between the government of Colombia and the main insurgency group in the country, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) on November 24, 2016, was a crucial step toward ending the armed conflict that has ravaged the country for over half a century.²

However, despite the dramatic decrease in overall violence since the beginning of the ceasefire in June 2016,³ violent attacks on community leaders, human rights defenders, and peace activists have soared.⁴ In the regions most affected by armed conflict, reconfiguration of territorial control and the inability of the state to occupy the geographical, economic, and political space left by the FARC-EP have given way to new cycles of violence. The Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army, or ELN), another guerrilla group that is in the middle of complicated peace negotiations with the Colombian government,⁵ and other non-state armed actors have taken advantage of these power vacuums to violently take over illicit economic activities, territories, and

communities the FARC-EP used to control.⁶

Although the implementation of the peace agreement between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP is underway and substantial advances have been made—especially in demobilization and disarmament and legislative reforms, it still faces challenges transforming violence into peace on the ground.⁷ As such, human rights defenders, grassroots organizations, civil society networks, and other peacebuilding initiatives continue to endure violence and face pressure from armed actors at the local level.

Colombia has a relatively strong and active civil society. Initiatives and mobilizations for peace have significantly increased since the 1990s, which saw successful peace negotiations with many insurgent groups,⁸ the convening of the National Constitutional Assembly, and the promulgation of a new constitution (1991). Mobilizations for peace also flourished during the second half of the 1990s to resist the renewed escalation of violence with the FARC-EP and ELN and advocate for peace negotiations. Civil society mobilization continued to increase with the start of peace talks between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government in

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2 For a detailed account of the peace process in Colombia, see: Renata Segura and Delphine Mechoulan, “Made in Havana: How Colombia and the FARC Decided to End the War,” International Peace Institute, February 2017, available at www.ipinst.org/2017/02/how-colombia-and-the-farc-ended-the-war; and “¡Basta Ya!—Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad, Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013, available at www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2013/bastaYa/basta-ya-memorias-guerra-dignidad-new-9-agosto.pdf.

3 Between 2015 and 2016 there were 400 fewer fatalities in the 261 municipalities where the FARC-EP used to be active. See Fundación Paz y Reconciliación, “Una Increíble Cifra de Reducción de la Violencia,” April 2017, available at www.pares.com.co/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Una-increible-cifra-de-reduccion-de-la-violencia.pdf. Other conflict-related violence, such as kidnappings and attacks on energy infrastructure, have also been decreasing. See Fundación Ideas para la Paz, “The Opportunity for Peace,” February 2016, available at <http://cdn.ideaspaz.org/media/website/document/570bfc5d63d41.pdf>.

4 In 2016, 389 attacks were reported. This number increased to 441 in 2017. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia*, UN Doc. A/HRC/34/3/Add.3, March 14, 2017; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in Colombia*, UN Doc. A/HRC/37/3/Add.3, March 2, 2018.

5 For more information, see Mike LaSusa, “Colombia Govt, ELN Sign Ceasefire amid Growing Dissidence,” InSight Crime, September 4, 2017, available at www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/colombia-govt-eln-sign-ceasefire-amid-growing-dissidence/.

6 For more information, see International Crisis Group, “Colombia’s Armed Groups Battle for the Spoils of Peace,” October 2017, available at www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/63-colombias-armed-groups-battle-spoils-peace.

7 See Kristian Herbolzheimer, “Turbulence in Peace Processes: What Next for Colombia?,” Wilton Park, May 2017, available at www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1533-Report.pdf.

8 Peace agreements were concluded with groups including the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19), Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT), and Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MAQL).

1998.⁹ Greater availability of funding and increased international political support played a key role in the rise of peace initiatives across the country.¹⁰

This mobilization for peace, sustained over almost three decades at the local, regional, and national levels, has led to the emergence of numerous organizations and networks. Not only have these groups organized a clear and consolidated campaign for peace in Colombia, but they have given rise to a multi-level organizational infrastructure for peace with a common agenda: the rejection of war and violence, and the demand for peace negotiations and an array of reforms to make peace possible.

Local peacebuilding networks constitute a key component of the infrastructure for peace in Colombia.¹¹ This paper argues that networking facilitates a more inclusive, collaborative, and holistic approach to peacebuilding.¹² The flexible organizational framework of networks not only promotes knowledge sharing among members but also encourages an integrated approach to pursuing political, social, economic, and cultural change.¹³ Hence, networking “is a means and carrier of mobilization as well as a flexibility-oriented organizational strategy.”¹⁴

This paper studies two prominent networks for peace in Colombia, the Red Nacional de Iniciativas Ciudadanas por la Paz y contra la Guerra (National Network of Citizens’ Initiatives for Peace and against War, or Redepaz) and the Ruta Pacífica de

las Mujeres (Women’s Pacifist Route, or Ruta).¹⁵ Both cases highlight how networks can realize bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding by linking local initiatives with national and international efforts. Grassroots organizations are at the core of each network’s structure and play a central role in their decision-making processes. Key challenges facing these networks include ensuring fluid communication and information flow among their members and striking the balance between autonomy and financial sustainability.

Overall, this paper argues that networks can advance peacebuilding efforts by providing a “multi-level mechanism” for local initiatives to gain influence at the national level and to help national and international peacebuilders better adapt to local realities.¹⁶ Given their potential to work for peace in multiple areas and at different levels in war-torn societies like Colombia, networks can contribute to sustaining peace.¹⁷

Mapping Local Networks for Peace in Colombia

RED NACIONAL DE INICIATIVAS CIUDADANAS POR LA PAZ Y CONTRA LA GUERRA (REDEPAZ)

The Red Nacional de Iniciativas Ciudadanas por la Paz y contra la Guerra (Redepaz) has officially been a network since 1993. However, most of its member organizations and initiatives were

9 See Mauricio García Durán, “Paz en el Territorio: Dinámica de Expansión Geográfica del Accionar Colectivo por la Paz en Colombia 1978–2003,” *Territorios* 15 (2006); and Carlos Fernández, Mauricio García Durán, and Fernando Sarmiento, “Peace Mobilization in Colombia: 1978–2002,” Conciliation Resources, *Accord* 14, 2004, available at www.c-r.org/accord-article/peace-mobilisation-colombia-1978-2002.

10 Angélica Rettberg, *Buscar la Paz en Medio del Conflicto: Un Propósito Que No Da Tregua* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2006), pp. 19–24.

11 Infrastructure for peace is understood as the dynamic and interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills that contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a society. Chetan Kumar, “Building National ‘Infrastructures for Peace’: UN Assistance for Internally Negotiated Solutions to Violent Conflict,” in *Peacemaking: From Practice to Theory*, Susan Allen Nan, Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, and Andrea Bartoli, eds. (New York: Praeger, 2011).

12 According to John Paul Lederach, peacebuilding is “a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships.... The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct” The concept includes conflict transformation, restorative justice, reconciliation, capacity building, and development as part of a sustained effort to build lasting peace. See Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 20.

13 Robert Ricigliano, “Networks of Effective Action: Implementing an Integrated Approach to Peacebuilding,” *Security Dialogue* 34, no. 4 (2003).

14 Anton Ivanov asserts that “networking may be broadly defined as a structured communication for the achievement of similar goals in the conditions of interdependence. It is especially applicable to the peacemaking NGOs which, being deliberately designed by their founders to deal with problems requiring collaborative action, may not seriously hope to be successful in their activities without co-operation and management of interdependence with other NGOs and social agents.” Ivanov, “Advanced Networking: A Conceptual Approach to NGO-Based Early Response Strategies in Conflict Prevention,” Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, October 1997, available at www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Papers/Occasional_Papers/boc11e.pdf.

15 Five interviews were conducted between May and September 2017: two with representatives of Redepaz and Ruta, and three with practitioners and scholars. Also, a questionnaire was sent via mail to Redepaz to solicit further details about its operation.

16 Idea adapted from Borja Paladini Adell, “From Peacebuilding and Human Development Coalitions to Peace Infrastructure in Colombia,” Berghof Foundation, 2012, available at www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue10_paladini_adell_comm.pdf.

17 Youssef Mahmoud and Anupah Makoond, “Sustaining Peace: What Does It Mean in Practice?,” International Peace Institute, April 2017, available at www.ipinst.org/2017/04/sustaining-peace-in-practice.

established in the mid-1980s.¹⁸ With the promulgation of Colombia's constitution of 1991, these pro-peace initiatives gradually mustered broader civil society participation as they mobilized to support and advocate for its enactment. In November 1993, as the FARC-EP and ELN abandoned peace negotiations, a national meeting among local and regional peacebuilding initiatives was held. This gave rise to Redepaz, which established itself as a national civic network for peace.¹⁹

Initially, the task of Redepaz was to consolidate a national movement for peace, democracy, and human rights. With the escalation of the armed conflict and the so-called “guerra integral” (“comprehensive war”) against guerrilla groups,²⁰ Redepaz coined the concept of “paz integral” (“comprehensive peace”). This term aimed to encapsulate the network's aspiration for social justice, social and economic equity, and strong democratic governance, underpinned by the notion that peacebuilding does not depend on the cooperation of armed actors.

Two of the most important and historic initiatives conducted by Redepaz are the Mandato de los Niños por la Paz (Children's Mandate for Peace, 1996) and the Mandato Nacional por la Paz, la Vida y la Libertad (National Mandate for Peace, Life, and Liberty, 1997). During the former, with the support of UNICEF and other civil society organizations, Redepaz had children vote on the two most important human rights to defend and promote. The right to life and the right to peace were selected, with around 3 million children voting.

One year later, with its increased recognition and visibility, Redepaz (together with other organizations) called for the National Mandate for Peace,

Life, and Liberty to demand an end to the armed conflict, kidnappings, and other violence against civilians. This initiative, supported by 10 million Colombian voters, was a genuine civic pact for peace achieved through a participatory exercise, the likes of which has not been seen since in Colombia. The text approved and supported by the people stated:

I vote for peace, life, and liberty. I commit myself to being a builder of peace and social justice, protecting life, and rejecting violent actions, and I embrace the children's mandate for peace.²¹

Building on this national mandate, Redepaz began implementing a bottom-up peacebuilding strategy based on local constituent assemblies (*asambleas constituyentes locales*). These assemblies emerged as exercises in local governance to consolidate civic resistance against violence and enable people to engage in democracy and participate in politics at the local level. To date, approximately 200 assemblies have been established and emerged as valuable spaces for political action, advocacy, and the improvement of governance.²²

However, toward the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, the network encountered two difficulties that weakened its structure. First, President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) tried to take control of the local constituent assemblies. According to a member of the collegial presidency of Redepaz, the network viewed this “as a tactic to strengthen presidential rule and centralism, which was exactly what the network was trying to avoid.”²³

Second, members of Redepaz and its activity were violently attacked, mainly by paramilitary groups aiming to disrupt the participatory

18 Given the dynamic nature of this network, the term “initiative” aims to encompass a wide range of organizations, interest groups, temporary projects, and alliances that gather around one common specific objective.

19 This event gathered prominent local and regional movements such as Movimiento Derrotamos la Guerra from Santander, the Asamblea por la Paz y el Desarrollo del Catatumbo from Norte de Santander, the Mesas por la Vida from Medellín, and the Movimiento por la Vida from Bogotá, among others.

20 When the peace talks with the Coordinadora Guerrillera were cancelled in 1992, President César Gaviria launched a military offensive against the guerrillas (1990–1994) to force them back to the negotiating table. This campaign was also called a “comprehensive war” because it simultaneously targeted the armed structures of the drug cartels. See Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, “Colombia en Guerra: Las Diplomacias por la Paz,” *Desarrollo Económico* 39, no. 155 (October–December 1999); and Francisco Leal Buitrago, *La Seguridad Nacional a la Deriva: Del Frente Nacional a la Posguerra Fría* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2002).

21 Author's translation. In the original: “Voto por la paz, la vida y la libertad. Me comprometo a ser constructor de paz y justicia social, a proteger la vida y a rechazar toda acción violenta y acojo el Mandato de los niños por la paz. “El Mandato por la Paz es Obligatorio,” *El Tiempo*, June 30, 1998, available at www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-812788.

22 The first experience with the local constituent assemblies was in the municipality of Mogotes in the department of Santander. According to Redepaz, in 1998 the ELN abducted the mayor of Mogotes and accused him of poor management of public resources. In response, and with the support of Redepaz, the people of Mogotes gathered together and declared a “sovereign municipal assembly,” demanding that the ELN release the mayor. “Once the mayor was freed, the assembly found him guilty and assumed the municipal administration until the new mayor was elected.” Redepaz, “Area Territorialidad para la Paz,” December 18, 2014, available at www.redepaz.org.co/index.php/shortcode/territorio-paz.

23 Interview with Luis Emil Sanabria, member of the collegial presidency of Redepaz, Bogotá, Colombia, May 31, 2017.

democratization processes the network was facilitating at the local level. Redepaz members fell victim to a wave of murders, forced displacements, and kidnappings. In places such as Cúcuta, Valledupar, and Barranquilla, network member organizations were forcibly disbanded or forced to halt their work for peace. Nonetheless, in the late 2000s Redepaz reactivated the local constituent assemblies and collaborated with many other organizations and peace initiatives to consolidate a victims' rights movement.²⁴

The movement entered a new phase in 2012 when the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos officially started peace talks with the FARC-EP. The network organized massive parades and advocated for the negotiations, which eventually led to the formation of an alliance between the government and civil society to promote and encourage the final signing of the peace agreement.

Currently, Redepaz is supporting and working to ensure the implementation of the agreement by educating civil society on its contents and on progress made so far, both online and in local communities. Also, key members of Redepaz have seats in the Consejo Nacional de Paz, Reconciliación y Convivencia (National Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence) established by the peace agreement.²⁵ This allows the network to influence the design of policy measures to promote reconciliation and build a culture of peace.²⁶

Moreover, Redepaz is assembling a proposal to design a mechanism that would allow citizens to participate in and contribute to the peace process with the ELN.²⁷ Redepaz has already participated in

workshops with other nongovernmental organizations, the Colombian government, and ELN delegates to define the methodology for such a participatory effort. During a series of "preparatory hearings" to gather these proposals, it was concluded that citizens' participation should focus on territorial, sectoral, and thematic issues at the municipal, regional, and departmental levels, including issues such as health, labor rights, women's rights, youth, and persons with disabilities.²⁸

The development of Redepaz illustrates the importance of preserving autonomy and avoiding political capture. This requires strategic interaction with the government. It also demonstrates that a network's adaptability to the changing political context and conflict dynamics is key to ensuring its long-term sustainability.

Today, Redepaz is composed of hundreds of peace and development organizations from seven regions of the country and has approximately 10,000 individual members.²⁹ The network has a presence in roughly 250 municipalities out of 1,102. With the end of the armed conflict between the government and the FARC-EP, Redepaz is now reaching into areas that were previously inaccessible.³⁰

In terms of organizational arrangements, Redepaz's lowest-level structures are municipal nodes where the organizers of local initiatives meet periodically, depending on local dynamics and needs. These local nodes constitute the core of the network. At the regional level there are two administrative bodies, while at the national level there are four, which are designed to facilitate the

24 The victims' rights movement refers to the collective effort to make the hardships and suffering endured by victims during the conflict between the FARC-EP and the government visible to people in the cities. It involves advocacy for their right to reparations and restitution. This shift in the emphasis of the peace movement was the result of the complete rupture of negotiations in the 2000s and the ensuing surge in paramilitary violence. Examples of efforts supported by Redepaz (along with other peacebuilding organizations) include the enactment of the Ley de Justicia y Paz (Justice and Peace Law, 2005) through which paramilitary groups demobilized, and the Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras (Victims and Land Restitution Law, 2011).

25 Luis Emil Sanabria, member of the collegial presidency of Redepaz, was appointed Technical Secretary to the National Council for Peace. As such, he coordinates and assists in the implementation of their projects and initiatives related to the peace agreement.

26 According to its legal mandate, the National Council for Peace will advise the president on public policies to promote reconciliation and a culture of peace and prevent the stigmatization of former combatants. See Colombian Ministry of the Interior, Decree No. 885, May 26, 2017, available at <http://es.presidencia.gov.co/normativa/normativa/DECRETO%20885%20DEL%2026%20DE%20MAYO%20DE%202017.pdf>.

27 Interview with Luis Emil Sanabria, member of the collegial presidency of Redepaz, Bogotá, Colombia, May 31, 2017.

28 Author's translation. In the original: "Todos los representantes llevaron ideas sobre cómo sería el mecanismo de participación. El consenso al que se llegó es que tuviera un enfoque territorial, sectorial y temático. Es decir, que fuera municipal, regional y departamental; que se incluyeran mesas como la de salud o la laboral y otras para las mujeres, los jóvenes o las personas discapacitadas." "Así Fueron las Primeras Conversaciones de Paz entre Ciudadanía y el ELN en Tocancipá," *Semana*, December 12, 2017, available at www.semana.com/contenidos-editoriales/tocancipa-es-el-norte/articulo/luis-emil-sanabria-habla-de-las-audiencias-preparatorias-con-el-eln-en-tocancipa/550469.

29 The Atlantic coast region, Pacific coast region, department of Antioquia, coffee region (departments of Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío), central region (departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá), and departments of Santander, Norte de Santander, and Bogotá.

30 These include the departments of Meta, Casanare, Arauca, Guaviare, and Caquetá.

flow of information about their agenda and priorities between different levels of the network and among its members across the country.³¹

This institutional arrangement reflects Redepaz's aspiration to promote horizontal and consensus-based decision-making processes. For example, network members periodically review and compare their strategies and plans at the local, regional, and sectoral levels. This review process is intended to ensure that local initiatives identify the most pressing matters for the network to address, and generally these issues are adopted as Redepaz's network-wide agenda. Further, it guarantees that each of the local nodes of the network have a say by raising and putting into consideration the most pressing matters according to their needs and context.

Plurality and inclusion are guiding principles of the network. Redepaz is politically and religiously independent, and members include indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities; women's, children's, and youth organizations; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) interest groups; labor unions; churches; NGOs; local politicians; and artistic collectives (such as theater companies). The only prerequisite for becoming a member is the rejection of violence.

The network is also not affiliated with any political party, which means that its strategies, its objectives, and the projects it initiates are not determined by external actors. Instead, they are reliant on the network's internal decision-making processes. Luis Emil Sanabria, the president of Redepaz, highlights the network's independence and neutrality as one of its distinctive features, allowing it to criticize allies when necessary, including the government and international donors.

Redepaz's collaborative approach has also facilitated its involvement in broad platforms or social movements, including the Plataforma Social para Impulsar la Semana por la Paz (Social Platform to

Promote Peace Week)³² and the Comité de Impulso de la Mesa Social para la Paz (Committee to Promote the Societal Roundtable for Peace).³³ In addition, the network approach has been useful in establishing programmatic alliances with international organizations such as the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), Pax Christi International, and the Latin American Coalition for the Prevention of Armed Violence (CLAVE).

Core funding from the embassy of the Netherlands was crucial in consolidating the movement during the early 2000s, but since then, Redepaz has become dependent on project financing, mainly from international donors. Therefore, the network competes over scarce resources with other organizations and is constantly applying for grants and financial support, which do not usually align with its own priorities. On the contrary, when Redepaz receives international financial support, it usually faces pressure to abide by international donors' guidance and interests. Thus, while the network strives to maintain its independence, this principled position also results in financial insecurity. That said, it has also forced the network to adapt and build its capacity to make the most out of scarce resources to ensure the effective operation of its national and regional offices.

Redepaz's approach has enabled it to successfully advocate for peace, establish valuable alliances with the government and other organizations in the field, and manage the risk of "political capture" of its initiatives. Networking and collaboration have allowed Redepaz to gain recognition and build political capital to achieve its goals. They have also contributed to increasing the diversity of its membership (including peasant, academic, youth, urban, women's, and rural organizations) and incentivized knowledge sharing among them. In addition, networking has helped Redepaz build a local, regional, and national presence and bolstered its ability to convene NGOs, peacebuilding organi-

31 At the regional level there are: (1) sectoral or regional conferences (periodic meetings of the members); and (2) regional administrative offices. At the national level there are: (1) a National Assembly (the highest administrative body where the political guidelines and the two-year plan are formulated); (2) a National Coordination Committee (comprising representatives from every local and regional conference across the country); (3) a collegial presidency (composed of three members who coordinate and execute the political guidelines and lead Redepaz's NGO, which was created to enter into contracts and execute projects); and (4) a National Oversight Committee (which ensures and advises on compliance with the network's principles).

32 This is an informal initiative to coordinate the activities and agenda of Peace Week, an annual event that takes place during the second week of September.

33 This is a coalition of social organizations that has gathered to support and advocate for peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and the ELN guerrilla group.

zations, government agencies, and civil society. The main challenges faced by the network are its struggles with financial sustainability and violence against its members and initiatives.

RUTA PACÍFICA DE LAS MUJERES

Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (Ruta) emerged in 1996 as a feminist, anti-militarist, nonviolent movement. This network was formed by several women's organizations from the department of Antioquia aiming to expose and denounce the particular way war and violence affect women—an issue that was generally invisible until then. On November 25, 1996, Ruta organized a caravan that traveled to the municipality of Mutatá, where women were being victimized by armed groups, especially through sexual and gender-based violence. This caravan, which was Ruta's first public act and a "foundational milestone" in its work for peace, aimed to accompany and show support to the women victimized in this region. In fact, the name Ruta ("route" in English) refers to this first journey that were made to advocate for the rights of these women.

Since its establishment, Ruta has focused on two main objectives: (1) assisting and accompany women affected by armed conflict at the local level and demonstrating the scale, logic, and particular consequences of gender-based violence; and (2) campaigning for peace and negotiated solutions to armed conflict in the country to put an end to the mass victimization of women. Ruta, then, does not understand peace as the mere silence of guns and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed actors, but also as the overcoming of structural violence against women in the country.

Mobilization in territories affected by violence and armed conflict has been the principal strategy of Ruta, which has allowed it to consolidate across the country. It was because of this mobilization strategy, including parades and cultural events against violence, that other women's organizations gradually decided to join the network.

Ruta has also focused on training its members on

topics such as feminism, conflict resolution, and effective political advocacy for peace. This capacity-building effort, called "Trenzando Saberes y Poderes" ("Combining Knowledge and Power"), is the result of a long process of collectively constructing training modules and pedagogical tools used by its members. Every regional office, depending on the context in which it operates and its specific needs, has developed its own training strategies as well, ranging from formal to informal mechanisms that facilitate the transmission of knowledge to new members, especially youth. Through these mechanisms, Ruta has transmitted to its members the nuances of feminist political practice, the construction and exercise of full citizenship for women, and nonviolence as a form of social and political resistance against war and oppression.

Although Ruta's members have received threats and pressure from armed actors, especially as they prioritize local mobilization to resist violence, over the years the network has shown capacity to adapt to violence. "The adherence to the principle of nonviolence and the network structure may have served as protection mechanisms," noted one of Ruta's regional coordinators.³⁴ The flexibility and dynamic membership of networks may make it more difficult for armed actors to target a single person or organization.

Symbolism is central to the work of Ruta. This not only reflects a commitment to collect the ancestral knowledge and life experiences of Colombian women, but to use this knowledge as a language that subverts the narratives of war. Every event organized by Ruta and their political demonstrations are full of symbolism. For example, during a demonstration in Putumayo against aerial spraying of glyphosate, Ruta members carried umbrellas and painted planes spraying seeds to symbolize life.³⁵

During the early 2000s, Ruta began a partnership with the international organization Women in Black, whose members organize vigils against violence, military, and war around the world.³⁶ As a

34 Interview with Sandra Luna, regional coordinator of Ruta, Bogotá, Colombia, June 30, 2017.

35 Glyphosate is a chemical pesticide used against the coca plant, the primary ingredient of cocaine and a key economic driver of the Colombian conflict. However, this pesticide also kills subsistence crops and has been shown to poison water sources.

36 Women in Black "is a world-wide network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. As women experiencing these things in different ways in different regions of the world, this network supports each other's movements. An important focus of this network is challenging the militarist policies of our own governments." See "Who Are Women in Black?," available at <http://womeninblack.org/about-women-in-black/>.

result, the network has engaged in communal demonstrations on the last Tuesday of every month in different parts of the country, which has led to greater visibility and recognition. Ruta has also made numerous temporary alliances with other Colombian organizations, particularly in times of financial crisis, establishing a constructive partnership with the broader movement for peace in the country. Such alliances have been useful for expanding Ruta's geographical coverage and establishing fruitful alliances with organizations from different sectors, including local and regional actors.

One of Ruta's key initiatives has been Comisión de Verdad y Memoria de las Mujeres Colombianas (Colombian Women's Truth and Memory Commission).³⁷ Between 2010 and 2013, over a thousand women across the country gave testimony of their experiences, resistance to violence, and demands to end the conflict. The aim was to recover the historical memory of female victims. As Ruta explains, this research was

a process carried out as from the base of a movement and through a network of women. It is not research conceived in an academic space, although it uses the standards of human rights research and of such projects as Historical Memory and Truth Commissions. Apart from researching, the project has implied rethinking the experience of women, building relationships with the victims and their support networks, and exploring the guts and the heart of the Colombian armed conflict at the hands of those who have suffered the horror and fear.³⁸

In this sense, Ruta's truth commission also included a process of devolving knowledge to the women and communities involved in the project. This inclusive and wide-ranging process of memory construction not only allowed female victims to have their voices heard but also helped them better understand how and why violence and

victimization took place, empowering them to demand justice and reparations.

Through a series of workshops and the work of a "devolution team," Ruta encouraged a process of self-recognition of this jointly constructed memory in an effort to heal the grief and wounds of women affected by violence.³⁹ This work served as an input to the peace negotiations between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government, specifically regarding discussions on the national truth commission.⁴⁰ The dissemination of Ruta's research and knowledge to the broader public through the arts (music, sculpture, painting, and music) has also contributed to the promotion of a culture of peace and reconciliation in the country.

Ruta is a network comprised of roughly 300 women's organizations. It has local offices in eleven out of thirty-two departments in the country, but its work extends to 142 municipalities (out of 1,102).⁴¹ Its members are diverse, including women identifying as victims, indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians, and farmers, and it includes people from urban and rural areas and of all ages.

Ruta has a presence at the local, regional, and national levels and has developed planning and decision-making bodies for each. At the national level there is a National Assembly and there are nine regional offices.⁴² At the local level the network has a number of grassroots members.⁴³ Through this organizational structure, Ruta aims to build consensus, only using majority votes to settle complex decisions when consensus is not possible. Although the process can be time-consuming, tools such as Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook (when connectivity permits) are used to facilitate and speed up the decision-making process. The network's three-year strategic plan, built and endorsed by each member at the local and regional levels, serves as a roadmap to prioritize among the

37 See Carla Alfonso and Carlos Marín Beristain, "Memory for Life: A Truth Commission Proposal from Women for Colombia," Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, 2015, available at [www.rutapacifico.org.co/images/libros/Memory%20for%20Life%20\(web\).pdf](http://www.rutapacifico.org.co/images/libros/Memory%20for%20Life%20(web).pdf).

38 Ibid.

39 For more information, see Carlos Marín Beristain, Clara Mazo, Kelly Echeverry, and Marina Gallego, "El Camino de Vuelta de la Memoria," Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, April 2015, available at www.rutapacifico.org.co/images/libros/EL%20CAMINO%20DE%20VUELTA%20de%20la%20memoria.pdf.

40 Interview with Sandra Luna, regional coordinator of Ruta, Bogotá, Colombia, June 30, 2017.

41 In the departments of Bolívar, Cauca, Chocó, Putumayo, the coffee region (Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío), Santander, Antioquia, Valle, and Bogotá.

42 In the National Assembly, nine regional coordinators and the national executive coordinator gather to discuss and consolidate the network's three-year strategic plan. In the regional offices, local and regional planning and discussions take place, including validation of strategic and administrative decisions taken at the national level.

43 Local members have one delegate or representative in the regional offices with the power to validate decisions made in the regional and national administrative bodies.

network's actions, events, and initiatives. If an initiative or event of any individual member organization departs from the strategic plan, the network abstains from participation.⁴⁴

Sandra Luna, a regional coordinator of the network, asserts that one of the distinctive characteristics of Ruta is its permanent presence in and historical ties to the regions. Although it was deemed necessary that the National Assembly be moved closer to Colombia's political center in Bogotá, Ruta has always resisted centralism. As Marina Gallego, Ruta's national coordinator stated, "God is everywhere, but she governs from Bogotá."⁴⁵ In addition, every regional office and network member has a great deal of autonomy. Ruta has a single national agenda endorsed by its members, but every regional team tailors those general guidelines to its context and needs.

Ruta has deliberately distanced itself from electoral debates. One of its principles is to isolate its work from any political party or candidate to prevent "political capture." In 2014, however, Ruta publicly supported the reelection of President Juan Manuel Santos as he was the only candidate promising continuity of the peace process with the FARC-EP. This is an example of how the network can have fruitful relationships with public institutions when it deems this to be the best way to achieve particular peacebuilding objectives.

Ruta has prioritized its autonomy over potential financial support. During negotiations with donors, its representatives usually stress that they already have the essential human resources in the field with the time and willingness to work for peace and the necessary contextual knowledge. For example, in the early 2000s the network received valuable financial support from the Swiss Program for the Promotion of Peace in Colombia (SUIPPCOL). Negotiations were difficult, but the network's representatives were able to establish certain "red lines" regarding its autonomy to ensure that it maintained control of the decision-making process. As one of the national coordina-

tors stated, "We do receive external support, but it is for us to decide how we receive it and use it, with our rhythm and our people."⁴⁶

Later, as the network gained more visibility, other international actors showed interest in supporting Ruta's approach to peacebuilding, including Oxfam, the UN, the Spanish Cooperation Agency for International Development (AECID), and the Swedish government. This support was crucial to strengthening the network's formal structure. Thus, Ruta has been highly dependent on project financing, principally from international donors. In this sense, an important obstacle to the network's operation at the regional and local levels is competition over international financial support among member organizations (as well as with other peacebuilding initiatives). It can also lead members, particularly smaller organizations, to prioritize the agenda of international donors to ensure they receive support and guarantee their survival.

The network approach has allowed Ruta to increase its influence on the peacebuilding sector through its apparent "multiplier effect" resulting from its territorial reach, as well as the creativity, flexibility, and diversity of membership that the network structure provides. When networks are composed of rural, urban, religious, academic, indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and youth organizations, their decisions and actions are usually enriched by discussions and insights from them all, allowing innovative and resourceful outputs.

Some of Ruta's more significant contributions to peacebuilding in Colombia include raising awareness of the particular effects of armed conflict on women and the importance of this as a crucial policy issue. It also contributed to the consolidation of public mobilization against violence in conflict zones. Finally, it has provided valuable insights for the implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC-EP, specifically for the truth commission.

44 This has happened with some members advocating for sexual diversity and LGBT issues. Although this is an important issue in Colombia, Ruta as a network abstains, as its priority is peacebuilding. This is a strategic decision to avoid a controversial issue that might generate obstacles and enemies that could hinder its main objective.

45 Interview with Sandra Luna, regional coordinator of Ruta, Bogotá, Colombia, June 30, 2017.

46 Ibid.

Analysis

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKS

Based on the analysis of the work of Redepaz and Ruta in Colombia, this section discusses several advantages and potential strengths of peacebuilding networks. First, peacebuilding networks can facilitate more inclusive and collaborative work when they have highly flexible organizational frameworks, which provides members with a great deal of autonomy within a unifying framework. For a network to function properly, a basic structure is needed with clear leadership, decision-making bodies, mechanisms to resolve disputes among members, administrative bodies to manage operational expenses, and clear principles to guide members in pursuing a common objective.

The work of both Redepaz and Ruta is firmly based on the principle of autonomy. For instance, members of both Redepaz and Ruta can freely undertake an activity at the local or regional level that departs from the network's roadmap and remain members. Similarly, they can choose not to participate in the national initiatives of the network without losing their membership. This flexibility contributes to a constructive dynamism that can promote the diversity of its membership and the inclusion of multiple and even dissimilar organizations from different sectors that gather around a particular temporary objective.

In order to balance plurality and autonomy with cohesion and the coordination of joint action, both Redepaz and Ruta have opted for non-hierarchical organizational structures and consensus-based decision-making processes. This has proven essential not only in prioritizing issues on the agenda (which is endorsed by every member of the network), but also as a way to protect and ensure the networks are diverse and inclusive.

This flexible and non-hierarchical structure appears to facilitate collaboration on a larger scale. The two networks analyzed suggest networks have a “multiplier effect,” as they have greater geographical coverage than a single organization. As the networks have increased their territorial presence,

more organizations and initiatives have decided to join, further increasing the number of members and the diversity of the programmatic agenda. This allows them to adopt a more holistic approach to peacebuilding when necessary (e.g., integrating humanitarian relief, development, or human rights approaches into peacebuilding work).⁴⁷

The organizational flexibility and collaborative approach also facilitate the establishment of new alliances and short-term associations with other organizations. Ruta, for example, has an alliance with Women in Black and also has temporary alliances with numerous organizations in the field. Similarly, Redepaz is involved in platforms such as the Committee to Promote the Societal Roundtable for Peace and international actors such as the International Action Network on Small Arms and Pax Christi.

This study also suggests that the flexibility of the network structure helps organizations develop mechanisms to adapt to complex and unstable contexts. For example, despite the violent campaign against some members of Redepaz, which led to its complete elimination in certain regions, the network has been able to continue its work, reemerging in areas once the security situation stabilized.

Likewise, it is plausible that both networks' more horizontally distributed leadership helped reduce the visibility of, pressure on, or violence against a single person or member organization. This could have strengthened the resilience of these networks' members to violent persecution and victimization. While more in-depth investigation is needed to uncover the factors at play, peacebuilding networks in war-torn environments such as in Colombia may be crucial to making civil society more resilient.

Second, networks promote more holistic and innovative approaches to peacebuilding. The number of members and programmatic diversity of their agendas, which are built on the basis of consensus, may promote knowledge sharing and stimulate the development of creative and innovative peacebuilding activities. Redepaz's National

⁴⁷ As Ricigliano points out, an integrated approach is crucial for peacebuilding to be effective in the field. This suggests a need for peacebuilding organizations to work together with other actors from diverse fields (e.g., peacemaking, peacekeeping, conflict transformation, development) and sectors (e.g., governmental and nongovernmental organizations) to increase their positive impact. Ricigliano, “Networks of Effective Action: Implementing an Integrated Approach to Peacebuilding.”

Mandate for Peace and local constituent assemblies and Ruta's symbolic performances and demonstrations for peace, as well as its collaborative women's truth commission, are examples of this. Both networks highlight the importance of working for peace in a comprehensive manner while simultaneously pursuing political, social, economic, and cultural change at the interpersonal, and individual levels. These examples suggest that networks can encourage positive synergies among these different types of change and catalyze positive (and hopefully sustainable) societal transformations for peacebuilding (for example, contributing to the emergence of a culture of peace or advancing towards reconciliation).

Third, this study suggests that networks may be instrumental in putting in place a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding by linking local initiatives with national and international peacebuilding actors. Networks offer a "multi-level" mechanism that allows local initiatives to inform and influence national and international peacebuilding efforts, helping them adapt to the local context.

Grassroots organizations form the core of Redepaz and Ruta's structures and decision-making processes. Yet these networks also have far-reaching impact at the national level, especially when partnering with governmental institutions. However, the restricted nature of such collaboration is key. By establishing limited alliances with governmental institutions that allow them to keep their autonomy, networks can increase their influence and impact as vehicles for bottom-up peacebuilding.

Both Redepaz and Ruta emphasize that "political capture" by political interests is a risk, and something they actively try to prevent. They describe their interaction with political interests as an ongoing negotiation in which their territorial coverage, human capital, and local know-how add to their bargaining power. In this sense, the size and territorial reach of networks compared to those of a single organization give them greater capacity to resist co-optation.

OBSTACLES TO NETWORKS

However, there are also many obstacles when it comes to the operation of networks. First, as previously mentioned, there is a complex trade-off between financial sustainability and autonomy.

While international financial support is critical, especially for networks to consolidate their organizational structures, it can also make them dependent. The cases of Redepaz and Ruta also illustrate how the priorities and interests of international agencies or donors can distort the organic bottom-up agenda-setting process at the heart of networks' organizational structure. This takes place when these agencies or donors call for project proposals with short timelines that coincide with their own institutional agendas.

Second, when working in unstable and conflict-ridden contexts, networks (like other peace organizations) endure violence and pressure from armed actors to stop working for peace and contributing to positive social change. Their work for peace may question armed actors' aspiration to exert violent rule at the local level. Despite networks seeming resilience and adaptability to complex environments, violence is still an important obstacle for their proper functioning.

Third, the operation of networks in contexts where centralism and hierarchy is deeply entrenched (as in Colombia) may be problematic. Communities and organizations at the local and regional levels often expect someone to lead and give guidance. When that figure is missing, the work of the network may be adversely affected.

Fourth, networks frequently face communication problems among members who live in different parts of the country. Regular in-person meetings are difficult due to economic constraints, and in many parts of the country poor Internet connectivity makes online interaction difficult. This is a significant barrier to organizations coordinating and following up with each other.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the work and functioning of Redepaz and Ruta in Colombia, this case study makes the following recommendations for how networks, governmental institutions, and international actors could capitalize on network organizations' advantages and better collaborate to achieve common peacebuilding purposes:

FOR NETWORK ORGANIZATIONS

- **Strategically cooperate with local actors and organizations from diverse sectors and fields.**

This can help advance a holistic and integrated approach to peacebuilding.

- **Establish limited alliances with governmental institutions for specific objectives.** This may help networks have far-reaching impact and influence at the national level. Nonetheless, these alliances need to be restricted and temporary to preserve networks' autonomy and prevent "political capture" by governmental institutions.
- **Cooperate with international actors for programmatic rather than financial reasons.** When local networks establish these alliances for programmatic purposes or to achieve common short-term objectives, they may gain visibility and recognition at the international level. Also, these alliances may increase local networks' capacities or knowledge for peacebuilding through collaboration work and interaction. Moreover, this kind of international cooperation could help networks continue working for peace even in times of financial crisis.
- **Work actively to achieve a non-hierarchical culture both at the national and local levels.** It is crucial that national leadership not only strive to promote procedures and institutional arrangements to ensure consensus-based decision-making processes but also encourage a horizontal organizational culture for a better functioning of networks. Eliminating or reducing asymmetrical relationships within networks may improve collaboration and cooperation across different levels. It is equally important that networks' local nodes (or local initiatives) embrace this non-hierarchical culture and engage as equals with regional and national organizations. This also may facilitate bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding.

FOR GOVERNMENTS

- **Guarantee the security and protection of network members, including local organizations.** Measures such as early warning systems to prevent networks members from being victimized and emergency protection programs (e.g.,

emergency evacuation operations) need to be effectively launched at the local level. Additionally, networks members could be trained in self-protection mechanisms to identify and avoid risky situations.

- **Recognize networks as key peacebuilding actors.** For instance, networks may constitute key assets in the government's ongoing peace negotiations with the ELN by bringing local, regional, and national proposals and pressing issues to the peace table. Networks may also provide crucial support to the government toward common objectives at the local level, such as the implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC-EP.
- **Promote and support networks' activities.** Such support could take the form of grants for travel and communication.

FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

- **Abstain from fostering competition over financial support among local networks and organizations.** This may instigate conflicts and suspicion not only among network members but also among networks and external local organizations working in the same geographical area or in the same field. International actors could discourage competition over resources by, for instance, developing innovative administrative strategies to ensure that experienced and large peace organizations share responsibilities, incomes, and expenses with smaller, weaker organizations at the local level.
- **Establish strategic partnerships with local networks** (and locally led peacebuilding initiatives) to realize specific shared peacebuilding goals.
- **Prioritize core funding rather than project-based funding.** This also means letting local actors decide on their own agenda and programs.
- **Promote and support nonfinancial programmatic cooperation** between international actors and local network organizations.

The Role of Local Networks for Peace in Kenya

Stephen Kirimi¹

Introduction and Context

Kenya is a young democracy, having attained its independence from British colonial rule on December 12, 1963. Ever since, the country has struggled to establish governance based on democratic principles. Despite setting out on a path to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, and disease,² Kenya has continued to experience widening gaps between the rich and the poor, especially between rural and urban populations. Access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and water, as well as to employment and livelihood opportunities, remain major challenges among the poor majority living in informal urban settlements and rural areas.³ This situation has been sustained by successive political regimes that have tended to focus more on consolidation of political power for complete control over resources rather than equitable economic development. The redistributive function of the state has also been hampered by policies of centralization instead of devolution of power and resources.

Kenya has a history of conflicts, ranging from communal conflicts over natural resources (pastoralists and agriculturalists fighting over water and grazing areas) to politically motivated riots and clashes, including electoral violence and workers' strikes following unresolved labor disputes.⁴ Some of the worst violence in the recent past was the electoral violence following the 2007 elections. This conflict and violence is driven by many factors working either on their own or in combination. These include but are not limited to: "(1) ethnic intolerance; (2) border conflicts; (3) political party zoning; (4) competition over land and other

resources; (5) proliferation of small arms; (6) weak security; and (7) poverty, underdevelopment, and marginalization."⁵

The Kenyan National Dialogue and Reconciliation process was initiated in February 2008 to seek both short- and long-term solutions to persistent conflicts, among other things.⁶ One of the outcomes of the national dialogue process was the establishment of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. This body, created by the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Act (enacted by the National Assembly in 2008) was tasked with investigating, among other things, the 2007–2008 post-election violence and recommending a national framework for reconciliation. After almost four years of work and nationwide hearings and consultations, the commission published its report in May 2013, which was presented to the president of Kenya. The report raised hopes that a framework for national reconciliation would be established and would bring about further national dialogue to promote healing and redress past injustices.

Other institutional reform processes were also put in place after the national dialogue process. These included security sector reform, judicial reform, and the establishment of independent institutions to deal with specific constitutional and socio-political issues that affect the peace and security of the country. One outcome was the adoption of a new constitution in 2010 that voters overwhelmingly supported in a referendum and that many praised for being progressive. The 2010 constitution redefined Kenya's governance structure, redistributing power and resources to promote popular participation in development and contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

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2 Kenyan Ministry of Economic Planning and Community Affairs, *Session Paper No. 10 of 1965: African Socialism and Its Application to Planning in Kenya*, 1965.

3 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and Society for International Development, *Exploring Kenya's Inequality: Pulling Apart or Pooling Together?*, 2013.

4 The country has often experienced prolonged strikes by nurses, doctors, university lecturers, and other labor unions, including in 2018. A list of and updates on these strikes can be found at www.labourstart.org/news/country.php?country=Kenya&langcode=en.

5 Brigitte Rohwerder, "Conflict Analysis of Kenya," University of Birmingham, May 2015, p. 1, available at <http://gsdrc.org/publications/conflict-analysis-of-kenya/>.

6 South Consulting, "The Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation: Building a Progressive Kenya," December 2011, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/kenya-national-dialogue-and-reconciliation-building-progressive-kenya-background-note>.

As part of efforts to foster peace and prevent conflict in the country, a number of civil society initiatives were launched, such as the Concerned Citizens for Peace initiative and church-led reconciliation initiatives.⁷ These initiatives have been implementing community-targeted peacebuilding and conflict prevention programs and projects in areas including reconciliation, dialogue, policy advocacy, training, and capacity building. Among the most enduring initiatives are the two case studies examined here: the Peace and Development Network Trust (PeaceNet Kenya) and the Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL). These two case studies will be analyzed further in this paper, with the objective of examining the role of network organizations in peacebuilding in Kenya.

This study is based on literature reviews, review of organizations' internal documents such as strategic plans and reports, and interviews with key officials in both organizations. Further, it builds on the direct observations and experiences of the author, who was the head of PeaceNet for seven years and worked indirectly with Rural Women Peace Link by cooperating on projects for more than two years.

Mapping Local Networks for Peace

PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT NETWORK TRUST (PEACENET KENYA)

The history of the Peace and Development Network Trust (PeaceNet Kenya) dates back to 1993 when the advocacy platform Ethnic Clashes Network (ECN) was founded. ECN was an initiative of three organizations that sought to effectively engage the government of Kenya on the plight of people displaced by politically instigated ethnic clashes.⁸ At the time, the ECN's interventions were guided by the need to continue coordinating relief

and advocacy work focused on conflict-affected areas and to address violence. In 1995, the ECN held a stakeholder forum, which identified the need to expand the mandate of the platform to cover the entire country so that it could respond to other peace and conflict challenges. As a result, the ECN was rebranded as the Peace and Development Network (PeaceNet), and its mandate was redefined to include coordination of peacebuilding efforts across the country.

PeaceNet started as an umbrella network organization bringing together individuals and groups from across the country. These included community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, women's organizations, and youth groups, among others.⁹ The organization operated as a thematic network within the National Council of NGOs until 2005, when it acquired an independent identity as a registered trust providing a networking platform for local organizations involved in peace and development programming.¹⁰

PeaceNet's secretariat is based in Nairobi, where the network is coordinated and administrated. PeaceNet has regional focal points in eleven regions of the country who coordinate the activities of its members and local partners through teams of elected volunteers. These teams comprise a chairperson, a coordinator, and representatives of each county in the region.¹¹ This arrangement enables the organization to effectively reach out to and coordinate activities with those at the grassroots level.

At the national level, the organization is run by a board of trustees, who are the registered custodians of the organization. This board provides oversight to the management board, which in turn supervises the secretariat headed by the chief executive officer.¹² The secretariat is the programming unit of

7 See Rescue Kenya, "Concerned Citizens for Peace Initiative," available at <https://rescuekenya.wordpress.com/2008/02/21/concerned-citizens-for-peace-initiative/>; and Philomena Njeri Mwaura and Constansia Mumma Martinon, "Political Violence in Kenya and Local Churches' Responses: The Case of the 2007 Post-election Crisis," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2010).

8 These three organizations were Oxfam GB, the Mennonite Central Committee, and the Development Desk of the Anglican Church of Kenya.

9 PeaceNet, organizational profile, September 2015.

10 The National Council of NGOs, also known as the NGOs Council, is a national umbrella body of nongovernmental organizations registered under the NGOs Coordination Act of 1992. The act mandates the body to establish both thematic and geographical networks of members.

11 The regions are defined along the provincial administrative boundaries in the constitution that existed before 2010. Officially, there were eight provinces prior to 2010. For its own purposes, PeaceNet split up two of these provinces: Eastern Kenya was divided into lower- and upper-eastern Kenya while the Rift Valley was divided into the north-, central-, and south-Rift regions.

12 The management board comprises the eleven elected chairs of the eleven regions.

the organization, generating project proposals, strategic plans, and work plans and mobilizing resources.

PeaceNet's main focus is peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and conflict transformation. It executes these roles through projects and programs, capacity building, horizontal and vertical networking,¹³ and partnership building. It is important to note, however, that some of the grassroots partner organizations engage in projects in different areas like health, environmental conservation, and human rights. These projects provide the network with important entry points into communities, as many of their beneficiaries are also affected by conflict.

During electoral periods, PeaceNet engages in elections monitoring and occasionally participates in civic education, primarily focusing on maintaining peace before and after the elections. The organization has been engaging in numerous short- and medium-term projects working to prevent violence and build peace. In 2017, it collaborated with a coalition of peace actors in Kenya in a campaign to avert violence during the electoral period. The objective of the campaign, branded "One Nation under God," was to mobilize citizens to embrace peace before and after the elections.¹⁴

In 2010, in partnership with the Japan Center for Conflict Prevention, PeaceNet implemented a post-conflict reconstruction project in the Maai Mahiu area of Naivasha, Kenya. This project aimed to build settlements and provide water for internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had settled there following the post-election violence of 2007–2008. In subsequent years, it carried out mediation and reconciliation activities in the Rift Valley, targeting eight areas in Uasin Gishu County that were adversely affected by post-election violence in an effort to restore community cohesion. These efforts allowed communities to focus and build on

social connectors while identifying sources of tension and violence.

The Sauti Mashinani project is another of PeaceNet's critical initiatives to prevent conflict.¹⁵ This online platform enables peace monitors and the general public to report incidents of conflict in real time by texting on mobile phones, thus facilitating an informed early response to prevent escalation of tensions into violence. The system also enables mapping of the patterns of conflict across the country, which informs appropriate targeting of resources and collaborative response efforts.

PeaceNet was also a pioneer and ideas innovator in developing the Uwiano Platform for Peace. This platform helped preempt conflict and ensure peace during the referendum in 2010 and elections in 2013, both of which several other organizations had predicted would lead to violence due to heightened political competition.¹⁶ The project was implemented in collaboration with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC), and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission.¹⁷ It was an initiative that leveraged the capacities of the government, an independent commission, civil society, and donors, demonstrating a successful strategy for forestalling conflict using minimal resources. It conducted over 300 responses to prevent conflict, mostly through network contacts across the country, which ensured local acceptance of the intervention and its cost-effectiveness.¹⁸

PeaceNet has also developed its own manual for training on conflict transformation. This manual is being used to train small entities, primarily community-based organizations, self-help groups, and individuals active at the community level, to

13 Horizontal networking refers to community-level organizations building relationships with one another while vertical networking refers to the establishment of links with national, regional, and international organizations.

14 The initiative was focused on appealing to individuals' faith in God as a unifying factor irrespective of their religious backgrounds to promote peace during the electoral period.

15 "Sauti mashinani" is Swahili for "voices at the grassroots." See <http://sautimashinani.com/>.

16 "Uwiano" is a Swahili phrase connoting cohesion, understanding, and resonance. The national referendum was conducted to adopt a new constitution that had been agreed upon as one of the medium-term outcomes of the national dialogue process. Coming only two years after the 2007–2008 post-election violence, there was widespread fear that the fragile peace could collapse and the country could return to violence. Initiatives like the Uwiano platform were designed to prevent a reoccurrence of violent conflict during the referendum.

17 Other players joined the initiative later on, including the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, UN Women, and the Kenya Partnership for Peace and Security.

18 Uwiano report, 2011.

build their capacity to intervene at the local level with available local resources.

One of the values of PeaceNet is its nonpartisanship. The organization endeavors to adopt a neutral position on the country's power politics.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it strategically collaborates with government institutions to further conflict prevention.²⁰ Such institutions include the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), and Directorate of Peacebuilding and Conflict Management housed within the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government in the Office of the President.

While the organization runs a policy advocacy program, it strives to ensure that it is not perceived to be embracing partisan political stances but rather to be reflecting the national interest. This was demonstrated during the process of conceptualizing and drafting Kenya's national peace policy, in which the organization endeavored to emphasize how such a policy would benefit the community rather than taking sides politically. It relied on information compiled from stakeholder consultations and community memoranda to make policy proposals during this process.

RURAL WOMEN PEACE LINK (RWPL)

Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL) was begun in the early 1990s by a group of women peacebuilders working under the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK).²¹ Initially, RWPL began its work in the northern Rift Valley, which had become one of the most noted conflict hotspots in the country. The initiative was therefore meant to galvanize a critical constituency—rural women who had a passion for promoting peace—to build peace and prevent conflict at the grassroots level.

RWPL organized a historic women's conference shortly after its registration in 1999 at the Reformed Church of East Africa in Eldoret. The conference registered a lot of interest, bringing together over 100 women—ten from each of the hotspots in the region. These hotspots were the

areas most affected by post-election violence, and the women selected were active in peacebuilding efforts in their communities. Key outcomes of the women's conference included an agreement embraced by all participants to strengthen the network by reaching out to other women's organizations and actors such as local peacebuilding organizations, elders councils, and peace committees in the region and to robustly engage women on matters related to peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

By the end of 1999, RWPL had formed strong networks of women leaders in the northern Rift Valley of Kenya and had registered as a community-based organization (CBO).²² Its vision then was to help rural women to network, to build their self-esteem, and to empower them to promote and maintain peace in their respective areas of origin.

After increasing support and demand for programs, in 2011 RWPL grew from a CBO to an NGO registered under the NGO Coordination Act (1990). This enabled the organization to expand its programs to other counties, including parts of Nyanza Province (Kuria and Muhoroni), Western Province (Kwaza and Mount Elgon), and areas affected by land clashes, including Ainabkoi, Burnt Forest, Moiben, Moi's Bridge, Molo, Nakuru, Trans Mara, and Turbo.

RWPL is a network organization. Its network extends to seven counties, with eleven women network leaders. These leaders' main roles are to mobilize and monitor communities and organize responses, and they are instrumental in reporting early warning signs and mobilizing communities to take necessary peacebuilding action. RWPL is governed by a board of directors comprising women and men established in various fields, including lawyers, people working in finance, clergy, teachers, and community leaders. The secretariat, based in Eldoret in the west of Kenya, comprises an executive director, a deputy executive director, program officers, assistant program officers, a finance officer, and an office assistant.

19 PeaceNet, Strategic Plan 2014–2019.

20 These institutions, though governmental, are required by law to be nonpartisan and are prohibited from active participation in the country's political discourse; rather, they are mandated to work for the common good of all citizens in their respective areas of focus irrespective of their tribe, religion, or political persuasion.

21 Phone interview with Selline Korir, one of RWPL's founders, Nairobi, Kenya, December 19, 2017; information gathered from Emma Mogabak, senior staff member of RWPL, through an open-ended questionnaire.

22 CBOs by their nature are community-based, operating at the most local level.

RWPL's work is guided by five main pillars: (1) women's human rights, (2) women's economic empowerment, (3) peacebuilding and conflict mitigation, (4) education support and mentorship, and (5) leadership and governance. The women's human rights pillar focuses on advancing "recognition and appreciation of women's human rights in the communities against socio-cultural restrictions and negative perceptions." It does this through "training of rural based women and girls on their rights through community education on legal education; human rights reproductive health and issues of bodily integrity and increasing access to justice."²³

The women's economic empowerment pillar focuses on women in rural areas and female survivors of conflict and gender-based violence "to promote sustainable livelihood management through offering life skills and entrepreneurship; providing seed grant[s] to facilitate start-up activities; linkages to financial institutions, partners and donors; [and] following-up and psycho-social support."

Its peacebuilding and conflict mitigation pillar aims to "strengthen the role of rural women and youth groups in mitigating violence in the community, monitoring conflict through early warning indicators and mediating conflicts." Key policy frameworks guiding this work include UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace, and security.

RWPL's work on education support and mentorship aims to support and encourage beneficiaries, "mostly bright promising girls that are identified from vulnerable backgrounds to take up opportunities offered through formal education in schools and colleges."

Finally, the organization's leadership and governance initiatives mentor "women leaders through capacity building trainings and exposure to be able to participate in leadership effectively and vie for elected positions and other areas of [leadership]."

RWPL carries out projects aimed at increasing the number of elected women representatives at the county and national levels to conform to the

constitutional provisions requiring gender balance in elective and appointive state positions. The organization aims to influence the creation of a political, legal, and policy environment conducive to women's participation in governance and electoral processes. RWPL identifies women candidates and initiates mentorship programs that guide them through the electoral process. Further, RWPL carries out voter sensitization activities aimed at shifting the mindsets of communities about women's leadership.

RWPL works closely with the governments of the counties where its programmatic activities are implemented. This continuous collaboration and partnership has raised the profile of the organization, thereby giving local officeholders, policy-makers, and stakeholders confidence that it is a consistent and reliable organization promoting not just women's rights but also human rights generally.

Although RWPL promotes women's political engagement, it is a nonpolitical, nonpartisan entity. In implementing programs, the goal has always been to advocate for the inclusion of women in all leadership platforms without engaging in active political campaigns for individual candidates or political parties. This nonpartisanship is made clear to all stakeholders and beneficiaries at the inception of programs. Members are therefore not encouraged to play active roles in political party campaigns and power politics. Instead, they aim to inspire women candidates to rise to the occasion and compete for political positions. The organization claims not to have experienced political capture thus far. In order to prevent member organizations from losing interest in the network (which can happen when a network aligns itself with a political party or agenda), RWPL has made a concerted effort to define its boundaries with regard to engagement in political partisanship and activism.

Following the unprecedented 2007–2008 post-election violence, RWPL spearheaded one of the most innovative and effective conflict resolution initiatives in the country aimed at bringing communities together and bridging gaps. The

23 See <http://ruralwomenpeaceclink.org/our-pillars/>.

initiative covered some of the areas experiencing the worst conflict, including Uasin Gishu County (Burnt Forest, Kesses, Bindura, Turbo, Kipkaren, Kapsaret, Ya Mumbi, Kiambaa, and Eldoret) and Bungoma County–Mount Elgon (Cheptais, Kopsiro, and Kapsokwony). By convening peace dialogues among ordinary people and leaders' fora in these areas, RWPL gave women and youth a platform to engage with each other to air their grievances and suggest ways to prevent further violence. As a result, the organization has become recognized by diverse stakeholders as an effective change agent.

Several projects in the town of Burnt Forest in Uasin Gishu County demonstrate these initiatives. Around March 2008, RWPL conducted a series of dialogue meetings, exchange visits, and interactive solidarity forums for reconciliation to generate ideas for conflict resolution and peacebuilding to be shared with community leaders in Burnt Forest.²⁴ One dialogue resulted in the community reaching an agreement that there was a need to rebuild the market. RWPL signed an agreement with the town of Burnt Forest to manage its new market with a focus on promoting reconciliation and implementing peace activities. The market was opened on May 18, 2009, at a ceremony attended by then US Ambassador to Kenya Michael Ranneberger, providing a forum for leaders to encourage peace and reconciliation within the community.

RWPL teams also acted as a bridge between women in IDP camps in Burnt Forest and women who had remained in the villages, conveying between them their views on the violence and the possibility of intercommunity meetings. RWPL facilitated a letter-writing process between the women in the IDP camps, who were mostly from the Kikuyu community, and the women from the Kalenjin community who were not in IDP camps. The women were encouraged to express themselves, including by airing their grievances and suggesting sustainable ways of reconciling the communities and sustaining the peace. After a series of exchanges, the women met in a forum that started the journey toward rebuilding peace in

Burnt Forest.

Another unique innovation was a campaign to turn *boda boda* drivers, who are often perpetrators of gender-based violence, into champions of ending such violence.²⁵ This initiative targets young men who struggle to make a living operating *boda bodas*, aiming to make them male champions of the fight against gender-based violence. This helped to change the attitudes of *boda boda* riders toward women and girls.

The Advantages and Challenges of a Network Approach to Peacebuilding

Both Rural Women Peace Link and PeaceNet have had a significant impact on the political landscape of Kenya. The organizations have faced numerous challenges over the years, including lack of financial sustainability, which has made them highly dependent on donors. Nonetheless, they have sustained momentum and built their brands as peacebuilding networks in Kenya.

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKS

Working in networks and pursuing collaborative engagement is highly advantageous despite the challenges that often constrain such arrangements. Networks enable organizations to leverage one another's resources, thereby providing opportunities to achieve more with less. Most local organizations operate on very small budgets, primarily because they do not have access to large grant funding, which limits their conflict prevention programming. When these organizations take a network approach, they are able to leverage one another's resources to mobilize more resources from donors, which increasingly appear to favor collaborative programming.

In addition, networks enhance information and knowledge sharing among organizations on specific conflict situations, thereby facilitating better understanding of the conflicts at hand. This enables better targeting of resources. For example, the Uwiano Platform for Peace, one of PeaceNet's collaborative initiatives, demonstrated how limited

²⁴ Interactive solidarity forums were spaces where victims of violence living in IDP camps could interact with those who remained in the towns and villages for community-level dialogue aimed at reconciliation.

²⁵ *Boda bodas* are motorcycles or bicycles used for public transport.

resources can be effectively used through collaboration among partners in a network. Through collaboration, its partners were able to leverage one another's resources, including money and information, to achieve a common goal.

This knowledge sharing can also benefit international actors. For example, if international actors conduct joint conflict analysis with local practitioners, they can gain more accurate insight into the issues. Local practitioners usually carry out conflict analysis through participatory approaches, including community stakeholder fora. Networks' innovative use of technology, such as PeaceNet's Sauti Mashinani early warning system, can also benefit the conflict analyses of external actors. This platform crowdsources information and classifies the incidents based on type, location, and whether any action has been taken. The system enables analysis of local-level perceptions of conflicts and therefore generates knowledge on issues and possible responses.

Networks also promote the legitimacy and ownership of interventions by their partners. Partners collaborating at the grassroots level receive support from the network to implement ideas and interventions they own, making them more effective and sustainable. A good example is PeaceNet's collaboration with various governmental and nongovernmental actors under the Uwiano Platform for Peace, as elaborated earlier in this paper. Through its network partners, PeaceNet was able to rapidly mobilize interventions across the country to share information on the conflict situation at the local level and to undertake quick-response activities. Members undertook over 300 response actions and had ownership over the idea, which ensured the success of the initiative.

By functioning as networks, organizations are also able to penetrate communities and areas that would otherwise not be easy for single entities to reach, especially if they are non-local. By working with local-level network members, non-local members or supporters can gain a degree of acceptance and recognition that facilitates their access to information, resources, and space for engagement with communities.

For local actors, networks create avenues to link

them with international players by making their community-level work visible. This can raise the profiles of local initiatives and increase international actors' appreciation of local capacities for peace. Networks also help involve more voices in policy advocacy and awareness raising. RWPL, for example, has effectively brought on board the voices of rural women to discussions around UN Security Council Resolution 1310, raising their awareness of their rights and entitlements. The resulting sustained demands from women at the grassroots level have created visible movement toward incorporation of international policies and covenants into national law.

BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

From the experiences of PeaceNet and RWPL, together with those of similar network organizations, an overall view emerges of organizations struggling to sustain their relevance, strength, and spirit of cooperation. Instead, they tend to gradually evolve into operating more as single organizations than as a network. This can lead some of the individual members to eventually feel isolated or sidelined, especially regarding access to financial resources. Members that reach that point often become indifferent or informally withdraw their allegiance to the network.

As network secretariats grow, so does their need for sustainability and support. This growth can lead secretariats to directly implement projects and programs. This usually is faced with the disapproval of the network members, which anticipate support from the secretariat to implement their own programs. As a result, the secretariat can slowly turn into a competitor for the same grant resources as its members, thereby eroding the bonds of collaboration. This was particularly evident for PeaceNet, whose secretariat staff directly implemented several projects with minimal, if any, involvement of network members. An examination of other documents, including board minutes and committees' notes, also revealed that the organization had made attempts to rebrand itself as a network organization so it could create linkages with other organizations rather than to become a network with a defined membership.²⁶

²⁶ The idea of a membership organization was basically abandoned and replaced with a platform for supporting community-level networking. As a result, the secretariat turned into an independent organization directly implementing projects on the ground rather than through its network members.

Given that networks and collaborative efforts survive on donor funding, they are faced with the challenge of financial sustainability. Most projects are short- to medium-term, ranging between six months and two years, which for peacebuilding and conflict prevention work is not sufficient time to have a lasting effect. The level of funding also dwindles as more players enter the space, trying to tap into the same pot of resources. As a result, the successes realized by organizations through mostly short-term projects risk not surviving in the long run once funding ends, is withdrawn, or stops for any reason. A good example of this is the Peace in Kenya (PIK) initiative, which was a one-year intervention funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by PeaceNet, RWPL, and other partners. Its objective was to strengthen community-level networks across the country. Upon closure of the project, some of the gains made could not be carried forward due to lack of finances, leading some of the earlier achievements of the initiative to stagnate or fall apart entirely.

In addition, as networks grow in membership and geographical spread, many face challenges managing such large outfits with limited resources and increased expectations. They also encounter challenges managing the diversity of opinions and expectations of network members. This is usually displayed during the election of new leaders to the governing boards and the appointment of regional focal points.²⁷

Political activism and ethnic politics are another challenge for networks. Some individual members are influenced by or brought into party politics, which damages the credibility of the network in the eyes of the community. Members of some networks have been seen publicly endorsing certain candidates for political offices, which does not sit well with other colleagues in the network.

Systemic corruption within government institutions hinders some networks from progressing with implementation of projects. In PeaceNet, for example, a community cohesion project in Nairobi was nearly derailed as government operatives arm-twisted the project team for financial gain, which went against the contractual agreement with the

donor. Being critical community gatekeepers, such actors know the power they wield to facilitate the success or failure of such projects in their communities.

Nonetheless, in most cases, depending on the resilience of their leadership, networks find ways to constructively engage with government authorities, which earns them support from the government. In the case of PeaceNet and the threat to its community cohesion project in Nairobi, the network's leader and the chief of party of the international organization Global Communities employed diplomatic approaches with various government officials, leading to the successful implementation of the project.

Local networks in Kenya also face legitimacy questions given that there is no legal framework providing for their registration. All peace and development networks are registered either as trusts (under the Trustees Act), as NGOs (under the NGOs Coordination Act), or as companies limited by guarantee (under the Companies Act), which then vest ownership in a certain group of individuals who tend to hold office in perpetuity, causing internal friction among network members. PeaceNet is currently struggling with this lack of legal status as a network, which threatens to reverse progress made over the years. RWPL is also facing this challenge, as its legal status as an NGO does not reflect its network structure.

The main constraint on local networks for peace is sustainable financing. This makes them heavily dependent on external peace actors for funding. It is difficult to fundraise from local sources as there are few local philanthropists, and competition for their support is high. Therefore, networks have built relationships with international NGOs, donors, and other external actors primarily to secure funding.

Conclusions, Policy Lessons, and Recommendations

The fact that network organizations are already working with local organizations and have built trust and long-standing operational linkages with international organizations makes them ideal

²⁷ As an example, the majority of PeaceNet's elections for regional volunteer teams experienced intense campaigns and lobbying in some of the regions, which led to a near full confrontation reminiscent of past national electoral periods.

connectors between local and international peacebuilding actors. Additionally, their experience in implementing local projects endows them with a wealth of data and information that international actors require for building relationships and participating in peacebuilding efforts at various levels.

PeaceNet remains a brand name in peacebuilding programming in Kenya. While many other initiatives followed in its footsteps, most could not sustain their operations beyond a few years, primarily because their nature and setup were not as unique (with regard to the circumstances that led to their creation) and they were not needs-driven. Although PeaceNet has experienced many challenges over the years, it has become a household name in the peacebuilding and conflict prevention circles, and its immediate and long-term effects will be appreciated for a long time. Such goodwill is a great asset that needs to be tapped into and protected in order to anchor future peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

Rural Women Peace Link has proved to be an agenda-driven organization with great potential to promote peaceful coexistence among Kenyan communities. As opposed to many other women's network organizations operating in Kenya, its unique positioning at the grassroots level has earned the organization legitimacy and created spaces for local women to engage and participate in peace and development processes. However, the network needs to consolidate the gains it has made so far to ensure that, as it adopts a life of its own apart from its founders, its intended vision and mission remain in focus so as to enable it to have nationwide impact. It can do this by building capacity within its secretariat and among the network members in knowledge management and resource mobilization.

Overall, with better structuring and appropriate support, networks have enormous potential to stop the fragmentation of peace and development actors. The value of peace actors working in

networked teams is immense but depends on sustainable funding and consolidated resourcing from donors. Depending on the strength of the network structure, it is possible to overcome the fragmentation of peace and development actors as funding partners channel their support through the network. There is no guarantee, however, that strong networks will be a lasting solution or that their members will stick together, given the various dynamics that affect cohesion within networks. If networks are able to overcome these barriers, they can help ensure holistic and inclusive approaches to peacebuilding, with members involved in different programming areas building on each other's competencies, strengths, and focuses.

Based on the above analysis, this study makes the following recommendations for network organizations and their supporters and financiers:

1. **Promote dialogue and collaboration:** Networks and their supporters, within and outside of the organization should embrace regular structured dialogue and consultations with stakeholders to share experiences and innovative ideas, strengthening collaborative approaches to peace and development. Collaboration and networking are concepts that need to be nurtured and shaped in accordance with socio-political, economic, and technological changes.
2. **Build financial sustainability:** Donors also need to build networks' capacity for resource mobilization and to promote their financial sustainability. Most of the difficulties experienced by networks relate to inadequate resources to sustain themselves both institutionally and programmatically. Donors should fund not only project activities but also the secretariats, which require funding to enable the basic functioning of networks.
3. **Build capacity:** Founders and initiators of network initiatives should run regular programs to build the capacity of network members in governance, leadership, and knowledge management.

Building Networks for Peace in Liberia

Aaron Weah¹

Introduction and Context

On March 30, 2018, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) completed its nearly fifteen years of peacekeeping operations in the country. The end of UNMIL's mission marked a successful end of a peacekeeping mission in West Africa.² Liberia has since made significant progress consolidating its peace, including by rebuilding institutions through security sector reform, judicial reform, and improved rule of law and restoring basic public services.

Despite these gains, public trust in the government has not yet been restored.³ In 2009, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report, which determined that the country's political elites were most culpable for the civil war's violence and destruction, while ordinary Liberians, especially women, children, and the elderly, were the victims.⁴ A recent empirical study revealed that unaddressed national grievances remain threats to the country's long-term stability.⁵ Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed echoed this

point in her closing remarks at the March 2018 national reconciliation conference: "Peace has been achieved, but if it is to be sustained, [Liberians] must engage in confidence-building measures that establish a solid foundation to long-lasting peace, and this can be assured through reconciliation."⁶

Fears that Liberia would relapse into violent conflict seem to have been assuaged by an enduring attitude of "maintaining the peace."⁷ While national peace and reconciliation efforts have fallen into abeyance, civil society groups have mobilized to restore hope that despite the lack of concrete action toward reconciliation at the macro level, informal practices of social cohesion and reconciliation at the micro level are important alternatives. And while the country has come close to the brink of crisis, facing challenges such as post-election disturbances in 2017, the Ebola outbreak in 2014, and episodic violence, peacebuilding networks have been working to inspire trust and confidence among the population.⁸

The contribution of peacebuilding networks to Liberia's postwar stability has been underreported.

1 Aaron Weah is an activist with more than fourteen years of programming experience in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and transitional justice. He has worked with local civil society groups and international NGOs and has served as a policy analyst for the government of Liberia. In Liberia, he actively participated in the formation of Liberia's Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG), a civil society coalition supporting the establishment of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He is currently an active member of the African Transitional Justice Research Network and has published a number of scholarly papers in academic journals. He holds a master's degree in international relations and serves as a part-time lecturer at the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAICT) at the University of Liberia. Weah is partially assigned in the Gambia helping civil society organize a Transitional Justice Working Group to support that country's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. Full time, he serves as Country Director for Search for Common Ground in Liberia.

2 Search for Common Ground, Local Voices for Inclusive Reconciliation in Liberia, Final Narrative Report; see also rapporteurs notes on the national reconciliation conference, 22-23 March 2018. 22, 2018, available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/dsg/statement/2018-03-22/deputy-secretary-generals-remarks-national-peace-and-reconciliation.

3 See government of Liberia and United Nations Mission in Liberia, Transition Plan, 2016; and Statement of Mutual Commitment between UNMIL and the government of Liberia.

4 The report called for, among other things, the establishment of an extraordinary criminal tribunal and reparation trust funds for victims and public sanction of people recommended for prosecution. Specifically, it named prominent Liberian politicians that it recommended to be the subject of public sanctions, including former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a sitting associate justice of the Supreme Court, some members of the legislature, and past government officials. See Paul James-Allen, Aaron Weah, and Lizzie Goodfriend, "Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Transitional Justice Options in Liberia," International Center for Transitional Justice, May 2010, available at www.ictj.org/publication/beyond-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-transitional-justice-options-liberia; and Aaron Weah, "Hope and Uncertainty: Liberia's Journey to End Impunity," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 2 (2012).

5 US Agency for International Development, "Liberia Conflict Vulnerability Assessment: Final Report," May 2016, available at [http://democracyinternational.com/media/Liberia%20Conflict%20Assessment%20Final%20Report%20\(External\).pdf](http://democracyinternational.com/media/Liberia%20Conflict%20Assessment%20Final%20Report%20(External).pdf).

6 Search for Common Ground, Local Voices for Inclusive Reconciliation in Liberia, Final Narrative Report; see also rapporteur's notes on the national reconciliation conference, 22-23 March 2018.

7 Ibid.; Interpeace, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Center of Studies for Peace and Development, and Platform for Dialogue and Peace, "Assessing Resilience for Peace: Guidance Note," April 2016, available at www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-FAR-Guidance-note-Assesing-Resilience-for-Peace-v7.pdf.

8 The Civil Society Organization Ebola Response Task Force was the largest network of civil society. It conducted outreach and disseminated information to address citizens' mistrust in the government, which had contributed to the rapid spread of the disease. The Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR) also played a vital role in the dissemination of facts about Ebola when citizens refused to listen to the government. Hence, civil society networks and community radio broadcasters had a profound impact on making citizens believe Ebola was truly in Liberia and therefore in reducing and eventually halting the transmission of the deadly virus. International Crisis Group, "The Politics behind the Ebola Crisis," October 28, 2015, available at www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/politics-behind-ebola-crisis.

The notion that non-state actors have played a bigger role than has been acknowledged is documented by the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index, which finds that

societal organizations and institutions receive the highest level of trust from people. While the organs of the state such as the legislature, the Supreme Court, Magisterial Courts, Local Authorities, [and] Police are, to some degree, mistrusted by over 50% of people. On the other hand, social-based institutions and leaders: Christian leaders (88%); Muslim leaders (72%); civil society organizations (71%); Palava Hut (62%) all have much higher credibility among people.⁹

While these findings reveal a strong relationship between citizens and non-state actors (including civil society groups), they also indicate deteriorating social cohesion between citizens and state actors.¹⁰

In line with these findings, this paper will look at the role of two peacebuilding networks in Liberia: the Security Sector Reform Working Group (SSRWG) and the Peace Huts. The SSRWG is focused on reforming the security sector by shifting from a predatory culture toward democratic control of security forces and on rebranding it by shifting public perception. The Peace Huts started with the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, a campaign led by rural and urban women to fight against Liberia's destructive civil war and call for peace and reconciliation in the country.¹¹ This paper analyzes the two case studies with a view to contributing to knowledge of civil society involvement in peacebuilding in Liberia and how the international community can better support these networks during this time of change for the country.

Case Studies: Networks for Peace in Liberia

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM WORKING GROUP (SSRWG)¹²

The Security Sector Reform Working Group (SSRWG) is an umbrella network organization with three main programmatic focuses: (1) legislative advocacy, (2) awareness raising, and (3) civil society capacity building.¹³ The network is diverse, comprised of pro-democracy groups, women's rights organizations, community security fora, labor organizations, and associations of retired and active security personnel. It is made up of eleven civil society organizations.¹⁴

For everyday coordination and decision making, the SSRWG maintains a simple structure, led by a secretariat composed of a coordinator, assistant coordinator, and secretary.¹⁵ For coordination purposes, each member organization has a focal person represented at meetings, while the secretariat runs the day-to-day operations of the network as a whole.

Over the last decade, the SSRWG has faced a variety of challenges, with limited funding remaining a key obstacle to its sustainability. The goal of the network is to ensure civil society participation in the reform of Liberia's security sector. It also aims to improve the security sector's relations with communities, including by rebranding its image, repealing old repressive laws, and introducing legislation that supports citizen oversight.¹⁶ In addition, the network works to engender constructive engagement between

9 Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index for Liberia, 2016, available at <http://scoreforpeace.org/en/liberia/2016-General%20population-1>. The indicators mentioned can be found under "other indicators" labeled "confidence in." Email correspondence with Ilke Dagli, head of operations for the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) and the manager of the SCORE Index, May 28, 2018.

10 Search for Common Ground, "Preventing Election Violence through Early Warning and Early Response in Guinea and Liberia," July 2016.

11 *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, directed by Gini Reticker (2008; New York: Balcony Releasing, 2008).

12 Much of the information in this section was drawn from the working group's framework and documents. The author has been engaged with the working group in varying capacities. From 2004 to 2007, he worked for the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) as a Program Associate. CEDE was one of the founding members of the SSRWG. In 2006, he visited Accra, Ghana, to document lessons from the country's transition from military to civilian rule. Between 2007 and 2011, he worked for the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). The ICTJ provided technical support to civil society organizations and specifically to the SSRWG. Presently, he serves as Country Director for Search for Common Ground, which is partnering with the SSRWG on a number of fronts. He also interviewed Cecil Griffiths, Coordinator of SSRWG and President of the Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA), and Dr. Thomas Jaye, Deputy Head, Research Department, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre.

13 Interview with Cecil Griffiths, Monrovia, Liberia, April 4, 2018.

14 Its members are the Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA), Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), Voice of the Voiceless (VOV), Community Watch Forum of Liberia, Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association (LIFLEA), Labor Congress of Liberia, Criminal Investigation Division of Liberia National Police, Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), and Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (FOHRD).

15 Interview with Cecil Griffiths, Monrovia, Liberia, April 4, 2018.

16 Ibid.

citizens and security authorities through technical training.¹⁷

The rationale for bringing together civil society to form this network rose out of the lessons learned from civil society advancing security policy in other post-conflict countries.¹⁸ In 2006, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), an NGO based in New York, provided funding for the SSRWG to go on a study tour to learn from the experience of Sierra Leonean civil society. Following the study tour and based on some of the findings, the ICTJ suggested that Liberian civil society organizations consider establishing a network or consortium to champion the reform process.

The reason for focusing on security policy emerged from the need for alternative views on how to advance security sector reform in Liberia. In 2007, the Rand Corporation launched an important report entitled “Making Liberia Safe: Transformation of the National Security Sector.”¹⁹ The report recommended a significant adjustment to the security architecture: reducing the numerical strength of the security sector to an affordable size and rationalizing the security agencies to avoid overlapping functions.

While the propositions advanced by the report appeared feasible, the criteria for implementing them were unclear, and civil society groups wanted a more open discourse on the reform process. However, the government maintained that postwar security reform was the exclusive prerogative of the state.²⁰ The predatory role of the security agencies during the war, coupled with lack of knowledge among civil society organizations and policy-makers on the issues under discussion, raised a number of concerns. The SSRWG was created to fill this gap and provide alternative policies on security sector reform. SSRWG received funding

support from a variety of donors and international organizations.

In June 2016, UNMIL handed over full responsibility for security to the government of Liberia. With one year until the presidential and legislative elections, public anxiety was rife over a potential relapse into conflict in the absence of UN security forces. A baseline study led by Search for Common Ground for early warning and early response predicted that the 2017 presidential and legislative elections would be marred by violence and that much of that violence would take place in Monrovia.²¹ Counties along the borders were highlighted as being exposed to a similar risk, though not to the same extent as in Monrovia, where one third of the country’s population resides. The study also determined that citizens expressed little confidence in the police and wider security sector in the absence of UNMIL.

In response, the working group trained civil society actors in southeastern Liberia to monitor the transition plan developed by UNMIL and the government.²² Members of the SSRWG also formed part of the Early Warning and Early Response Working Group. The mission of the working group was to foster collaboration among actors engaged in early warning. It comprised thirty-two organizations united to conduct conflict analysis, early warning, and prevention. Reports on early warning are generated by more than 100 monitors using eighty-six indicators. Reports generated are sent to the Liberia Early Warning and Response Network (LERN).²³

The SSRWG launched an awareness-raising campaign to enhance public trust in the police with a view to reducing tension and increasing collaboration. In partnership with the Professional Standards Division of the Liberia National Police, the SSRWG established a platform to facilitate the

17 Ibid.

18 After the second Liberian civil war (which ended in 2003), civil society organizations were disorganized as a result of the war and there was no overarching structure to help garner support for advocacy efforts, especially in areas such as security sector reform. LINLEA, CEDE, FOHRD, and the Labor Congress of Liberia were among the few organizations campaigning for the promotion of democratic control of the security forces.

19 Rand Corporation is an American-based security think tank that was hired by the US Government to advise Liberia on the rebuilding of the security sector. David C. Gompert et al., “Making Liberia Safe: Transformation of the National Security Sector,” Rand Corporation, June 2007, available at www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG529.html.

20 In a public address in 2006, Brownie Samukai, former minister of defense, indicated that matters of national security were required to remain classified and not open to the general public or civil society for input.

21 Search for Common Ground, “Preventing Election Violence through Early Warning and Early Response in Guinea and Liberia.”

22 Search for Common Ground, with funding from the Swedish International Development Agency, collaborated with the SSRWG to train and launch a southeastern Liberia chapter of the working group in Grand Gedeh County.

23 To learn more about LERN, see: www.lern.ushahidi.com.

submission of complaints of abuses committed by police against citizens. The objective was to hold police publicly accountable in an effort to repair their negative public image and rebuild citizens' trust in the force. Prior to this, citizens were limited in their ability to complain. To report police misconduct, they had to physically appear at a depot or station to put down a written statement. The lack of an open channel for citizen-police dialogue or for pursuing police accountability through the judiciary had found expression in violence such as vigilantism or arson attacks on police stations across the country.²⁴

To open up this reporting channel, this platform only required people to text the badge number of the officer, location of the offense, and depot or name of the officer, if known. In less than two months (January and February 2016) following the implementation of the new platform, the system recorded 781 complaints against the police, compared to 729 recorded for all of 2015.²⁵ This highlighted citizens' eagerness to constructively engage the police on their misconduct and the crucial role of civil society in facilitating such dialogue. Many of the complaints reported through this platform, however, are yet to be publicly reviewed, and there has been no concrete action to increase citizens' participation in the reform and discipline of the police.

To further share information and raise awareness, the working group holds a regular lecture series, the Wilfred Clarke Lectures. The forum is named in commemoration of Colonel Wilfred E. Clarke, who served as director general of the Liberia National Police from 1982 to 1990 and is considered to have operated with integrity and transparency. The lecture series is attended by civil society activists, criminal justice practitioners, and government ministers and is used as a forum to disseminate critical information on the security sector and rule of law in Liberia.²⁶

Lastly, the working group advocates for the professionalization of the police force and campaigns for it to be depoliticized. For example, SSRWG is advocating for appointment of senior police officers on the basis of merit rather than political considerations, as over the last ten years police directors have been appointed from outside the police force rather than from within. Civil society is also campaigning for a tenure system within the security sector to avoid drastic changes every time there is new political leadership. However, the last two appointments of police directors have come from within the police force. Cecil Griffiths, the coordinator of SSRWG and himself a former senior police officer, thinks the new trend of appointment from within is positive and should be applauded.²⁷

In 2015, in partnership with the Liberia National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA), the working group submitted a draft Civilian Oversight Bill to the legislature. This law would ensure robust independent civilian oversight of the entire security sector. Inspired by the working group's thinking around civilian involvement, the Senate and House committees provided for a Civilian Complaints Review Board in the Liberia National Police Act passed in 2016. Within the security sector, this has given the SSRWG considerable recognition.

PEACE HUTS

The Peace Huts are an informal network that comprise an estimated 23,000 individual members and are established in thirteen of Liberia's fifteen counties.²⁸ In terms of governance and decision making, the network is operated by a secretariat composed of a president, vice president, general secretary, and financial secretary. The Peace Huts were created as a forum for women to discuss issues that affected them during the war. Unlike other networks such as the SSRWG, the majority of the Peace Huts' members are women who suffered the brutality of the Liberian civil war first-hand,

24 "UN Peacekeepers Stop 'Mob Justice' in Liberia," IOL, February 14, 2008, available at www.iol.co.za/news/africa/un-peacekeepers-stop-mob-justice-in-liberia-389189.

25 The SSRWG received funding support from Search for Common Ground through Making All Voices Count (MAVC). Making All Voices Count was funded by Hivos. The project was designed as a pilot.

26 The African Methodist Episcopal Zion University, Liberia, established a college in honor of Wilfred E. Clarke, who is regarded as the father of modern policing in Liberia.

27 Interview, Cecil Griffiths, April 4, 2018, Monrovia, Liberia

28 Interview with Bernice Freeman, director of advocacy for WIPNET, and Philip Kollie, head of programs at WANEP, Monrovia, Liberia, April 11, 2018. WANEP supports the Peace Huts as one of its program areas.

and they now work to advance the socioeconomic conditions of their members.²⁹ This approach is new and uncommon for networks in Liberia, the focuses of which, by-and-large, are normally programmatic and administrative.

The history of the Peace Huts is inextricably linked to that of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, a women's social movement that contributed to the end of the civil war in Liberia. The idea of the Peace Huts evolved after the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement as a way for women to unite and hold the government accountable for the promises made in the agreement.

The Peace Huts process derives from the Palava Hut process. Like the Gacaca courts in Rwanda, the Palava Hut is Liberia's traditional mechanism for dispute resolution at the subnational level. It is a historical relic of Liberia but still very relevant today. In the past, whereas the statutory legal system was used in urban Liberia, the Palava Hut was used in rural parts. In response to the over-centralization of Liberia in Monrovia, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended that the Palava Hut be used as a mechanism for truth telling, atonement, and rehabilitation. Although the Palava Hut process is recognized for the critical role it played in providing social order, it has been criticized for excluding women and youth from its process of administration. During a 2010 conference at the Carter Center, the traditional chief complained that the process has received less recognition and cooperation from youth, thus putting its legitimacy into question.³⁰

The Peace Huts evolved to address these shortcomings and serve as a model for resolving disputes not only at the subnational but also at the national level.³¹ They are envisioned as a platform to discuss issues that affected women during the war—a space to address broader issues of peace and conflict in which the concerns of women feature prominently. Through the model pioneered by the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, the

Peace Huts gained a strong reputation for advocacy, building a community to support women in postwar Liberia.³² They also developed a culture of discipline, as demonstrated by the tenacity of women to convene during the war and stand for several months in protest until a peace deal was secured. Unlike the Palava Hut, young and older women are involved in decision making.

The network is engaged in farming, village saving schemes, and other initiatives designed to empower its members and to ensure it is self-sufficient. For example, the village saving schemes work like a trust fund where network members combine their resources then give them to one person to start up a business. The fund is intended to provide microfinancing support to network members. Every fund provided to a member is intended to be a loan but does not accrue interest like regular commercial bank financing mechanisms. Over time, the network member is expected to pay back the funds originally borrowed.³³ The amount returned is later passed on to another member of the network. The funds can be used, for example, to start up farming projects or soap- or bead-making businesses. Proceeds from these initiatives are used for the upkeep of members. In instances when there have been challenges with repayment, the network leadership has simply drawn up new deadlines and a repayment plan to ensure full payback.

The network focuses on a range of issues, including rape, domestic violence, access to justice, and land rights. For example, in order to stop corrupt police from pressuring or manipulating witnesses to produce misleading facts, the Peace Huts provide oversight in the statement-taking process to ensure witnesses or alleged victims have full representation in the police station and court. In the court, similar oversight is provided to avoid intimidation of witnesses or victims.³⁴

The Peace Huts also engage in protest actions. According to a recent Global Witness report,

29 Ibid.

30 Aaron Weah and John Christopher Louise, "Building Conflict Resilience Capacities through Social Cohesion and Conflict Transformation Strategies in Liberia," Liberia Development Conference Anthology, Embassy of Sweden, US Agency for International Development, and University of Liberia, 2018.

31 Liberian Independent National Commission on Human Rights, "Ethnographic Study Report," 2016.

32 Interview with Bernice Freeman and Philip Kollie, Monrovia, Liberia, April 11, 2018.

33 Ibid.

34 Interview with Bernice Freeman and Philip Kollie, Monrovia, Liberia, April 11, 2018.

members of Liberia's fifty-third legislature and former cabinet ministers received bribes to expedite a deal for a mining concession.³⁵ The report was publicly condemned and justice demanded. One of the persons implicated in the report was the speaker of the House of Representatives. This led to a stalemate in the legislature because some members wanted the speaker to resign his position, and he refused. The Peace Huts intervened through a protest action, shutting down normal legislative operations until the speaker was removed.³⁶

Analysis

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKS

One of the main advantages of the two networks studied here is that they brought together people and organizations from diverse backgrounds. These two networks benefited from a diverse range of expertise. Diversity in membership gave them a variety of capacities and knowledge bases to draw from. In the Peace Huts, some of the women are lawyers, while other are farmers. This dynamic is a reflection of how one part of the membership is grounded in everyday local knowledge, while the other is knowledgeable about policy and governance. This expertise in both local and national issues allows for complementarity between and access at both levels.

The same can be said about the SSRWG, where half of the membership is retired security personnel whose vision for reform is driven by their experiences and the need for greater professional standards, whereas the other half is traditional civil society activists guided by principles and values of democracy and governance. These two perspectives operate in symbiosis, with retired security personnel providing valuable insight into and analysis of the security context and civil society activists shedding light on the comparative experiences of other post-conflict societies.

Beyond professional diversity, these networks are also ethnically diverse. As a result, they can also address group stereotypes held by their members, such as through the collective financing practiced

by the Peace Huts. The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index revealed that more than 60 percent of Liberians perceive certain ethnic group to be violent, between 39 and 45 percent (depending on the ethnic group) reject intermarriage between ethnic groups, and 54 percent will not vote for candidates that belong to certain ethnic groups.³⁷ These perceptions are driven by the legacy of the war and the violent memories it invokes. Because of their ethnic diversity, these networks are microcosms of postwar Liberia. This enables them to lead efforts to transcend ethnic stereotypes, repair damaged social relations, and reduce the social distance between certain ethnic groups.

These case studies suggest that through diverse membership, networks can also facilitate pursuit of a more holistic approach to peacebuilding. The Peace Huts are a good example of a network that pursues a dual strategic agenda. On the one hand, it pursues economic welfare programs for its members by raising funds internally for start-up businesses, while on the other, it pursues a more high-level agenda of peacebuilding and community development. This approach contributes to strong internal cohesion among members, addressing both peace and development needs simultaneously.

Another value of networks is that they can allow smaller organizations with limited reach to have broader impact. This can help maximize the impact of efforts and contribute to a more sustainable outcome. For example, compared to individual organizations, networks can take stronger positions on national issues and drive public opinion. Networks can also help link local and international actors. International organizations often need local groups as allies to put pressure on the government, and local actors can access international policymakers through their international partners.

CHALLENGES FACING NETWORKS

However, networks also face many challenges and obstacles in their effort to be sustainable. Donor fatigue is one of the most prominent challenges. In the immediate postwar era, funding was provided as part of international reconstruction efforts. The

35 Phil Edmonds and Andrew Groves, "The Deceivers," Global Witness, May 2016, available at www.globalwitness.org/thedeceivers/.

36 Interview with Bernice Freeman and Philip Kollie, Monrovia, Liberia, April 11, 2018.

37 Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index for Liberia, 2016, available at <http://scoreforpeace.org/en/liberia/2016-General%20population-1>.

presence of UNMIL also offered some legitimacy to network operations. In support of government priorities, UNMIL was organized around themes such as the security sector, rule of law, and consolidation of the peace. These programming areas aligned with the government's short- and long-term agenda. Accordingly, donor organizations supported networks that were organizing around similar issues.

UNMIL's departure in March 2018, however, has brought about a shift from protecting the peace as part of the country's transition to consolidating gains. In such an environment, fewer traditional donors may support networks, and networks may have to shift their ideas for programming to align with the changing context. For example, during the early periods of Liberia's security sector reform efforts, the SSRWG received funding support from multiple donor sources. However, its funding has since dwindled because of donors' changes in priority and the fact that some have moved on.

Lack of funding can be a major impediment to the functioning of a network. It is rare that network secretariats have direct funding for activities and outreach, and thus the work of a network can be driven by organizations with large amounts of funding. Smaller organizations may be less active and struggle to raise funds. Lack of a clear vision for a network's financial sustainability can lead to attrition of critical human resources. With limited resources, networks can also easily become overstretched and take on too many things at the same time, which often negatively affects the quality of their work.

Uneven human resource capacity is pervasive in networks across Liberia. Individuals or leaders with dominant views on how the network should be run are likely to disproportionately influence its strategic direction. This was observed in the SSRWG, where retired or active security officers dominate the network agenda and skew it in favor of police reform. Similarly, in many networks, small organizations are overpowered by larger ones. There is a need to ensure that the mandate of a network is inclusive of the needs of all members.

Networks also often struggle to adapt their mandate to changes in the context where they operate. Even though the issues they are advocating for sometimes change, some networks do not often

reflect on their strategy or position. Some networks are formed in response to an emergency or to expedite a short-term goal. Networks formed under such circumstances need to undergo a more deliberate reflection of their strategy and impact with the view of reorganizing for the medium and long term. Otherwise, they may appear inconsistent and out of touch and can be susceptible to manipulation and influence. In post-conflict societies where the context is rapidly evolving and in a state of flux, monitoring the development and adapting strategic objectives accordingly are critical to networks ensuring their relevance.

Another common challenge is poor, non-inclusive leadership. For example, some networks do not meet regularly. Rather, they are operated from the center, usually by a secretariat, and decision making is left in the hands of a few people. This dynamic makes networks vulnerable to maneuvering and manipulation. The SSRWG is a good example of this, as it only meets regularly when there is a specific project or strategic event. Such meetings involve planning and specific timelines for implementation. After such an event, the organizations retreat to their own offices until another initiative or undertaking requires collaborative engagement.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

For networks to overcome these challenges, they need to take a number of actions:

1. **Networks' positions on critical issues have to be clear and to resonate with the public.** In international and domestic politics, having a coherent position and clear organizing principles is critical in order to send a strong message. Grounding interventions in strong knowledge of the context and best practices is a powerful strategy for making positions resonate at both the national and international level.
2. **Networks need to continuously reorient themselves toward their common purpose.** This requires networks to regularly bring their members together to explain the cause and the need to sacrifice to achieve it.
3. **Sustaining networks beyond donor funding is critical.** Networks and civil society groups are

increasingly being starved of donor funds. Every network needs to anticipate and prepare for how to address this so it does not become disruptive.

4. **Networks need to identify like-minded agents of change that could further their objectives.** Such agents could include the legislature or local governments to support their position on key issues.

5. **Networks must pay attention to shifts in the local environment.** Even though the issues they are advocating for sometimes change, networks do not often reflect on their strategy or position. To avoid this, they need to have an institutional framework, working methods, and governance structures to drive and guide them to adapt over time.

Lessons from Community-Led Peacebuilding in South Africa

Masana Ndinga-Kanga¹

Introduction

During the past twenty years of democracy in South Africa, a variety of local initiatives have sought to play a role promoting peace. They have used different models of engagement, have different constituencies, and network across communities in various configurations.

One of the earliest examples of this network approach in the post-apartheid era was the local peace committees, which sought to create opportunities for constructive conflict resolution and to quell political violence during the transition in the early 1990s. Mandated by the National Peace Accord in September 1991, the local peace committees formed part of a comprehensive, multi-sector commitment to ending high levels of violence, with a particular focus on reforming and reframing the role of and responsibility for security and policing services. The successes of the committees included resolving taxi wars, rent-related conflicts in townships, consumer boycotts, and hospital strikes across the country, with notable success in the greater Johannesburg area, Northern Province, and Transvaal.

Within this context, peacebuilding is taken to mean interventions designed to directly address conflict and violence through mechanisms that can include mediation, psychosocial support, policing, and early-warning systems. Since the first post-apartheid elections in 1994, peacebuilding networks have diminished significantly across the country. Nonetheless, contemporary examples of local initiatives making use of networks have included the Treatment Action Campaign (working on healthcare, particularly HIV/AIDs),

Reclaim the City (working on housing), and Equal Education (working on education). These have functioned across the country in a manner that is issue-specific and not directly focused on peace. Other examples of local networks also include organizations that focus on particular members of society, such as Abahlali base Mjondolo (mobilizing shack dwellers) and Khulumani Support Group (supporting victims of apartheid).

A more recent phenomenon is smaller networks, generally under the leadership of a local, professionalized NGO, such as the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation's local community action groups in four communities in Gauteng and North West Province and the Social Justice Coalition's branches in Western Cape Province. These are more directly peace-oriented and multi-issue-focused, pursuing participatory and consensus-building approaches to conflict issues.

Some of these initiatives have actively sought formal relationships with the government, both to increase their legitimacy and to secure regular sources of funding. But many community-led peacebuilding networks are short-lived, in part because their limited resources prevent them from being scaled up to the national level to bring together communities that are far removed from one another but face similar issues.²

This report explores one of these peacebuilding networks in contemporary South Africa: the Community Action Groups (CAGs), which were convened by a formal nongovernmental organization called the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVSR).³ CSVSR formed the CAGs as a formal network, and it serves as the central body that facilitates shared learning and develop-

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² This gap in cross-country networks around peace and security issues can be explained by the institutionalized disconnect during apartheid, whereby "homelands" were created through ethnic demarcation of the different provinces of South Africa. Furthermore, movement was restricted across the country, which limited informal links among communities. As a result, the urban center became the place for diverse, multilingual connections.

³ This case study is informed by research conducted between 2016 and 2017 at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, which made use of interviews with key community activists, CSVSR practitioners, and partners involved in the Community-Led Intervention to Counter Authority-Based Urban Violence (ABUV) and the Urban Violence Prevention through Public Employment projects. The research conducted in these projects was funded by the Raith Foundation and the International Development and Research Centre. For more, see www.CSVR.org.za.

ment across them to ensure they are working toward common peacebuilding objectives.⁴ This report unpacks the role the CAGs can play in ending violence and the structural, political, and economic challenges they face.

Context

In recent years, local-level conflicts have been a prominent feature of South Africa's political and socioeconomic terrain. Political violence has been a jarring component of recent local and national elections, with reports that thirty-six politically motivated killings have taken place since early 2016.⁵ Such violence also exists in the context of socioeconomic deprivation. Service-delivery protests have been on the rise in the last decade, peaking in 2014.⁶ Research by CSVr in 2011 found that violent service-delivery protests were a continuation of historical collective mobilization. Communities used these protests to escalate their grievances to politicians who tended not to respond to their needs in the absence of violence.⁷

The communities most likely to experience service-delivery protests and political violence are also marked by high levels of violent crime, including domestic violence, assault, and drug-related crimes.⁸ Some of these historically black or "colored" (mixed-race) communities or newer informal settlements also have fewer resources devoted to policing and to social services.⁹ The resulting criminal violence, poor service delivery, and lack of social cohesion are all factors that can lead to violent protests.

It is against this backdrop that local efforts to address grievances have continued to play a role in democratic processes in South Africa. Formal and

informal organizations working in communities across the country have attempted to grapple with some of the underlying drivers of conflict and to promote sustainable, positive peace. Their role has included opening up space for direct engagement with local, national, and international audiences on core socioeconomic grievances and using collective mobilization as a tool for change. Such organizations range from national movements like the Treatment Action Campaign to grassroots efforts in specific communities like Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack-dwellers movement in Kwazulu-Natal.

Mapping Local Networks for Peace in South Africa

This paper focuses on the Community Action Groups (CAGs), a network that works to build a society that is free of violence, inclusive, and able to support sustainable peace. They demonstrate: (1) how local actors engage in peacebuilding under a central banner; and (2) how networks are shaped by local needs, donor agendas, and organizational priorities. While they tend not to engage beyond the local and regional levels due to resourcing and capacity constraints, they also demonstrate the potential for a more robust national network.¹⁰ The CAGs are focused on building peace but also underscore the role of economic inclusion in contributing to long-term peace.

CSVr formed the Community Action Groups (CAGs) in 2011 to prevent violence and heal its effects. They functioned in four communities: Ekangala, Kagiso, Johannesburg's inner city, and Marikana. The CAGs help communities address emerging issues related to violence and its preven-

4 There are two main types of network organizations: (1) umbrella networks, made up of member organizations grouped together under a common alliance; and (2) single-organization networks, made up of chapters, district offices, or village-level committees that are all part of the same organization.

5 Niels Posthumus, "De Dodelijke Slag om het Geld an de Macht Binnen Het ANC," *Trouw Online Newspaper*, November 6, 2017, available at www.trouw.nl/democratie/de-dodelijke-slag-om-het-geld-en-de-macht-binnen-het-anc~ad010cd7/.

6 Nomahlubi Jordaan, "Gauteng Accounts for Most Service-Delivery Protests," *Times Live*, October 24, 2017, available at www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-10-24-gauteng-accounts-for-most-service-delivery-protests-research/; Karl von Holdt et al., "The Smoke That Calls: Insurgent Citizenship, Collective Violence and the Struggle for a Place in the New South Africa," Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) and Society, Work and Development Institute, July 2011, available at www.csvr.org.za/publications/2509-the-smoke-that-calls-insurgent-citizenship-and-the-struggle-for-a-place-in-the-new-south-africa.

7 Von Holdt, "The Smoke That Calls."

8 For a detailed analysis of violence against women in South Africa, see Nonhlanhla Sibanda-Moyo, Eleanor Khonje, and Maame Kyerewaa Brobbey, "Violence against Women in South Africa: A Country in Crisis," CSVr, April 2017, available at www.csvr.org.za/publications/2735-violence-against-women-in-sa; and Statistics South Africa, "Victims of Crime Survey 2016/2017," September 2017, available at www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10521.

9 Mary-Anne Gontsana, "Policing System Discriminates against Black Women, Court Told," *GroundUp*, November 30, 2017, available at www.groundup.org.za/article/day-2-sjc-case/?platform=hootsuite.

10 On the divide-and-conquer system of rule under apartheid, see Ira Shor, "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction & Inequality," *Journal of Basic Writing* 16, no. 1 (1997).

tion through awareness raising, multi-sectoral network building, and, in some cases, early warning of impending conflict. Their work focused on “the prevention of violence, especially torture and its negative effects, as well as the provision of psychosocial support to traumatized communities from a community-based model.”¹¹

The first step in creating the CAGs was to draw on local expertise. Community-level stakeholder meetings identified male and female leaders of various ages already directly or indirectly engaged in peacebuilding work and often linked to existing organizations. Communities then nominated individuals to serve in the action groups, and these individuals were trained and offered psychosocial support. Participants in the action groups are called community psychosocial supporters and report to community facilitators employed by CSVR. These facilitators in turn provide support and training for peacebuilding interventions. Both the supporters and the facilitators are deeply embedded in the communities, with the former often being residents of the communities they work in. They also serve as the interface between CSVR and the communities.

While not self-identifying as a single network organization, the CAGs demonstrate network characteristics. They are community-level committees supported by a main organization in conducting local interventions. In addition, the CAGs from the four communities frequently convene in capacity-building and psychosocial-wellness workshops and in “cross-pollination” meetings where all participants share lessons learned. The CAGs are informal structures (in that they are not registered) but are able to access resources, information, and support from a more formal organization (CVR). The CAGs focus not only on addressing the drivers of violence and the effects of violence on communities but also on raising awareness of its primary drivers.

The CAGs support peacebuilding and violence prevention by increasing access to rehabilitation services for participants within communities. These services provide support and care to victims of violence and torture and often create referral

networks for appropriate care and support.¹² To date, providing such community-led psychosocial support remains an innovative way to address the effects of torture and violence. Individuals within the CAGs who have experienced trauma can both access and give psychosocial support. These initiatives and services are targeted equally at men and women, typically between the ages of 19 and 35.¹³ The main targets of these interventions are South Africans (76 percent), with those remaining consisting of foreign nationals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Zimbabwe, and other African countries.

Other CAG-led initiatives have included working with school systems, traditional leaders, local governments, and other formal and informal organizations to create a common understanding of the drivers and impact of violence. The main contribution of such awareness-raising campaigns has been a discursive shift around violent activity, specifically as it pertains to gender-based violence. Local leaders, including traditional leaders, have demonstrated shifts in perceptions of gender-based violence and have worked alongside CAGs to address its effects on communities, calling for greater accountability for perpetrators.¹⁴ The emphasis on psychosocial healing for action group and community members has also proved salient, as mental health and its associated support services are still stigmatized and under-resourced in the communities most affected by violence. Psychosocial support has proven to be effective in supporting resilience in individuals and families. This directly addresses the effects of and trauma associated with violence.

However, an emerging challenge for the CAGs has been capturing how psychosocial interventions have a broader impact on the drivers of violence at the community level. As discussed later, capturing such impact is difficult due to lack of capacity and resources. As a result, local initiatives rely on anecdotal evidence to demonstrate impact in an environment where programming, policy, and practice are driven by statistical evidence.

11 Ella Kotze, “Expanded Impact Report: CSVR Community Work in Ekangala, Kagiso, Johannesburg Inner City, and Marikana, 2012–2016,” unpublished, CSVR, 2017.

12 CSVR, “Community Intervention,” available at www.csvr.org.za/programmes/community-intervention.

13 Kotze, “Expanded Impact Report,” pp. 12–13.

14 For examples from Ekangala, Marikana, and Johannesburg’s inner city, see Kotze, “Expanded Impact Report.”

Analysis

ADVANTAGES OF NETWORKS

With just over a decade remaining to achieve the targets of the national vision for South Africa as articulated in the National Development Plan, the CAGs present opportunities for the realization of these goals. Similarly, their work speaks to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty (Goal 1), provide decent work (Goal 8), and facilitate peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16). Networks present an opportunity to deepen such work and share lessons learned to improve policy and practice.

For the CAGs, the benefits of being part of a network have included the sharing of lessons learned in meetings with partners based in other communities. For example, a 2016 cross-pollination meeting not only proved useful for mediating intra- and inter-group conflict but also provided a platform to raise the need for a shared vision.¹⁵ These reflections have supported the development of a community-healing model that has represented a step-by-step framework for building peace through CAG interventions since 2012. Building solidarity around core interventions is critical, as is sharing strategies to address common challenges.

Being a part of a network can also build mutual understanding of shared aims and objectives in policy and practice. Capacity-building workshops helped to frame the nature of violence in each community and shape the resulting interventions. The “umbrella” organization, CSV, was then responsible for translating lessons learned from each community into best practice through community intervention guidelines. Developing community guidelines has also facilitated convening local participants and creating the space for them to discuss priorities for national and international programming and practice.

The formal organizations at the heads of networks can also bring local-level learning, impact, and challenges into international programming spaces, such as the peacebuilding community in New York. In this way, networks can allow

organizations to contribute to setting the norms that national governments then use to shape their development and peacebuilding agendas.

Lastly, a network approach can provide structural support to informal groups that are historically unable to access resources. These networks have increased access to psychosocial services in South Africa, which has contributed to community-level social cohesion, especially among the CAG participants. Rather than operate in isolation and struggle to access under-resourced mental health services, the CAGs have been able to access specialized and contextualized psychosocial support through their links to the CSV.

CHALLENGES FACING NETWORKS

Despite great gains, these networks have also faced challenges. Their engagement with the government has sometimes yielded mixed results. For example, the CAGs have experienced challenges in addressing torture in a context where state institutions are perpetrators of violence in communities.

The networks also face structural barriers, such as the historical isolation of communities and their organizations along ethnic lines—a direct outcome of the “divide-and-conquer” policies and practices adopted during apartheid. As a result, cohesiveness among groups at the community level does not automatically translate into a strong network or solidarity among communities facing similar issues.

The presence of a formal organization like CSV or the Social Justice Coalition can bridge this gap by creating a space for cross-pollination among groups, but this is usually resource-intensive when done in-person. Nevertheless, community groups have expressed the desire for such spaces to inform their learning, practice, and strategies.¹⁶

Another challenge in South Africa is that there are few networks that can support multiple communities facing similar types of violence across the country. The CAGs have demonstrated such potential, but they have struggled to foster mutual learning and undertake targeted advocacy efforts at the national and international level. While CSV has worked extensively with such local partners, its work has only been regional in scope.

¹⁵ Kotze, “Expanded Impact Report,” p. 90.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Conclusion: Policy Lessons and Recommendations

South African local peace networks are not as clearly defined as in other contexts. The case study selected for this report highlights this. The CAGs directly focus on peacebuilding and work in four communities across the Gauteng region, representing a very small network under a formal NGO (CSVN), which relies on donor support to run campaigns and provide psychosocial wellness to communities affected by violence.

1. Support sharing of lessons learned.

In the CAGs, the interventions (selected by local committees and site managers, respectively) are context-specific. Where common themes emerge, CSVN facilitates a participatory sharing of lessons learned across sites, informed by research and practice. This shared learning on community interventions can be further strengthened to support sustaining peace across the country because communities face a number of similar challenges, particularly related to gender-based violence and community protests. For this to happen, there needs to be acknowledgement of the important role of collaboration between informal organizations (like CAGs) and formal organizations (like CSVN) in facilitating shared learning and building a cohesive approach to violence prevention.

This requires programming support from the national government and international actors. These actors need to commit to building the resilience of community actors to the effects of violence (through psychosocial interventions) and to training local actors to measure impact in ways that speak to policy audiences. Support should thus be given to create platforms for formal and informal organizations to work together, share lessons learned and strategies, and build solidarity.

2. Adopt a crosscutting approach to peacebuilding.

There is also a need to recognize the role of community actors in preventing violence in a context of great inequality and to understand the link between livelihoods, peace, and justice. This can address a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and South Africa's

National Development Targets (like ending poverty and increasing access to decent work) that are interlinked and must function together to realize sustainable peace. Networks can serve to amplify the voice of community groups that have been calling for a crosscutting approach to violence prevention that includes economic considerations. A systemic approach that contributes to improved overall outcomes, including socioeconomic ones, is needed to address some of the main drivers of violence, thus linking SDG 10 (reducing inequality) and SDG 16 (promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions).

3. Ensure networks are not guided by political interests.

Ensuring transparent and nonpartisan participation by multiple community members has become a challenge. Greater accountability is required at all levels to avoid limiting the reach of the network due to partisan politics.

There is also a need to recognize the specific dynamics of each community, which are often shaped by local political interests. Committing to a shared vision and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue is one way of overcoming political patronage at the local level, but this may be difficult in networks that function across a broad array of communities, each with its own power dynamics. Networks could support analysis of similarities and differences in the drivers and consequences of violence in such contexts, help bridge the gap between policy and practice, and build common objectives for addressing similar forms of violence across communities.

Networks have an important role to play in facilitating the merger between the formal and informal (as with the CAGs). They can also contribute to public awareness, social cohesion, and the resilience of community leaders at the forefront of preventing violence and enable longer-term collaboration between the local, national, and international spheres in ways that are necessary for achieving sustainable peace. In a fragmented society like South Africa, they present an opportunity to build a movement of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers that can support the realization of peacebuilding agendas in the long run.

Youth and Women's Networks for Peace in Sri Lanka

Hasini Haputhanthri¹

Introduction and Context

Since its independence from the British in 1948, Ceylon, which became Sri Lanka in 1972, has been marked by cyclical spurts of political violence and ethnic strife. The island witnessed many riots and insurrections, including in 1956, 1971, 1977, 1983, and 1988. A protracted civil war with separatists in the northeast spanned nearly three decades, from the early 1980s to 2009. The bitter struggles among a myriad of political and military actors including the government of Sri Lanka, the People's Liberation Front (JVP), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), the Indian Peace Keeping Force, and other political and paramilitary actors have claimed over 65,000 lives from 1989 to 2009.² Many more have been injured, affected psychologically, or displaced internally or overseas, while communities, property, and ecosystems have been destroyed.

Sri Lanka's last decade can be roughly divided into three periods: 2007–2009, which witnessed intensified war leading to the defeat of the LTTE; 2009–2015, which saw a surge of triumphalist rhetoric and widespread corruption under the government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa; and the unexpected electoral victory of President Maithripala Sirisena in January 2015, which marked a clear shift toward reconciliation. The success of a broad-based coalition representing Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims in parliamentary elections in August 2015 highlighted people's desire for sustained reconciliation efforts to address the legacies of the war and achieve a lasting peace. However, three years after the 2015 election,

the new government has failed to deliver on reducing corruption. As scholars have noted, "That corruption risks undermining state legitimacy, diminishing trust and reducing resources for reconstruction in the aftermath of war."³

Today, the armed conflict in Sri Lanka has come to an end, but tensions continue among hardline groups from different ethno-religious communities. Although both the JVP and minority Tamil groups have entered mainstream politics, deep-seated inequality and ethnocentrism remain unresolved. The island has to balance electoral democracy with a diverse population: Sinhalese make up 74 percent of the population, Tamils 11.2 percent, and Moors 9.2 percent.⁴ Politicians continue to exploit ethno-religious and nationalist rhetoric for electoral success. The country also continues to deal with the legacies of violence, such as unresolved guilt, insecurity, and individual and collective trauma, while simultaneously addressing economic growth and developmental issues that affect the overall population of the country.

Numerous organizations are working to address these challenges and build peace. This paper focuses on two networks: the Women for Peace and Good Governance (WPGG) network, a small organization made up of grassroots women's groups and simultaneously working with a larger network of women's groups in Sri Lanka; and the Sarvodaya Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade) of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, a network organization with an active presence in all districts of Sri Lanka. This paper examines the impact of these groups, the benefits of working in a network, and some of the challenges facing these organiza-

1 Hasini Haputhanthri has focused on peacebuilding in Sri Lanka for the past ten years, working specifically on culture, communications, and education. She has worked with over 100 initiatives with youth and women's groups. Initially trained as a social anthropologist in India and Sweden, she specialized in museology and oral history at Columbia University.

2 Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, available at <http://ucdp.uu.se/#country/780>.

3 Camilla Orjuela, Dhammika Herath, and Jonas Lindberg, "Corrupt Peace? Corruption and Ethnic Divides in Post-war Sri Lanka," *Journal of South Asian Development* 11, no. 2 (2016).

4 Sri Lankan Department of Census & Statistics, "A2: Population by Ethnic Group According to District, 2012" available at www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/cph2011Pub/pop42.pdf.

tions. It also highlights how the international community can better work with network organizations.⁵

Mapping Local Networks for Peace

WOMEN FOR PEACE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE (WPGG)

Women for Peace and Good Governance evolved naturally out of a group of researchers based in the University of Peradeniya, Kandy, who had been working on women's issues, especially women's participation in local politics and governance, since the 1970s.⁶ Though the group initially concentrated on academic outputs, the discovery that only 2 percent of local-level representatives were women in a country that boasted the first woman prime minister in the world spurred it to take action.

Having carried out numerous activities on a voluntary basis, thereby establishing a robust network of grassroots women's groups, fifty-four women from various backgrounds came together to form Women for Peace and Good Governance (WPGG) in 2007. The focus of the organization was to promote women's leadership at the grassroots level by promoting, coaching, and mentoring women who wished to get involved in local politics. The organization depended on community assistance and raised modest donations to support its activities. According to founding member Kamala Liyanage, the organization received considerable community support, and its initial activities were conducted without external funding.⁷ Eventually, WPGG received funding from development assistance organizations supporting local governance.

To date, the organization remains informal in spirit, allowing it to stay flexible and focused. WPGG does not have a continually functioning office unless a full-blown project is underway. The network has chosen to remain focused on women's leadership without branching into other areas or

becoming a "development organization" despite the potential this could have for raising funds from international donors.

By remaining focused in both theme and geography (its members are all in the central province), WPGG soon acquired an impressive grassroots network of women's groups. Today, its network boasts 238 women's societies and 7 youth organizations. WPGG's member organizations allow it to reach villages and to work with women on the ground. It reaches most of its target groups through this network of women's societies.

WPGG also proactively networks with other women's organizations across the island and attends national events on women's representation in politics. Operating from Kandy, WPGG nurtures strong connections with similar regional networks such as the Badulla Women's Resource Centre and Sarvodaya Galle to conduct joint activities across the island. These include advocacy activities jointly convened with and attended by other women's organizations and networks working on similar issues.

In terms of its structure, WPGG remains a flat organization. It is governed by a committee of twelve multiethnic members, mainly rural women. A chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, and two secretaries are appointed every year. The committee meets bimonthly to make decisions and discuss operational matters. An annual general meeting is also held. An advisory board gives inputs as and when required.

The work conducted by WPGG is geared toward supporting women in overcoming the practical, day-to-day challenges they face in participating in politics. For instance, the electoral system has reduced women's participation in politics by requiring popularity within a district, and election campaigns require large amounts of money, which most rural women do not possess.⁸ Moreover, though Sri Lanka has no legal barriers to women owning property or accessing education, considerable cultural barriers remain in the form of stereo-

5 This paper draws from interviews conducted with peace workers and representatives of donor agencies and the organizations under review. It also draws from information gathered from publications, reports, and studies conducted on the topic.

6 Interview with Professor Kamala Liyanage, Kandy, Sri Lanka, May 21, 2017.

7 Ibid.

8 Law and Society Trust, "Women's Political Representation in Local Government Institutes: 25% Quota and Way Forward," 2016, available at www.lstlanka.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Womens-Political-Representation-in-Local-Government-Institutes.pdf.

types about the role of women in society. Women are still predominantly seen as domestic caregivers, and their role in the private, domestic sphere is valued over their contributions in the public sphere. An assertive woman in a leadership position is not considered socially desirable, and this stigma pushes most women to choose domestic roles over public ones. Furthermore, social media is often seen to disadvantage women in the public sphere by rapidly spreading rumors and harming their dignity. WPGG lobbies actively against these challenges, including through its “A Postcard to the President” campaign, which encourages women to write directly to the president.

WPGG’s relationship with the University of Peradeniya ensures that its programs are conceptually sound. Together with the university’s Gender Education Unit, WPGG has conducted thirty-six training courses for aspiring women political leaders. It continues to conduct awareness-raising programs, “pocket meetings,”⁹ and informal mentoring and coaching. WPGG also continues to provide moral support, counseling, and advice to women long after they participate in its formal programs, helping them to tackle the day-to-day challenges of assuming leadership in their communities. During local election periods, it has promoted women nominees, working to get them elected through strategic campaigns. It actively organizes events within the university and partners with it to run courses on women’s leadership. In feedback collected after programs conducted by WPGG, women indicated that they appreciated the space the organization created at the community level to discuss common challenges faced by women in politics.

Though WPGG does not directly work with ex-combatants and refugees, its joint programs with women’s organizations from the north of the country often address issues facing conflict-affected zones. Local organizations in the north and south of Sri Lanka indicated that WPGG helped them to reflect on common issues faced by women in their regions.¹⁰ WPGG promotes women leaders who promote inclusivity and nonviolence

and take an active interest in reconciliation. WPGG has many links with women parliamentarians and has taken an active role in lobbying for women’s representation. It also uses these links to connect local women leaders to women in parliament.

SARVODAYA SHANTI SENA (PEACE BRIGADE)

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is a pioneering development organization with over 3,000 active village-level societies within its network. It was started in 1958 by A. T. Ariyaratne, a teacher in Nalanda College, Colombo, as an educational “service learning” program for students in urban schools to understand rural communities. The students were taken to a village named Kanatoluwa to contribute to development activities by volunteering while learning about the village. The initiative quickly spread across villages and became a social movement for uplifting the living conditions of the rural poor through economic and social empowerment programs. During its first fifteen years, Sarvodaya grew with minimal foreign aid or state support, relying on volunteer labor, mostly from the beneficiaries themselves. This work was in the spirit of “shramadana,” or “gift of labor,” the concept of recognizing and activating the internal dormant potential of communities and harnessing it for their benefit.

By the late 1970s, Sarvodaya had developed global relationships and, with the support of donors from all the districts of Sri Lanka, was working in over 15,000 of the country’s 38,000 villages. Though the organization had begun as a social movement, it grew into a full-fledged development organization with nine units and twenty-six local centers based in the districts, working across all sectors related to development.¹¹ Sarvodaya’s cohesive and holistic vision has withstood the test of time. In fact, Sarvodaya established the first peace secretariat in Sri Lanka in 2000—two years before the government of Sri Lanka set up its own Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process in 2002.

Today the organization is a complex web of units

9 “Pocket meetings” is the term used by WPGG members to describe small focus groups.

10 Participant feedback in unpublished WPGG quarterly reports.

11 According to Sarvodaya, its vision for development includes economic, social, political, and spiritual growth.

with various functions: Sarvodaya includes 345 divisional units; 34 district offices; 10 specialist development education institutes; over 100,000 youth mobilized for peacebuilding under Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade); the country's largest microcredit organization with a cumulative loan portfolio of over \$1 million (Sarvodaya Economic Enterprise Development Services, or SEEDS); a major welfare organization serving over 1,000 orphaned and destitute children, underage mothers, and elders (Sarvodaya Suwa Setha); and 4,335 preschools serving over 98,000 children. Sarvodaya's total budget exceeds \$5 million, with 1,500 full-time employees. When combined with numerous volunteers, members of *shramadana* societies, youth clubs, and other participants and beneficiaries, this yields an equivalent of approximately 200,000 people involved full-time in Sarvodaya programs, placing it on par with the entire workforce of Sri Lanka's plantation sector.¹² The executive governing council of Sarvodaya includes people of different ethnicities who meet on the last Friday of every month to make decisions. All district officers visit the headquarters for a joint meeting every month, where they discuss issues openly, with trilingual translation provided.

One of Sarvodaya's most innovative peace programs is its engagement with youth through Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade). This program was established in 1978, with a mandate to build peace in a country that was going through political unrest. Later, Shanti Sena also responded to natural disasters. As described on its website, "The main objective of Shanti Sena is to develop youth leadership, and to help and encourage a disciplined society free of violence and suffering."¹³

In 1978, a former scout commissioner took charge of Shanti Sena. Thus, Shanti Sena was modeled after scouting and was based in village schools (called *shramadana* societies), which are at the heart of Sarvodaya's activities. Student leaders in these schools naturally transitioned from scout groups to Shanti Sena, which gave them space to develop as politically conscious, morally upright

leaders of their communities.

Shanti Sena conducts a large array of programs promoting peacebuilding, democracy, and good governance. Through peace dialogues, interreligious dialogues, youth exchange programs, leadership training camps, sporting events, and pen-pal programs, Shanti Sena builds bridges among different ethnic and religious communities. It also trains youth leaders on how to respond to and save people in emergencies and conflict situations. It covers all twenty-five administrative districts of Sri Lanka with over 120,000 youth volunteers dedicated to peacebuilding and community development through some 9,800 youth circles.¹⁴ Because of this geographic reach, its membership is ethnically diverse, providing ample opportunity for exchange programs, "amity camps," and interethnic and interreligious dialogue.

Shanti Sena's amity camps are usually fourteen days long and include young men and women from across the country. A specific case was recalled by Lakshman Perera, a former employee of Sarvodaya, who worked on its peace programs through the height of the war: "I remember this particular amity camp we had, which was actually organized by a Swedish intern who worked with us for a while. He went back to Sweden and did a hat collection to raise funds, came back to Sri Lanka and organized this amity camp with Sarvodaya in 1996."¹⁵ Perera still recalls a testimony of a participant (a Tamil youth) during the evaluation of the program:

I came to this camp with the mission of killing seven people, because the Sinhalese killed seven people in my family. My mission in life is to kill seven times seven—forty-nine—Sinhalese, and I thought I will start with this camp. But the first day there were too many people so I couldn't choose. Then during cooking together when I cut my hand, a Sinhalese girl helped me. I began to realize that we are the same. The only difference is between the gods and the devils [local way of expressing good and bad]. So I am reconsidering my mission in life.¹⁶

These examples illustrate the transformative effect that such programs can have simply by

¹² See www.sarvodaya.org/shanthi-sena.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Interview with Lakshman Perera, former employee of Sarvodaya, Colombo, June 15, 2017.

¹⁶ Ibid.

bringing formerly unconnected youth groups together to find common ground. Over time, using social media, Shanti Sena has created a further platform for young people to work across geographical distances.

Analysis: The Value of and Challenges Faced by Networks

VALUE OF NETWORKS

Working in challenging circumstances on politically sensitive topics requires the collective strength of many. From 2005 to 2015, peacebuilding organizations in Sri Lanka fought to address daunting issues related to human rights, militarization, disappearances, political participation, and divisions among groups. As the state adopted a hardline approach to minorities and civil society actors, bolstered by the military victory over the LTTE, small peacebuilding organizations found themselves overpowered by the shrinking space for civic activism and dissent of any nature. This led organizations to consider collaboration and joint action. Both local and international peacebuilding organizations actively promoted networking. Many civil society organizations agreed that “a chorus of voices together was better in confronting a dictatorial government instead of a lone voice in the wildernesses.”¹⁷ Many civic alliances and political lobbying groups were formed in the period between 2014 and 2015, eventually contributing to the change of government in the 2015 elections.

A 2011 study based on interviews with over ten peacebuilding networks in Sri Lanka indicated that many organizations recognize the benefits of networking in challenging political climates.¹⁸ The study found that networking “enables often marginalized/vulnerable or disenfranchised groups to work together and to be a more visible force or presence in that particular field of work.”¹⁹ Networks were more effective than organizations working individually, had greater impact, offered platforms for sharing lessons learned, and created a collective spirit that made partners feel that they

were part of a larger process. Networks also enabled smaller organizations to access resources and increase leverage with decision makers.

For example, WPGG became a noted voice in lobbying for women’s political representation by successfully networking with women’s groups and organizations at all levels. By joining forces with Colombo-based groups such as the Women and Media Collective, WPGG was able to influence policymakers during election campaigns, including by mentoring some women parliamentarians. At the same time, the network continued to work with small women’s groups in villages, supporting them in making decisions about issues in their day-to-day lives. By networking vertically as well as horizontally, a small organization like WPGG was able to achieve greater effectiveness, outreach, and impact. It was able to share its research expertise and contribute to women’s empowerment more broadly.

Networking can be particularly effective when focusing on a target group, as seen with WPGG’s focus on women and Sarvodaya Shanti Sena’s focus on youth. Rather than focusing on an issue like peace or the environment, focusing on a target group and working with it on issues it faces can make the work more relevant and concrete. Through this approach, peacebuilding work can be tailored to the needs of the target group instead of being generalized.

Targeting a specific group within a network can also emphasize commonalities among members of that group. For example, women in WPGG, whether Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim, all struggled with cultural barriers and patriarchy. They were all victims of war, with war widows on every side. These commonalities made the networks meaningful for their members. Celebrating diversity and being inclusive are important for both WPGG and Shanti Sena.

While both networks prominently promote peacebuilding, they identify themselves primarily as youth or women’s networks rather than peacebuilding networks. But focusing on target groups allows them to take a more holistic

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Niroshana Chaminda and Marisa Fernando, “Facilitating Networks and Networking for Peace Building and Conflict Transformation,” GIZ Colombo, 2011.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 5–6.

approach to peacebuilding. While addressing the need for youth representation in politics, for example, Shanti Sena also addressed psychosocial issues facing youth and organized cultural and sports exchanges.

Additionally, both networks, in times of emergency, were able to use the social capital of their members as a security and survival mechanism for both organizations and individuals. It is here that the more informal side of networks is extremely important. Networking in Sri Lanka has also led to transfer of knowledge and skills on issues related to peacebuilding, inclusive decision making, and dealing with diversity. As seen in both WPGG and Sarvodaya Shanti Sena, women and youth who formerly did not have access to knowledge and skills were able to develop capacities to think critically and independently and act collectively and creatively in asserting their agency. Being a part of the network not only transformed their attitudes but also enabled them to assert their roles as leaders of their communities and drivers of peace. Once networks tap into their own resources, they realize their own potential to mobilize the financial and social capital required to transform the communities they serve.

CHALLENGES FACING NETWORKS

Networking has also presented some notable challenges to organizations in Sri Lanka. Increased coordination has often required more time and resources. Smaller organizations were often not familiar with the networks' internal decision-making modalities, often leading to conflicts of interests, misadministration, and domination of weaker members by stronger ones. Thus, finding internal structures that suited the networks took time and required trial and error.

For example, Facilitating Local Initiatives for Conflict Transformation (FLICT), a peacebuilding project operating between 2004 and 2017 that adopted a networking approach to developing capacities for peace, recorded its experience of supporting rural organizations to network in 2011. It observed that

the intermediary/network at times played the role of

the gatekeeper in the regions or within that issue. Some organisations received the 'message' that the only way to access funds from FLICT were through these organisations. As Sri Lankan civil society was often hampered by fractions and polarisations on ideological as well as personality dimensions this became a problem particularly to the smaller and less influential organisations who were unable to contact FLICT directly.²⁰

In the case of WPGG and Sarvodaya Shanti Sena, the networks proved to be resilient as they evolved naturally (rather than in response to external pressures) and were not particularly dependent on donors. The key overall lesson from studies on networks is that while networking should be actively facilitated and supported, formal networks established with external influence or incentives were less effective and had logistical issues related to registering members and delegating responsibilities.²¹ The two organizations studied in this paper, though different in scale, both confirm that networks that grow organically in response to the needs of communities are more resilient than those formed through formal agreements and projects.

Policy Lessons and Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the observations of the two case studies presented, as well as more generally from the author's experience working with a large number of peacebuilding organizations. They are aimed toward actors involved in international and local peacebuilding communities, including donors, UN agencies, national and local NGOs, and peacebuilding activists.

1. Support smaller organizations to network by providing skills for multi-stakeholder collaboration.

As seen in the case of WPGG, smaller, younger organizations tend to be more network-savvy than larger, more established organizations like Sarvodaya, which often lack the internal drive to network externally. However, smaller organizations often lack the capacities to work with other

²⁰ Ibid., p 9.

²¹ Ibid., p. 6.

organizations on a common platform, especially when there are more dominant and powerful organizations that are network members. Therefore, support for networks to establish internal mechanisms for decision making and governance is needed in order to strengthen their internal capacities—particularly given that internal conflicts can often dissipate networks that otherwise could have had great impact. Support is also needed to help smaller organizations build the know-how and skills necessary for multi-stakeholder collaboration, such as negotiation, active participation (especially in voicing dissent), and collective leadership. Such collaboration enables small groups to open up to other organizational cultures, handle different power dynamics, and develop feasible internal mechanisms for decision making and action.

2. Focus on quality of impact over breadth of outreach.

One of the main obvious benefits of networking is the potential for increased outreach. But as seen in both cases (though in WPGG more so than in Sarvodaya), networking also made peacebuilding initiatives more successful, especially in delivering impact and changing people's life situations. What matters to its members most is not how big a network is but the value of being part of that network. For instance, members might consider how the network supports them when they decide to stand in local elections or their family is affected by floods. Even for Sarvodaya, which mobilized thousands of people for peace meditations and walks, what mattered to its members was not the breadth of its outreach but how much of an impact engaging with the network had on their lives. Thus, networks should be recognized and appreciated for their contribution to change and overall impact rather than their size, coverage, or outreach alone.

3. Support organizations to network both horizontally and vertically.

Networks should be encouraged to network both horizontally and vertically to achieve

greater impact. When organizations network horizontally, as seen in the case of WPGG with other organizations working on similar issues, they create common platforms, increase outreach, and gather momentum. When they network vertically, they create space for voices from the ground to be heard in crucial events and platforms. Thus organizations should be encouraged to act as advocacy and lobbying groups, leveraging their bargaining power with policy- and decision makers whenever it serves the vision of the organization.

4. Support networks working with specific target groups.

While issue-based networks have yielded many victories in such areas as the environment, peacebuilding networks face a different challenge due to the politicized nature of their work. In conflict situations, different communities understand peace differently, and it can thus be pursued in many different way. For example, many peace movements in Sri Lanka are divided along ethnic lines, as the understanding of peace is different between ethnic groups. These movements are still dividing rather than uniting people.

Peacebuilding networks can be more effective by focusing not directly on political issues but on target-group-specific issues (e.g., youth issues or women's issues). This can make networks more inclusive and make it easier to create spaces for people to exchange experiences and discover common ground. Sometimes being young or being a woman can be more important than being Tamil or Sinhalese, creating opportunities for empathy and collaboration despite differences.

It is also important to recognize youth and women as potential drivers of peace. As seen in situations all over the world, women and youth often become the first and easiest victims. Youth have been perpetrators as well as victims of war. However, when integrated into peacebuilding initiatives, they can become transformative agents of peace within their communities.

Civil Society Organizations Networking for Peace in Zimbabwe

Webster Zambara¹

Introduction and Context

Zimbabwe has a long history of violence: colonial violence, revolutionary violence, and state-sanctioned violence have all played key roles in shaping modern Zimbabwe. The evolutions from a colony to a sovereign nation, and from a promising transitional state to one embroiled in crises, are dominated by narratives of violence and memories of violence and impunity. According to scholar Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, violence in Zimbabwe is a culture rather than an isolated or episodic phenomenon. He identifies this culture of violence in three undemocratic historical periods in Zimbabwe. The first was the country's patriarchal and often violent pre-colonial era (pre-1890), during which political cultures and practices were informed by ideologies of heredity and kinship rather than modern-day political competition. The second was the colonial period, which ushered in an undemocratic tradition based on white supremacy that was equally violent, patriarchal, and authoritarian. The system of governance introduced during this period was inherently racist, excluding blacks from participating in the country's political and economic processes. The third was the rise of African nationalism, which, together with armed and violent liberation struggles, culminated in Zimbabwe attaining independence in 1980. This period was dominated by cultures of authoritarianism, oppression, intolerance, and violence.²

One of the key challenges confronting the post-

independence government led by Robert Mugabe was nation building in a country with an engrained culture of violence and deeply divided along lines of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and geography.³ Other key challenges included engaging in postwar reconstruction, reconstructing the inherited colonial political economy—especially redressing its racial imbalances—and democratizing the inherited authoritarian colonial state.⁴

The political and economic situation in Zimbabwe began deteriorating drastically in February 2000 after the government-sponsored draft constitution was rejected in a constitutional referendum.⁵ This was soon followed by a fast-track land reform exercise targeting white commercial farmers, which was led by veterans of the liberation war who were later joined by youth militias. The official government position was that the purpose of the land reform exercise was to correct inherited colonial imbalances that had left 70 percent of arable land in the hands of the white minority, which constituted less than 5 percent of the population. However, the violent and chaotic manner in which the exercise was implemented not only revealed a deeply engrained culture of violence, but also reflected a broader political agenda that has become the defining framework of Zimbabwean politics.⁶

Following violent elections in 2008, peacebuilding efforts were prioritized during the tenure of the Government of National Unity (2009–2013), which recognized the need for far-reaching national healing and reconciliation

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2 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Do "Zimbabweans" Exist?: Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity Formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

3 Robert Mugabe ruled Zimbabwe for thirty-seven years. He first served as prime minister (1980–1987) and then as president (1987–2017), before being deposed in a bloodless coup that installed his deposed vice president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, as president in November 2017.

4 James Muzondidya, "From Buoyancy to Crisis, 1980–1997," in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-colonial Period to 2008*, Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo, eds. (Harare: Weaver Press, 2009).

5 Kåre Vollan, "The Constitutional History and the 2013 Referendum in Zimbabwe," Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, 2013, available at www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/programmes/nordem/publications/docs/zimbabwe_constitution_2013.pdf.

6 Eldred V. Masunungure, "Nation-Building, State-Building and Power Configuration in Zimbabwe," *Conflict Trends*, no. 1 (January 2006).

processes in Zimbabwe.⁷ To pursue this, it created the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration, which was dysfunctional largely due to political squabbles. The organ was replaced by the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), established in 2018 with a ten-year constitutional mandate to “ensure post-conflict justice, healing and reconciliation” and build national capacity for peace.⁸ Past experiences in Zimbabwe have shown that top-down approaches such as that of the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration have regularly failed to produce tangible results at the community level. This is the gap filled by civil society organizations (CSOs) such as those affiliated with the Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET) and (Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe) PBNZ, which have local community-outreach initiatives.

This paper traces the evolution of local networks among CSOs in Zimbabwe in their bid to promote human rights and build sustainable peace in the country. It focuses on two networks: the Civic Education Network of Zimbabwe (CIVNET), formed in 1996, and the Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe (PBNZ), formed in 2006. The paper begins by briefly describing the local context in which networks of civil society groups emerged in Zimbabwe. It goes on to explore the history and evolution of CIVNET and PBNZ and assesses their strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and prospects for success. This paper posits that the emergence of networks in Zimbabwe was largely circumstantial—a reaction and adaptation to the shifting political realities affecting the promotion of democracy, human rights, and peace in the local context. It concludes that local networks provide an important contextual framework for peacebuilding that is often ignored by major national and international agencies involved in

peacebuilding efforts that do not distinguish national-level initiatives from those at the local level in the implementation of their programs.⁹

Emergence of Local Networks

CIVIC EDUCATION NETWORK TRUST (CIVNET)

A number of CSOs with common agendas, particularly those organized around specific religions, form loose networks or coalitions in Zimbabwe focusing on specific campaigns or programs. The Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET), however, is largely recognized as the first network to bring organizations dealing with related issues under one umbrella. It is founded on a common long-term goal: promoting human rights and democracy through civic education. Its establishment was galvanized by the 1995 parliamentary elections and the 1996 presidential elections, which were largely characterized by voter apathy. These elections resulted in the ruling party—the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)—winning largely uncontested and thus governing without a national mandate. The six organizations that came together to form CIVNET believed that civic education through community outreach programs would encourage citizens to participate in how they are governed and ensure that the elected leadership would be accountable to the population.

CIVNET was a precursor to the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1997, a larger umbrella organization that advocated for a new (and democratic) constitution for the country.¹⁰ The roots of the main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), can

7 The Government of National Unity comprised three political parties represented in parliament after the disputed elections in 2008: the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), led by Robert Mugabe, and two formations of the Movement for Democratic Change, led by Morgan Tsvangirai and Welshman Ncube. On the elections, see: African Union, “The Pan African Parliament Election Observer Mission to the Presidential Run-Off and Parliamentary By-elections in Zimbabwe: Interim Statement,” June 2008, available at <http://allafrica.com/download/resource/main/main/idatcs/00011576:66040896db1081a2b5c2350cde7b43d8.pdf>.

8 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, Art. 252.

9 This paper is informed by desk-based research as well as interviews carried out with seven directors (current and previous) of civil society organizations that are members of CIVNET and PBNZ. The author’s work with both organizations also gave him an insider advantage to understand the internal dynamics of both networks.

10 The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) is a coalition of civil society organizations and individual member organizations formed in 1997 to advocate for a new constitution for Zimbabwe. See Cephas Lumina, “Evaluation of the National Constitution of Zimbabwe,” Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), 2009, available at www.norad.no/globalassets/import-2162015-80434-am/www.norad.no-ny/filarkiv/vedlegg-til-publikasjoner/evaluation-of-the-national-constitutional-assembly-nca-of-zimbabwe.pdf.

be traced to the NCA. The member organizations of CIVNET played key roles not only in forming both the NCA and the MDC, but also in leading and popularizing them in the country. It is for this reason that Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party were hostile toward civil society in general and on numerous occasions blamed CSOs and nongovernmental organizations for leading a “regime change agenda” against the government. This prompted Mugabe’s supporters to be intolerant of civil society as a whole, and at times violent toward CSOs.

CIVNET is an umbrella network with a head office and secretariat in Harare that directs operations through provincial and local structures of its network members. The secretariat makes decisions that bind network members to collaborate with other progressive movements fighting for democracy in Zimbabwe. This structure allows for broader outreach through member organizations.

Beyond promoting human rights, democratic governance, and government accountability through civic education, CIVNET also uses voter education to encourage an active citizenry that is directly involved in local governance and community development. This is achieved through innovative programs like community “study circles,” which are the nuclei for participation and implementation of programs at the local level. Such programs are highly effective in building capacity through local-level knowledge transfer. CIVNET member organizations also strategically collaborate with social and political movements engaging in nonviolent campaigns for human rights and democracy.

A 2008 report by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) evaluating CIVNET-funded projects in Zimbabwe attributed the increase in voter turnout and change in voter behavior patterns in Zimbabwe from 2000 to 2007 to the consistent implementation of civic education workshops by CIVNET.¹¹ The report concluded that CIVNET member organizations introduced citizens to basic concepts of democracy, participation, accountability, and leadership at various levels of society. In a constitutional

referendum in February 2000, Mugabe’s party was defeated for the first time since independence, and it almost lost its parliamentary majority to the newly formed opposition party in the parliamentary elections held in June of the same year. This was largely due to the effectiveness of CIVNET in promoting active citizenry.

After that, and amid a growing economic crisis, incidents of politically motivated violence increased at the behest of the ruling ZANU-PF, including violent seizures of white-owned commercial farms and political intimidation tactics meant to ensure ZANU-PF’s political victory. The violence was spearheaded by war veterans and the military-trained youth militia, often with the direct support of the army. This violence took the form of murder, rape, torture, assault, kidnapping, and denial of access to resources, particularly food, to perceived or actual members of the opposition.¹² In a way, then, the success of CIVNET and other progressive forces to mobilize people to exercise their civil rights to participate in elections and other processes was met with violence by the ruling party in an attempt to cow them and to ensure its political survival and entrench its dominance.

PEACEBUILDING NETWORK OF ZIMBABWE (PBNZ)

In an attempt to tackle the scourge of political violence and build a sustainable peace in Zimbabwe, two key organizations that formed CIVNET—the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights)—joined twelve other CSOs to form the Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe (PBNZ) in 2006. PBNZ is a network of nineteen local organizations involved in community peacebuilding activities across the country. It was founded on the belief that coordinated peacebuilding activities contribute to sustaining peace and development in Zimbabwe. The nineteen organizations work in different geographical areas throughout Zimbabwe, collectively covering the whole country.

PBNZ is coordinated by one member—the

11 Dren Nupen, “The Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET) in Zimbabwe,” Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), 2018, available at www.sida.se/English/publications/112802/200851-the-civic-education-network-trust-civnet-in-zimbabwe/.

12 Lloyd Sachikonye, *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2011).

Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (CCMT)—but decisions are made collectively and at the management level. Directors of various member organizations (or their proxies) meet and select a chairperson, who works closely with the director of CCMT to coordinate the work of the entire network. This structure enables national outreach to member organizations that work on a diverse range of issues.

This range of issues includes human rights, gender, youth, the environment, ecological land use, peace and justice, trauma healing, and reconciliation. PBNZ member organizations monitor and assess conflict trends in Zimbabwe in order to develop strategic and holistic peacebuilding frameworks, which they use to coordinate appropriate interventions at the local, regional and national levels.¹³ To improve its work on trauma healing and reconciliation, PBNZ sought partnership with and technical expertise from the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), based in Cape Town, South Africa. This partnership led to the creation of a capacity-building training manual—“Community Healing: A Training Manual for Zimbabwe”—which is both a resource and a guide to enhance the work of the network.¹⁴ All eight of the modules in the manual were written by members of the network, based on their knowledge and experience. The modules are specifically modelled in accordance with member organizations’ program priorities, making it relevant to the local context.

Unlike CIVNET and other coalitions that receive their training manuals from member organizations, the PBNZ attempted to collectively create a manual for the network as a whole with technical support from IJR. A core group of fourteen project officers held three writing workshops over a period of two years during which they drafted, presented to fellow members, and revised modules based on inputs from colleagues (of their own volition, some member organizations refused to take part or pulled out along the way). This was followed by a

“training-of-trainers” workshop to strengthen member organizations’ capacity and devise a plan for supporting each other with specialized knowledge and skills in their community work. This was meant to encourage cooperation and coordination among different actors at the local level.¹⁵

The support rendered by IJR provides insights into how international actors can promote local peacebuilding efforts by transferring knowledge and skills and building a relationship with local actors where monitoring, evaluation, and learning can take place. This is facilitated by the communication revolution that has made the Internet and social media platforms easily accessible on cell phones. This model creates a bottom-up peacebuilding approach that supports actors locally, nationally, or internationally by promoting joint learning through a flexible, reciprocal process.¹⁶ This also conforms to the shift to more participatory and agency-oriented approaches aiming at the “from-below” and “from-within” peacebuilding models pioneered by John Paul Lederach.¹⁷ These models can create local ownership while complementing the more common top-down approach to peacebuilding that often starts at the national level. In Zimbabwe, where a national peace and reconciliation process is just beginning (and is led by a constitutionally mandated commission), local networks such as CIVNET and PBNZ have great potential to complement government efforts to build a peaceful country.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Local Networks

ADVANTAGES OF LOCAL NETWORKS IN PROMOTING PEACE

There are several advantages to working through a local network to promote peace.

13 Zimbabwe is divided into ten administrative regions.

14 Webster Zambara, ed., “Community Healing: A Training Manual for Zimbabwe,” Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Network of Zimbabwe, 2015, available at www.ijr.org.za/portfolio-items/community-healing-a-training-manual-for-zimbabwe/.

15 Ibid.

16 Swiss Peace, “Strategy 2016–2020: Contributing to the Improvement of Conflict Prevention and Conflict Transformation,” 2015, available at http://swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/Essentials/swisspeace_Strategy_2016_2020.pdf.

17 Joakim Öjendal, Hanna Leonardsson, and Martin Lundqvist, “Local Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities,” University of Gothenburg, 2017, available at www.gu.se/english/research/publication?publicationId=252933.

Repository of local knowledge: Arguably the most important advantage of local networks is their contextual knowledge, including of the history of the conflict and its dynamics, of acceptable cultural practices, and “community intelligence.” This knowledge can be leveraged by both external and internal actors to understand and influence local peace and security issues.¹⁸ Local knowledge also informs swift adaptation by local actors responding to local realities, such as the creation of PBNZ by the same member organizations that had formed CIVNET a decade earlier in Zimbabwe. Through community intelligence platforms, local networks can use their proximity to conflict and violence to urgently respond to and assist victims while adapting their strategies to the prevailing situation. PBNZ members such as the Zimbabwe Peace Project have deployed human rights monitors throughout the country who publish monthly reports and incident alerts of human rights violations in both urban and rural areas.¹⁹

Broader outreach: Local networks are built on the understanding that individual organizations have limited outreach capacity. Networking with like-minded organizations broadens outreach; networks’ peacebuilding programs and interventions can reach further than individual organizations would be able to alone. By working as a collective, they can pass on the message of peace faster. In turn, this may result in quicker responses to conflict. For example, the advocacy work undertaken by CIVNET to encourage an active citizenry would have taken far longer had it been attempted by a single organization.

Network members come from diverse backgrounds and geographical areas and have a broad range of experiences and skill sets. This diversity, coupled with a deep understanding of the local context, means that a network’s peacebuilding work can be carried out in a holistic manner, incorporating all aspects necessary to promote positive peace. For example, PBNZ includes organizations working on aspects of peace sometimes regarded as peripheral, including those

related to gender, youth, and the environment. This gives it the potential to facilitate multiple peacebuilding interventions across Zimbabwe concurrently, something a single organization could not do.

In addition, the core group of trainers who produced the training manual for PBNZ have created a group on the social media platform WhatsApp where they continuously share information and update each other on the activities they are involved in, as well as on the availability of members to collaborate when they organize events. The social media group is now the most frequently used medium for the network’s coordination.

Safety in numbers: In Zimbabwe, as in other countries experiencing a democratic deficit, networks can also serve as defense mechanisms by cushioning individual organizations from being targeted by the government and its agencies, particularly in remote areas. In Zimbabwe this was the case for human rights defenders who were viewed by the Mugabe regime as instigating regime change at the behest of and with funding from Western governments.²⁰ As such, civil society activists in Zimbabwe often rely on lawyers within their networks to provide legal representation when they are targeted by state agents, especially when they take part in protest action, and to litigate on behalf of victims of politically motivated violence in both urban and rural areas.

DISADVANTAGES OF LOCAL NETWORKS IN PROMOTING PEACE

Despite the observed advantages—identified above—of belonging to a network of like-minded organizations to promote peace, there are also several disadvantages.

Divided loyalties: Organizations that voluntarily become members of networks, coalitions, or similar umbrella bodies often have divided loyalties. They are already established entities in their own right—with their own programs, constituencies, and obligations—and being part of a network requires them have to do “extra” work.

18 Andrea O Súilleabháin, ed. “Leveraging Local Knowledge for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in Africa,” International Peace Institute, March 2015, available at www.ipinst.org/2015/03/leveraging-local-knowledge-for-peacebuilding-and-statebuilding-in-africa.

19 Zimbabwe Peace Project, Monthly Monitoring Reports, available at www.zimpeaceproject.com/monitoring-reports/archives/.

20 “Mugabe: There Will Be No Regime Change in Zimbabwe,” Eyewitness News, December 16, 2016, available at <http://ewn.co.za/2016/12/16/mugabe-there-will-be-no-regime-change-in-zimbabwe>. See also “NGO-Gate: Analysts Speak,” The Herald, February 17, 2015, available at www.herald.co.zw/ngo-gate-analysts-speak/.

In many cases this work is similar to their own but under the banner of the network, which has its own structure, programs, and obligations. This has led to many organizations prioritizing their individual brand in an effort to guard it against “dilution” by the network. Similarly, some organizations belong to more than one network. Belonging to many networks does not necessarily mean organizations will have the same level of commitment to each one.

Moreover, the time and resources needed to contribute to collaborative efforts are often perceived to be eating into the core business of the individual organization. For example, when the PBNZ decided to collectively write its training manual, a few member organizations refused to participate, while others later withdrew their participation, arguing that they had manuals of their own.

Competition over resources: Linked to the above is competition over resources, particularly donor money. Members of networks are obliged to fundraise for the network to ensure its survival, yet in most cases funding proposals are sent to the same donors that fund individual organizations. This leads organizations to hold on to what they consider brilliant ideas or intervention strategies, withholding important information for fear that if divulged, fellow network members could take it and use it in their own funding proposals. This has the net effect of delaying peacebuilding programs from expanding quickly through the network platform.

This competition between nongovernmental organizations, not only over funding but also over human resources and access to communities that are historically difficult to reach, has affected both CIVNET and PBNZ. There is a real perception that CIVNET is now weaker than before due to dwindling donor funds. This is a sad development because Zimbabwe’s transitional period is stalled and the country needs vigorous efforts to promote human rights and democracy.

Fragile management structures: Local networks often have operational structures that make it difficult for them to function. CIVNET established

a national office that led programs and managed resources, making fundraising easier because donors could clearly see its operational structure. PBNZ, on the other hand, appointed one of its members—the Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (CCMT)—to coordinate its operations,²¹ and the directors of member organizations created a management structure for decision making. This structure is opaque to an outsider who may want to work directly with the network, because it does not have an independent secretariat. Coordination at the management level is generally weak, and there seems to be insufficient energy at the leadership level to complement the work of the program officers who painstakingly produced the training manual and are ready for fieldwork.

Conclusions

While local networks for peace in Zimbabwe can play a critical role in transforming conflict through collective mobilization of resources, they still have to work in a largely prohibitive political environment, which limits their success. Networks operate in situations where basic human rights are not respected, and peace workers sometimes find themselves falling victim to state-sponsored violence. The environment of fear in which they operate has led to self-censorship among some practitioners, which can become a source of division among network members. Added to this is a general reduction in donor funding that has not only increased competition, leading to divisions among local networks, but has also reduced their capabilities. For example, due to lack of funding, the PBNZ has not rolled out nationwide training workshops using its new community-healing manual as anticipated.

However, all is not lost. The growth of information and communication technology provides an opportunity that remains largely untapped by local networks for peace, given their potential outreach through the Internet and cell phones. The government of Zimbabwe is aware of the threat this poses to its administration. It even considered promulgating a potentially repressive cybercrime law,

21 Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation, “Annual Report 2015,” available at www.ccmt.org.zw/index.php/reports-publications.

which has drawn criticism from human rights and peace activists for its focus on limiting use of social media.²² In 2016, Pastor Evan Mawarire changed the political terrain in Zimbabwe by starting the nonviolent #ThisFlag social media campaign against police brutality, corruption, and injustice, which temporarily shook the Mugabe regime. In solidarity with Mawarire, PBNZ members used social media to encourage their members to join other civil society activists who thronged the Harare magistrates' court where his trial took place. The campaign waned after he temporarily fled to the United States fearing for his life, but not before creating a huge following of 80,000 people (now over 200,000) on Twitter.²³ This example shows that with innovation, local networks can promote, support, and consolidate peacebuilding efforts even in a hostile environment.

The emergence and evolution of local networks promoting peacebuilding in Zimbabwe such as CIVNET and PBNZ are an important step toward implementing peacebuilding policies that link directly with the local population and have the potential to address its needs. The widespread acceptance of "national ownership" as the guiding principle in global peacebuilding policy, often championed as a means of anchoring peace in local

realities and needs, in fact commonly focuses on national governments rather than local populations and contexts. Thus it misses the point, as ownership of peacebuilding efforts remains within an overall state-centric framework where national political elites are mistakenly considered to be representatives of local populations.²⁴

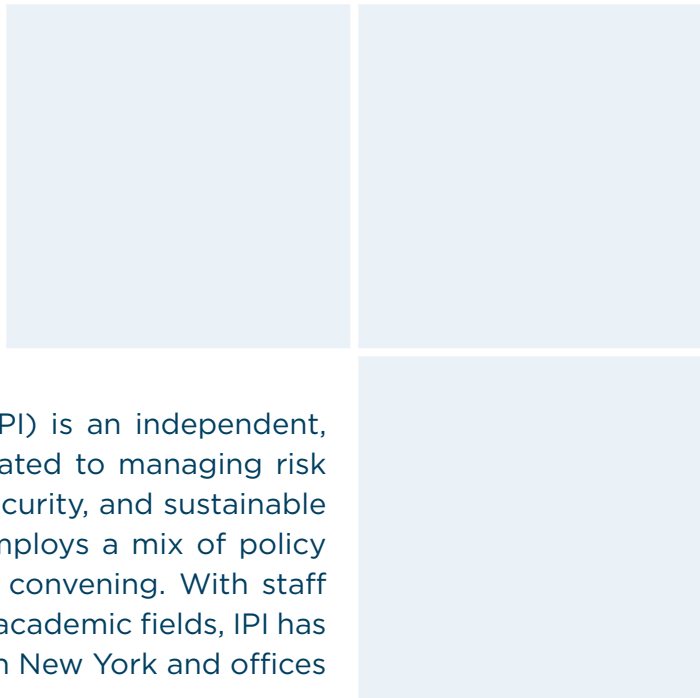
Zimbabwe is one case among many in Africa where there is a democratic deficit. Historically, its elections are neither free nor fair, basic freedoms are not protected, and human rights defenders are at the mercy of a predatory state whose priority is to retain power. It is not yet certain whether the ouster of Robert Mugabe in November 2017 after thirty-seven years of autocratic rule provides an opportunity for a new democratic political culture to emerge in Zimbabwe. However, the aspirations of true democracy through credible free and fair elections will only be tested when the country goes to the polls in 2018.²⁵ Therefore, local civil society organizations, particularly those networking to build peace, provide an important middle rung that links communities to national and international peace processes. Their work is a practical example of bottom-up peacebuilding that has great potential to complement top-down national and regional peace efforts.

22 Nigel Gambanga, "Here's Zimbabwe's Draft Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill," TechZim, August 11, 2016, available at www.techzim.co.zw/2016/08/heres-zimbabwes-draft-computer-crime-cybercrime-bill/#.V7LL9Jh97IU.

23 The flag movement (#ThisFlag) was started by Pastor Evan Mawarire by posting a short online video that went viral on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (@PastorEvanLive). He fled to the United States after being arrested and acquitted, and was rearrested upon returning to Zimbabwe. He is currently out on bail. He is charged with trying to "subvert a constitutionally elected" government. See "Zimbabwe's '#This Flag' Pastor Granted Bail," *IOL*, February 8, 2017, available at www.iol.co.za/news/special-features/zimbabwe/zimbabwes-this-flag-pastor-granted-bail-7668284; and Simon Allison, "The Simple Genius of Zimbabwe's #ThisFlag Protest, and the Man Who Started It," *Daily Maverick*, May 22, 2016, available at www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-05-22-the-simple-genius-of-zimbabwes-thisflag-protest-and-the-man-who-started-it/.

24 Öjendal, Leonardsson, and Lundqvist, "Local Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities."

25 Elections in Zimbabwe are set for July 30, 2018. Farai Machivenyika, "ED Proclaims July 30 Election Date," *The Herald*, May 31, 2018, available at www.herald.co.zw/elections-set-for-30-july/.



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