



Wilton Park



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Report

Next generation African peacebuilding: new voices, new networks and new strategies

Wednesday 10 – Friday 12 April 2019 | WP1676

In association with:



SSRC



With support from:





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Next generation African peacebuilding: new voices, new networks and new strategies

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**In association with the African Peacebuilding Network of the Social Science Research Council, New York and the African Leadership Centre
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Key points

- Peacebuilding processes in Africa must adapt both to fit with diverging internal trends on the continent – from the rise of transnational non-state actors to a resurgence of central state sovereignty and militarisation – as well as changing external relationships within an increasingly networked world.
- The traditional ‘liberal peace’ model of peacebuilding still plays a leading role despite evidence that it has failed to create conditions for durable peace and in many cases has exacerbated cycles of violence. The new demands of the evolving landscape in Africa call for a fundamental reconceptualisation of peacebuilding that moves beyond an ‘add-on’ to existing paradigms.
- The next generation of peacebuilding actors must be more inclusive and should seek to recognise and engage actors who may not comfortably fit within the traditional sphere of wilful or self-identifying peacebuilders – from social protest movements on the streets to trafficking groups operating across areas of entrenched conflict.
- While newly assertive external state actors are altering the nature and scope of their activities in Africa, the tendency to depict this as a zero-sum game between traditional and emerging players fails to acknowledge that such engagements are occurring within established peacebuilding frameworks as well as disrupting them.
- Peacebuilding networks face multiple interrelated challenges of sustainability, relevance and effective leadership. Tackling these issues will require greater attentiveness to current power dynamics and an awareness of how their local components working on the ground can be better included in decision-making processes.
- Youth and women’s networks frequently operate on small budgets and are predominately volunteer-driven – yet have achieved significant results by bridging the gap to segments of society that larger organisations are unable to reach. The contribution of these groups still often lacks formal recognition and it is imperative that they are respected as equal players in the field.
- An insistence upon short cycles of funding with stringent financial monitoring requirements has excluded many smaller groups from obtaining funding and can represent a drain on the energy and resources of others. Funding and support systems must adapt to fit with the realities of peacebuilding as an incremental process that is prone to setbacks, by embracing longer-term

flexible funding models and including broader initiatives such as legal support and psychosocial assistance.

- Traditional media sources can play a critical role in peacebuilding by elevating constructive voices for peace, but this focus has frequently been obstructed by a fixation on the drama of conflict and a failure to prevent the spread of misinformation and incendiary rhetoric.
- New online media sources, including social media platforms, have opened space for grassroots investigative journalism and the mobilisation of popular movements. However, they have also provided a space for recruitment to extremist groups and can facilitate the increasingly rapid spread of false information. The concept of responsible 'netizenship' must be pursued further if such issues are to be addressed.
- Peacebuilding strategies should continue to incorporate new technologies and mediums in order to tackle longstanding challenges: whether in the use of crowd sharing applications to map conflict incidents and build early warning systems, or in developing effective ways to communicate complex peace histories via social media platforms.
- While next generation peacebuilding does not necessarily entail the creation of 'new' actors, networks or strategies, there are significant changes taking place in the execution of peacebuilding, in the roles of existing actors, as well as new peacebuilding spaces that were not previously designed as such. On the one hand, there is a need to reframe and to exploit better the extensive knowledge and experience that already exists on the ground. On the other hand, there is a need to recognise the existence of new peacebuilding actors and the changes occurring in peacebuilding that come as a direct product of the changing contexts in which conflict and peace currently sit in both regionally and globally.

Next generation peacebuilding in context

1. Peacebuilding processes in Africa are being shaped by trends of change and continuity on the continent. Local non-state actors and multilateral organisations have attained significant influence at both national and transnational levels; while simultaneously many states are retreating towards centralised power arrangements and a gradual militarisation of their interactions with citizens. On the global stage, meanwhile, Africa is grappling with changing external relationships and new spaces for engagement as part of an increasingly networked world. As the concept of peacebuilding itself remains contested and far from uniformly defined, the urgency to reformulate peacebuilding within the rapidly evolving African context has never been greater.
2. Although trends within Africa have diverged, the understanding of what peacebuilding is has not adapted to fit such developments. While peacebuilding has frequently been critiqued in recent years, the dominant 'liberal peace' approach has not been replaced - despite evidence that it has failed to create conditions for durable peace and development in many instances. The African continent offers alternative models that must be harnessed to create a bold and relevant replacement for this existing paradigm.
3. Peacebuilding should be viewed as a continuum. At one end are actors who attempt to prevent violence and uphold peace, and by doing so reinforce a self-held understanding of themselves as peacebuilders. Although such efforts — which include many of the United Nations (UN) missions in Africa — may be consciously generated, they often risk perpetuating cycles of violence. At the other end of this continuum are those engaged in producing a situation where powerful actors do not have the will or means to use violence. Overly emphasising the traditional end of this

scale risks imbuing all peacebuilding with a basic normative dichotomy of good against bad, which can overlook both the deficiencies of wilful actors and the importance of many less obvious contributors.

4. Peacebuilding is complex, chaotic and confusing; it would be a mistake to suggest that any single actor is fully in control of its processes. Nonetheless, when considering how to define next generation peacebuilding, often the first question posed is to ask 'who' is worthy of categorisation under the label of peacebuilder — rather than *how* peacebuilding actually takes place. A greater focus on the latter question will discourage the instrumentalisation of particular peacebuilding actors and give more attention to the wider power dynamics and interactions that take place under these complex and messy conditions.
5. Ultimately, the next generation must represent more than just an add-on to existing approaches, as has often been the past record. Sharp thinking will be required to instead unlock a deeper reconceptualisation of African peacebuilding.

Broadening 'new' actors

6. The next generation of peace builders must be more inclusive and may involve:
 - Those involved in shaping and influencing thinking and aspirations on peacebuilding matters, such as think tanks, academics, and some non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
 - Institutions or individuals who are formally engaged in peace and security activities with the goal of promoting peace, including certain regional organisations, state governors, and local institutions;
 - Those who are actively involved in 'sectors other than security', but are nonetheless impacted by currents of violence and peace - such as business communities and certain civil society organisations;
 - Movements and individuals engaged in conscious efforts to make societal changes using rhetoric and devices other than security, such as through non-violent protest;
 - More controversially, those who are involved in violent or quasi-violent acts of resistance with the aim of changing a prevailing social order. Certain youth movements and protest movements within Africa have been uncomfortably packaged within this category by some states who wish to criminalise and dismiss their behaviour.
7. Peacebuilding actors cannot merely be reduced to those who are believed to be motivated by some notion of a common or societal good. Rather, certain actors who have been actively shunned by traditional approaches may in fact play a role in peacebuilding processes. This category includes traffickers operating across areas experiencing entrenched conflict, for instance in parts of Mali, who have for decades been forced to negotiate with armed groups to preserve space for their livelihood. Irrespective of their illicit nature, to immediately exclude these actors from the peacebuilding sphere overlooks the value of such dialogue and the lessons it can provide for established actors.
8. There is debate around whether new or emergent leaders or 'outlier' actors are a current reality in the peacebuilding space. On the one hand, new and emergent actors may also include established actors whose roles are or might be transforming in a changing context. On the other hand, as a particularly contested term, the 'outlier' description raises various questions. For instance, is this status an empirical fact due to actors being acknowledged as important to peacebuilding ambitions but not yet considered by established actors as a core part of their network? Or is it that their importance to the peacebuilding endeavour is considered to be peripheral?

9. Disruption to the peacebuilding space by 'outlier' or emergent actors has both positive and negative connotations in peacebuilding. To continue to frame such actors as merely disruptive 'outliers' or 'emergent' peacebuilding actors is part of the problem rather than the solution by contributing to a categorisation of peacebuilding as a highly technical activity that demands externally given knowledge.
10. Although they also are not easily packaged alongside traditional understandings, the current prevalence of popular protest movements against governments - as seen recently in Sudan, Algeria and Zimbabwe amongst others – must be seen as an important element of peacebuilding dynamics.
11. The vast majority of these actors constitute part of the next generation of peacebuilders. They may not be 'new' as in many cases these actors have existed across past generations and have operated within their own contextual environments without significant acknowledgement of their contribution to broader peacebuilding processes. More often it is a shift in the prevailing external perception of such actors that is new, as opposed to their own behaviour or structures.
12. As Africa faces increasing non-state actor transnationalism, multilateral organisations are also gradually beginning to adapt to include a greater focus on such groups. Some voices within the UN, for instance, have pushed to escape the dominance of a state-centric mindset and to engage on a more local basis with Africa.
13. At the level of regional organisations in Africa, efforts are being made to engage with a wider range of stakeholders in conversations around mediation and conflict intervention. For example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has worked in the past with think tanks and NGOs when formulating policies, and increasingly seeks to integrate civil society organisations such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) within this architecture. As well as deepening these vertical engagements, Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are collaborating amongst themselves to share information and experiences in facing common challenges such as maritime security, farmer-herder conflicts and violent extremism.

New External Relationships

14. A range of external state actors are changing the scope and terms of their engagement with Africa, with respect both to their bilateral relationships with African states and their roles within multilateral fora. In this respect, attention has primarily been turned towards the actions of states including China, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey. Similar to locally-based actors within Africa, these countries should not necessarily be taken as entirely 'new' in terms of their interactions — several Gulf States, for example, have been active in the Horn of Africa for many years. What is significantly new at the current moment is the nature, scale and scope of such engagements as well as the geopolitical backdrop against which they take place.
15. Although China is the biggest seller of weapons to Sub-Saharan Africa, it is now also increasingly engaging through existing multilateral peace support frameworks. These include troop support for specific UN peacekeeping operations as well as financial assistance for the broader UN peacekeeping budget. Although perceptions have circulated of China as a 'disruptive' actor within Africa, there is now evidence to suggest that its current engagements may equally reinforce traditional peacebuilding frameworks.
16. In the Horn of Africa, evolving relationships with the Gulf States have fostered militarisation processes that are amplifying the strategic significance of ties across the Red Sea — as reflected by the establishment of several naval and military bases in Somalia, Somaliland, Eritrea and Djibouti. Such interactions have had diverging consequences for trends of regional integration and stability. Although Gulf influence played a role in the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the extension of

intra-Gulf disputes has had a destabilising impact upon Somalia's emerging federal structure.

17. The emergence of these new relationships does not amount to a zero-sum game between newer players and more traditional partners. African actors and traditional international donors must avoid demonising these new external actors based on a generalised narrative of their motivations and should instead find more nuanced ways to interrogate and respond to their actions on the ground. For example, Turkish actors in Mogadishu have been able to establish an increasingly respectful relationship with local Somali people, which has facilitated their access to peacebuilding and development spaces that more traditional players are less capable of operating in.

Developing Networks

18. Many of the 'new' networks in Africa are not newly created as such, with many of the actors within them having operated for a considerable amount of time. It is perhaps due to fear or a refusal to recognise such contributions in the past that they are currently presented as new. However, many existing African peacebuilding networks now find themselves faced with challenges that could encourage them to rethink their original goals, including:
 - Challenges of remaining relevant in the face of rapidly changing dynamics;
 - Questions around effective leadership that is able to adapt to these changes;
 - Maintaining sufficient resources to operate effectively, including across geographical divides.
19. Improving the effectiveness of peacebuilding networks in Africa does not necessarily require creating new networks but rather to better understand the power relations of those that exist. Many networks are structured around national or regional coordinating centres that liaise both with international actors and with operations on the ground. Within such structures, however, there is a danger that the capacity of locally based actors are not sufficiently integrated into decision-making, with the result that the networks become primarily driven by the interests of individuals at the top level.
20. Peacebuilding networks fundamentally depend upon the experience and knowledge of local units on the ground in order to remain relevant in the short-term, particularly when dealing with fragile and rapidly evolving conflict environments. In the long-term, however, the sustainability of peacebuilding networks requires not only that the voices of local actors are heard, but that they have some degree of ownership over the development of networks moving forward. In the past, the fact that these grassroots actors are often not formally organised or structured along familiar hierarchical lines means that they have been left out of these strategic conversations.
21. Nonetheless, while it is critical that the voices of grassroots peacebuilding actors are amplified, how this is done should be carefully thought through. An insistence upon highly formalised funding applications and subsequent financial monitoring systems can exclude certain groups or pose a major drain on the time and energy of others. Established NGOs should remain aware that encouraging informal local operations to form more organised structures can risk introducing power dynamics of competition and even corruption, as opposed to rewarding their original intentions.
22. Women continue to be excluded from a majority of high-level conflict mediation and dialogue processes in Africa despite their expertise and capacity in this area. While the equal representation of women leaders in peacebuilding networks is essential, it is also vital to recognise the importance of women in a bottom-up sense as many of them play an indispensable role within their own homes and local communities in preventing conflict and violent extremism - including in often-marginalised rural areas.

Youth networks

23. Africa's youth seek ownership over their future. At the grassroots level, youth groups are achieving success in combating violence by preventing recruitment to violent and extremist groups, delivering capacity building measures and fostering broader social cohesion across communities. They are transforming the perception that youth are merely troublemakers or are intrinsically prone to violence.
24. In many contexts, youth peacebuilding networks have access to sectors of society, including other young people, that more traditional organisations or the state are unable to reach effectively. By bridging this gap to uniquely mobilise action for peace in these areas, youth groups can often have a far greater impact than more established players. Frequently, such outreach takes place as a result of inter-generational dialogue and cooperation with related groups, whether these are local authorities, professional associations, student movements or trade unions.
25. Youth-led peacebuilding organisations in Africa are predominately volunteer-driven and tend to operate on extremely small budgets. Evidence shows that they have been able to generate impressive results despite these limitations; for instance, by establishing hundreds of grassroots 'peace clubs' across schools to deliver capacity-building education to students and members of their wider communities.
26. The success of youth networks shows that in many cases local resources, particularly in the form of human capital, are sufficient to solve local issues. Nonetheless, this still lacks recognition and support from actors at the state and international levels. Young people in Africa should be respected for their contributions to peacebuilding and seen as equal players within the field. External actors need to engage with youth not as a static category but as a fluid and evolving one. This approach is needed to ensure that support to youth peacebuilding networks does not simply benefit elite sectors but encompasses a wider spectrum of people including young women and disadvantaged young people in rural areas.
27. In making efforts to cooperate with and support youth-led organisations, established NGOs should begin not simply by asking whether they trust the involved young people but should reflect firstly upon who it is that these young people trust, and why. Such cooperation is unlikely to be successful if young people feel their proposals will be dismissed or even stolen.

New spaces for peacebuilding

28. Conflict in Africa remains unpredictable, often arising in places where it is least expected and deepening in circumstances that are attracting the most attention. Nonetheless, peacebuilding actors are defying convention and pushing creativity in their responses, working for example across spheres such as business, psychology, media, sport and art.
29. Peacebuilding across this range of sectors has already been taking place for a considerable period of time, driven by actors such as students, human rights campaigners, social protest movements and labour unions. As such actors largely continue to be unacknowledged as peacebuilders — with their aims and actions dismissed as messy or chaotic — it becomes increasingly important to be attentive to the spaces in which they operate and the dynamics that shape them. Examples of these spaces include:
 - a) Technology-enabled spaces — emerging technologies are providing opportunities for peace-minded actors to come together and develop strategies. For instance, the proliferation of WhatsApp groups has created a space for discussion that governments cannot easily monitor or suppress.
 - b) Hidden spaces — peacebuilding efforts have arisen in areas where they are not expected or obvious, for instance within business incubator initiatives that are actively encouraged by the state.
 - c) Intentional spaces for peace — such as African think-tanks and NGOs.

- d) Independent institutions within otherwise entrenched governments are also peacebuilding spaces: such as the Public Protector in South Africa, or Public Auditor in Sierra Leone.
 - e) As recent popular protests have shown, the streets are also a space where peacebuilding takes place.
 - f) Areas within Africa described as 'ungoverned spaces', where the central state is not present due to conflict or insufficient resources, are not in fact wholly chaotic but have seen the emergence of alternative forms of governance — these too are spaces for peacebuilding.
30. Rather than placing additional chairs around the existing table by simply bringing certain previously excluded actors into traditional peacebuilding frameworks, there is a need to help protect and nurture spaces that go beyond the sphere of 'security and stability'. This does not only require acknowledging dissenting voices and spaces within society, but also extends to the highest levels of the state itself. In this respect, the recent establishment of a 'Peace Ministry' in Ethiopia is an example of innovation that rejects a purely militarised peacebuilding role for the state.
31. It is also important to remain mindful of developing spaces that may restrict and disrupt peacebuilding. For example, major external funding of oil and gas projects in Africa, such as in northern Mozambique, is continuing to create enclaves of investment that have significant negative implications for wider peacebuilding processes.

The role of the media in peacebuilding

32. The media often plays its most visible role during times of conflict, owing partly to the rolling news focus on the drama and flashpoints of violence. This focus is exacerbated by the obsession with clicks and viewing figures that has accompanied the rise of online media sources. However, a focus on the most shocking aspects of conflict can obstruct the establishment of any significant peacebuilding dialogue; there is a need to also elevate narratives that embrace the commonness of humanity and can help to bring people together. In South Sudan, for example, the protracted state of conflict can mean that many young people have never been adequately exposed to alternative experiences and voices of peace.
33. While the media has a basic right to independence and freedom of speech, its practitioners must be aware that these rights equally entail significant responsibilities. News reporting can play a dangerous role in spreading misinformation and propaganda to stoke conflict and division, as has been seen in past cases such as Rwanda or post-election violence in Kenya. Such cases illustrate that it is challenging to fully separate reporting on conflict from the processes of conflict.
34. Within more traditional elements of the media, transformation from the bottom up will be necessary to support peacebuilding efforts. The training of new journalism scholars provides an opportunity to teach African theories of peace journalism, and therefore to institutionalise more constructive practices of conflict reporting without amplifying divisive narratives. In addition, while traditional funding sources for investigative journalism are in decline, space is opening up for grassroots actors to generate momentum in this field. Organisations such as the International Centre for Investigative Reporting, established in Nigeria, are working to deliver capacity-building programmes that will enable journalists to challenge inaccurate news reporting and hold governments to account.
35. The rapid expansion of social media can both enable and disrupt peacebuilding. Online social media platforms such as Twitter have the potential to give a voice to popular movements for change, irrespective of government attempts to close down these spaces — as has been recently illustrated by the '#ShutDownZimbabwe' campaign or the mobilisation of protestors in Sudan. However, the absence of online restrictions mean that social media can equally lead to the rapid spread of misinformation or incendiary rhetoric, as well as providing a space for recruitment to

extremist groups. To confront such challenges, the concept of responsible 'netizenship' should be further developed in order to foster individual responsibility for and awareness of online issues.

New strategies and recommendations

36. In considering the development of 'new' strategies, it is important to build upon the rich history of African innovation in peacebuilding. Prominent examples include frameworks of ethics and norms, such as the philosophy of Ubuntu; civil society networks including WANEP; National Peace Councils, as seen in Ghana and Kenya; transitional justice mechanisms in South Africa or Sierra Leone; a multitude of cases of nonviolent action or social movements, as witnessed in Liberia and elsewhere; and initiatives within arts and culture, such as the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.
37. African technological innovation also continues to provide strategic avenues for peacebuilding. For example, the Ushahidi online platform, developed in 2008 in the context of post-election violence in Kenya, allows local observers to submit reports of developments around them that can then be amassed into a geospatial archive and timeline of events. Such technologies are useful not only in crisis response scenarios but for the day-to-day activities of peacebuilding networks. Crowd sharing apps or websites that allow members to upload their activities are being used to generate awareness and share learning experiences across geographic boundaries. Moreover, the rapid spread of social media and messaging services such as WhatsApp has facilitated faster and more flexible communication across networks, which is helping to enable new initiatives such as inclusion of youth members within early warning systems.
38. All too often, nonviolent social movements in Africa have been divorced from peacebuilding activities; with insufficient attention given to how the two can be mutually reinforcing. Nonviolent social movements can help change power imbalances between the state, armed groups, and society by mobilising collective action in support of sustainable peace and justice. Women's groups, for example, have used nonviolent tactics to press for ceasefires, rights to vote, democratic elections and other aspects of peace processes. In addition to shifting power towards peacebuilders, nonviolent action can also strengthen dialogue by raising awareness of key issues and increasing the urgency for ending violent conflict. Conversely, peacebuilding can strengthen nonviolent action by helping to build diverse coalitions and strengthen capacity.
39. There is a need to also recognise the use of the human body as a tool for peacebuilding; drawing upon the stories of women who have been detained and tortured but have returned to the frontline of street protests, or examples of the self-brutalisation of the body as a tool of protest.
40. Narrative, discussion and dialogue are important aspects of strategy and require particular attention in the context of power imbalances across peacebuilding. Actors such as youth groups who are arriving into established peacebuilding networks must consider how their use of language can enable them to better infiltrate and influence these spaces. In addition, strategic thinking is increasingly necessary for the formulation of peacebuilding terminology: the deliberate choice of particular terms is not inconsequential but affects how individuals define themselves.
41. Increasingly, a role is developing for satirical, comedic and irreverent strategies of peacebuilding. African citizens on social media, for example, are making light of difficult situations of conflict and disunity through humorous exchanges, but in doing so are utilising this as a tool to move dialogue forward by capitalising on the ability of Africans to laugh at themselves.
42. While much of the discussion around new strategies inevitably focuses on the inclusion of youth and their embrace of new technologies, this must equally be

complemented by inter-generational exchange and the learning of peace histories. However, progress in this respect is being constrained by a decline in history teaching and in the uptake of history by students in Africa. New strategies must find ways to synthesise this complex historical information and communicate it using contemporary mediums, including via social media.

Funding and Support Mechanisms

43. Fundamentally, peacebuilding is a long-term, incremental process that is inevitably constrained by short-term setbacks. Effective strategy must therefore consider how funding and support mechanisms can adapt to fit with this reality — which is not being matched by the current prevalence of funding cycles of 1-3 years. Longer-term, more flexible and nimble systems are required to break these cyclical aspects of funding and release some of the burden of their monitoring and evaluation requirements for local and smaller-scale organisations operating on the ground. Ultimately, this approach must be underpinned by a broader mindset change, moving towards strategic patience and a greater appetite for taking risks.
44. Longer-term support mechanisms for peacebuilding should incorporate a broad range of features beyond simply financial components, including:
 - a) Legal assistance — for instance, to support nonviolent action movements if their members face imprisonment;
 - b) Training in media and communication strategies;
 - c) Equipment and materials, including technological assistance;
 - d) Psychosocial and trauma support.

Conclusion

Amidst a changing global and regional landscape, with diverging internal and external trends affecting the continent, the space for peacebuilding continues to transform in response to changing needs and incentives. These evolving dynamics have shone fresh light on actors, strategies and networks; demanding greater acknowledgement of periphery capabilities while also recognising and strengthening existing peacebuilding entities. In reflection of this, next generation African peacebuilding does not necessarily require the creation of anything substantively 'new', but instead to reconsider, leverage better and link much of what already exists: bringing together the extensive knowledge and experience of youth organisations, women's networks, community groups and nonviolent movements.

Voices

As a first step towards harnessing this abundant potential, it is critical to recognise the sheer breadth of the spectrum of voices that permeate the peacebuilding space. They range from the overtly recognisable – in the self-defined 'peacekeeping' missions that continue to play a significant role in areas such as the Sahel or Somalia – to those actors who seldom identify as peacebuilders nor are acknowledged as such, across business communities or civil society organisations. Others, meanwhile, are changing the means by which their voices are heard on the African continent: state actors including China or those in the Gulf have acted both from within established multilateral frameworks as well as working to destabilise them. Next generation peacebuilding calls not only to include voices from opposite ends of the current spectrum of recognition, but also to surpass this in search of engagement with actors who have actively been shunned and rendered voiceless in this space – from youth organisations to groups with elements of criminality, such as trafficking actors operating in conflict environments.

Networks

As the range and roles of peacebuilding actors continue to evolve, the networks that connect them must equally adapt to fit this reality, while simultaneously grappling with questions around their resources, relevance and effective leadership. Nonetheless, many of the answers for these challenges are often readily available in the form of local actors already working on the ground: from volunteer-driven grassroots initiatives such as

'peace clubs' to networks of women and young people. Going forward, therefore, networks must be restructured to foster greater integration of their local elements within decision-making processes, as well as increased recognition of the disproportionate impact of these grassroots activities for peacebuilding outcomes.

Strategies

Strategic innovation of peacebuilding in Africa must not only take into account the significant variation in relevant actors, but also consider the new spaces across which they operate, particularly those enabled by new technologies and media outlets. In this context, however, the need to look forward does not preclude the importance of looking back. Strategy must both build upon the rich history of African innovation in peacebuilding – including civil society approaches, transitional justice mechanisms, social movements and art and cultural initiatives – while also remaining cognisant of how new dimensions such as online messaging or crowd sharing applications are opening alternative avenues for action.

Peacebuilding must be demystified; on the one hand by adopting a whole of society approach that acknowledges that anyone can be both a peacebuilder and not a peacebuilder on the same day; and on the other by working with humility and self-reflection to acknowledge where current arrangements are ultimately proving to be harmful. The strategies that match this mindset are fundamentally flexible, nimble and patient: from embracing longer funding cycles with less stringent financial monitoring requirements, to raising awareness of new media platforms and crowd sharing technologies. Above all, therefore, peacebuilding has to be contextual. Just as Africa's diverse and diverging landscape makes it impossible to identify any homogeneous dynamics applicable to the continent, a one-size-fits-all approach to peacebuilding will never be sufficient to address this diversity.

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