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# Locally Driven Peacebuilding



PURDUE PEACE PROJECT



Peace Initiative Network



**American Friends  
Service Committee**



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The following emerged from a two-day mini-think tank on local approaches to peacebuilding held in November 2014 in Boston, MA. In attendance were practitioners, funders, peacebuilders from conflict affected nations, and academics. The mini-think tank was convened by Milt Lauenstein in his role as philanthropist to violence prevention work. This document represents a collective statement in support of locally driven peacebuilding from those who are in the position to assist and encourage such endeavors.

## What is locally driven peacebuilding?

Locally driven peacebuilding is an approach in which the people involved in, and most affected by, violent conflict work together to create and enact their own solutions to prevent, reduce, and/or transform the conflict, with the support they desire from outsiders. This is an inside-out, bottom-up approach that involves mobilizing local capacities, knowledge, and resources. It is an approach to peacebuilding that aims to amplify local ownership of conflict transformation. This is sometimes referred to as locally led or locally owned peacebuilding.

By “local” we refer to those who must deal with the conflict on a day-to-day basis and live with its consequences. The scale of “local” is defined in relation to the specific conflict and context. For example, “local” can refer to those in country in relation to international agencies. In some situations it can also refer to residents of a particular community or region experiencing conflict in contrast to a national civil society organization.

The role of outsiders to the immediate conflict (e.g. INGOs, aid workers, academics, funders, etc.) in this approach is to work in support of local groups and individuals to encourage, accompany, and assist their efforts. This can take a variety of forms including, but not limited to, providing spaces in which they can develop and enact their own peacebuilding strategies, amplifying their solutions to decision-makers, offering technical and financial support, and connecting local expertise and perspective to international decision-makers, policy makers, and ongoing international dialogue.

## Why support locally driven approaches?

We, the undersigned supporters of locally driven approaches, believe that people in conflict contexts should be more than “implementing partners” for donors and outside groups. They should *drive* the peacebuilding process. Too often those who are most deeply affected by conflict have not been included in the peacebuilding conversation or are only included as implementers of a project but not decision makers. We believe people at the local level (a) have the *capacity* to articulate, develop, and enact solutions to their own problems; (b) possess important *knowledge* and a better understanding about the complexities of the people, situation, context, and culture of the conflict; (c) maintain pre-existing, established *relationships* that enable them to network and engage with others in the peace process; (d) may be more likely to have the *motivation* to act, and act quickly, to resolve issues that directly impact them; and (e) have the *staying power* to sustain peace long after external actors have left. As such, we believe those in conflict contexts are best placed to work together to develop solutions to the problems they face, and therefore should lead peacebuilding efforts by defining the problem, designing and enacting solutions, and evaluating the results. Additionally, evidence increasingly demonstrates that locally driven approaches have the potential to be more cost-effective than outsider interventions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gillhespy, T., & Hayman, C. (2011). *Coming home: A case study of community led disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in D.R. Congo*. London, UK: Peace Direct.; Poole, A. (2014). *Bazara justice: A case study of community led conflict resolution in D.R. Congo*. London, UK: Peace Direct.

### **What are the major challenges to locally driven approaches?**

Three major challenges to locally driven approaches exist that need to be addressed. First, engaging in locally driven approaches requires a major shift in the mindsets of practitioners, policymakers, and, in some cases, local citizens and authorities themselves. It requires challenging entrenched beliefs, sometimes displayed by members of the international community and often embedded in peacebuilding practice, that those outside the conflict should be the only ones to develop peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts. These beliefs are based on assumptions that (1) local people are biased and too close to the conflict while outsiders are perceived as neutral and (2) that local people do not have the education, technical skills, or organizational capacities needed to engage in peacebuilding and therefore outside “experts” are best positioned to design, implement, and evaluate interventions. Locally driven peacebuilding serves as a direct response to these externally driven approaches that have historically been enacted across a variety of contexts. It attempts to speak to criticisms of outsider interventions being culturally insensitive, costly, and unsustainable. Those who adopt locally driven approaches argue that outside experts may not always be neutral, but enter with their own biases and assumptions, and that local communities have valuable capacities toward building peace. It is important to note that locally driven approaches to peacebuilding should not be seen as uncritical celebrations of the “local,” but rather represent efforts to reshape the relationship between those directly affected by the conflict and those outside of it by shifting decision-making power back to those most affected.

Second, and relatedly, most donor funding structures and requirements are predicated on these assumptions. They are built for large-scale grants and a high level of technical expertise. The requirements are often inflexible, proving challenging for those who would seek to engage in small, locally driven projects that require a certain amount of financial autonomy and flexibility.

Third, there are few *documented* models, processes, and tools for locally driven peacebuilding efforts. For those interested in locally driven approaches, additional models are needed to illustrate how such projects could be implemented and to demonstrate their success. Existing models need to be more widely shared and discussed. Additionally, the peacebuilding field needs more tools (especially related to measurement and evaluation) that are useful and relevant to local communities.

### **What next?**

To promote and extend locally driven peacebuilding, we invite you to:

- **Share best practices and document evidence in support of locally driven peacebuilding.** We need more opportunities for lesson and experience sharing among practitioners, funders, and policymakers. If you engage in locally driven peacebuilding approaches or are interested in learning more about them, then consider participating in a conversation of this topic convened by the [Alliance for Peacebuilding](#) Annual Conference. For more information contact Jessica Berns: [jbbarns@yahoo.com](mailto:jbbarns@yahoo.com)
- **Fund locally driven initiatives.** We need to develop more flexible structures for supporting this type of work. This may involve persuading larger funders to give smaller grants and encouraging smaller donors to consider the merits of local approaches to peacebuilding. If you are a funder, consider the ways you can provide small, flexible and multi-year grants to local peacebuilding efforts. Funders should also consider participating in conversations on this topic within funding affinity groups, such as the [Peace and Security Funders Group](#).
- **Ensure local voices are at the table.** If you are in the position to influence who is part of conversations about peacebuilding, then advocate for those local to the conflict to be included. We should model the practices we want others to enact by being inclusive of local and diverse voices on our boards and working groups, at our conferences and workshops, and in our reporting.

## Recommended resources

Want to learn more about locally driven peacebuilding? Check out some of these resources:

- Connaughton, S., Yeanay Mayson, G., Kuang, K. (2014). Peacebuilding with local citizens. *Building Peace*. Retrieved from <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2014/09/peacebuilding-with-local-citizens/>
- Gillhespy, T., & Hayman, C. (2011). *Coming home: A case study of community led disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in D.R. Congo*. London, UK: Peace Direct. Retrieved from <http://www.peacedirect.org/us/coming-home/>
- Hoffman, L. (2015). The answer to Ebola: A funder makes the case for community-driven action. *Building Peace*. Retrieved from <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2015/01/the-answer-to-ebola-a-local-peacebuilder-makes-the-case-for-community-driven-action/>
- Kazingufu, F., & Moix, B. (2014). Putting local peacebuilders first. *Building Peace*. Retrieved from <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2014/09/putting-local-peacebuilders-first/>
- Lauenstein, M. (2014). An urge to make a difference: An entrepreneur's journey for peace. *Building Peace*. Retrieved from <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2014/09/an-urge-to-make-a-difference-an-entrepreneurs-personal-journey-for-peace/>
- Local peacebuilding successes. (2015). *International Peace Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.ipinst.org/2015/03/local-peacebuilding-successes>
- Ó Súilleabháin, A. (Ed.). (2015). *Leveraging local knowledge for peacebuilding and statebuilding in Africa*. New York, NY: International Peace Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.ipinst.org/2015/03/leveraging-local-knowledge-for-peacebuilding-and-statebuilding-in-africa>
- Pinnington, R. (2014). *Local first in practice: Unlocking the power to get things done*. London, UK: Peace Direct. Retrieved from <http://www.peacedirect.org/us/local-first-action/>
- Poole, A. (2014). *Bazara justice: A case study of community led conflict resolution in D.R. Congo*. London, UK: Peace Direct. Retrieved from <http://www.peacedirect.org/us/baraza-justice/>

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