

Taking Peacebuilding to the Next Level: Conversations with Peacebuilding Leaders

By Milt Lauenstein
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Peacebuilding works! Hundreds of case histories demonstrate that peacebuilding organizations can prevent and, occasionally, stop, armed conflict. They have helped conflicted parties work out their differences, arranged truces, and facilitated final peace treaties.

In spite of all of those successes, though, political violence has been increasing in recent years. The human and economic cost is so great that finding more effective ways to promote peace merits high priority.

To get new ideas about what more can be done, earlier this year I spoke individually with 14 friends in leadership roles in promoting peace and for whom I have high regard. They are in positions of responsibility in academic, funding, and practitioner institutions.

The conversations lasted about an hour each. We probed the question of who can do what to achieve transformative, positive progress in peacebuilding activity. Some of the discussants have been working to achieve more significant results and all are seeking additional ideas about how the peacebuilding community can become more effective in reducing armed conflict.

We identified factors that are limiting the effectiveness of the peacebuilding community. They include:

- The field is fragmented with little coordination among participants.
- Organizations lack adequate, sustainable funding.
- Practitioners have failed to convey to potential funders and to the public the positive difference in their work has made.
- Better assessment tools are needed measure the cost effectiveness of both individual projects and the results of the work overall.

Several of the people with whom I spoke suggested that a meeting of well-informed individuals committed to identifying possible transformative actions to promote peace might yield positive results. A small group is now collaborating to determine what sort of meeting might be productive; who might contribute most as participants, and what preparation would be needed to achieve significant results.

One objective of these conversations was to stimulate thinking "outside the box" about how more significant results might be achieved by those working for peace. An idea that emerged from the conversations was to encourage younger people in the field, especially in academia, to generate ideas of how peacebuilding could become much more effective. I have already arranged to fund a call for papers on new and better ways to promote peace, to be

administered by Purdue University and co-sponsored by the Alliance for Peacebuilding.

Another promising action that was discussed was research on cost-effectiveness, which could provide data on the basis of which resources could be allocated more effectively. I have now arranged to support initial research on cost-effectiveness at six different organizations. Not only may the findings be useful in allocating resources immediately, but positive results may encourage other funders to sponsor such research in other places so as to provide more evidence about where effort and money can do most to reduce political violence.

More collaboration among peacebuilders on the ground, in sharing knowledge and experiences, and in developing more effective approaches, could yield positive results.

The amount of money spent to promote peace is a tiny fraction of the cost of war. A group of leading organizations in the field are working together to call attention to what is being achieved by peacebuilders to engage more people in peacebuilding, to increase its profile, and to increase the amount of money devoted to reducing armed conflict.

I am grateful to those who participated in these conversations and to Jessica Berns, who participated in many of them and made the notes on which the comments above are based.

Discussants

1. Andy Blum, Executive Director, Institute for Peace and Justice, Kroc School, University of San Diego
2. Alexa Courtney CEO and Founder, and Steve Sheamer, CFO/COO, Frontier Design Group
3. Steve Del Rosso, Program Director, International Peace & Security, Carnegie Corporation,
4. Jim Fearon, Professor of Political Science , Stanford University
5. Melanie Greenberg, President and CEO, Alliance for Peacebuilding
6. Shamil Idriss, President and Chief Executive Officer, Search for Common Ground
7. Kerri Kennedy, Associate General Secretary for International Programs, American Friends Service Committee
8. Michael Lund, Senior Specialist for Conflict and Peacebuilding, Management Systems International Inc.
9. Dylan Mathews, Chief Executive, Peace Direct
10. Rob Ricigliano, Systems and Complexity Coach, Omidyar Group
11. Darynell Rodriguez, Executive Director, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
12. Bill Schulz, Senior Fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government
13. Dan Smith, Director, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
14. Alex Toma, Executive Director, Peace and Security Funders Group