

Conference Report

Berlin Summer Dialogue 2018

sef:

Strengthening Local Peacebuilding. Establishing the Basis for Sustaining Peace

Larissa Neubauer

With the concept of “sustaining peace”, the United Nations (UN) aims to place international peacebuilding on a new footing, characterised mainly by the shift of responsibility for securing peace from the international to the national and local levels. The UN will play a largely supportive role in establishing viable national and local architectures in future.

The forms, strategies and challenges of local peacebuilding were therefore the focus of the Berlin Summer Dialogue 2018, which took place in Berlin Town Hall on 30 May 2018. A further key topic of interest was how local engagement can link in with national and international peacebuilding.

The liberal understanding of peace vs. local conflict management traditions

Dr Andries Odendaal from South Africa has been supporting local peace processes in various regions of the world for decades. “Let us be clear on one thing,” he said in his introduction. “Through all the centuries and millennia, local communities have made their own peace.” What is new, however, is the shift towards international responsibility for local peace. Dr Odendaal identified three challenges in the international debate about local peace. Firstly, there is the prevailing view that local peace relies on the implementation of national peace agreements and will “trickle down” to the local level. The opposing argument put forward by those who favour local peace engagement is that the trickle-down assumption just does not work: conflicts must be transformed and peace must grow from the grassroots up. Secondly, the paradigm that guides international peacebuilding is founded on the liberal understanding of the democratic state as the best guarantee of peace. The contrary view is that this largely Western paradigm is being enforced on societies across the globe in a way that smacks of neo-colonialism, undermining local concepts. And thirdly, there is the notion of state sovereignty, which is a sacrosanct principle. However, in many instances, internal conflicts are impacting on the international community as well, as they give rise to displacement and migration, terrorism and instability in the country or region concerned. In that sense, the international community has a legitimate

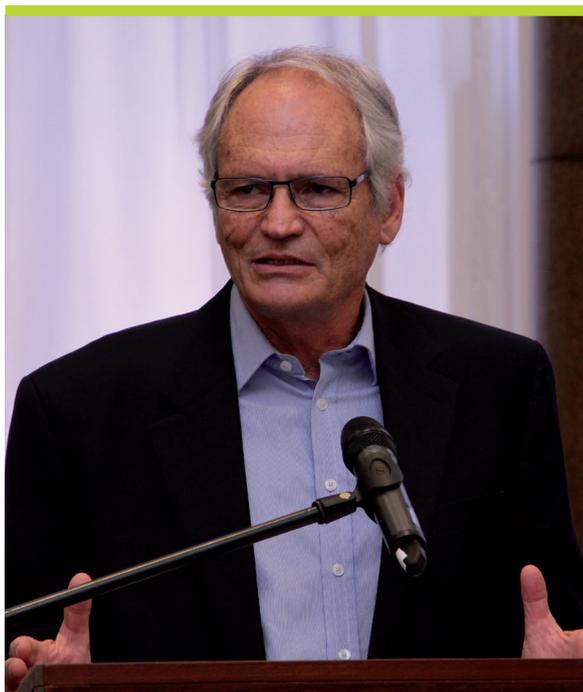


Julie Brethfeld (Chair), Jurma A. Tikmasan, Simone Wisotzki and Sophia Close (l.t.r)

interest in taking action and intervening in such situations, said Dr Odendaal.

Local conflicts – local solutions?

He also emphasised that peace engagement must start with the local conflict system: “Each conflict must be resolved by its ‘owners’. No one can solve other people’s conflicts.” Long-term sustainable peacebuilding depends on the type of conflict and the parties involved. A strategy that works in South Africa may not necessarily work in Nepal and vice versa. Even within one country, the solution to one local conflict is not always a template for others.



Andries A. Odendaal

For outsiders, therefore, the dialogue with local stakeholders is especially important. Here, however, Dr Odendaal criticised the overworked catchword “capacity building”, because it implies that outsiders have the expertise needed to achieve a (supposedly better) solution to a local conflict (“we know, and you do not”). Quite the reverse: “Local peacebuilding cannot be performed by outsiders without professional humility.” Success is predicated above all on an in-depth conflict analysis involving all parties.

Between local and national peace

Successful local peacebuilding does not necessarily translate into national peace, as the example of Burundi shows. Dieudonné Kibinakanwa, Co-Founder and Legal Representative of Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation under the Cross (MIPAREC), provided a brief introduction to his organisation’s work. Since 1994, MIPAREC has established 500 local

peace committees (LPCs) nationwide with more than 18,000 members. The LPCs enable local communities to build peace and social cohesion in accordance with their own ideas, values and circumstances. The LPCs offer a safe space where conflict parties can share and listen to stories. Despite these successes, Dieudonné Kibinakanwa made it clear that a national peace infrastructure supported by the international community is needed in Burundi in order to build the capacities of the LPCs. At present, political instability and poor economic performance are hindering their work. There is also declining support from international organisations due to concerns about the country’s lack of stability.

The Most Reverend Professor Emmanuel Asante, Chairman of the National Peace Council in Ghana, explained that in light of historical experiences of land conflicts in the north of the country, it was recognised that there was a need to develop conflict resolution mechanisms. In 2011, Parliament adopted the National Peace Council Act, which institutionalised the national peace architecture which was an emerging model for conflict resolution in Ghana. The peace councils engage at both the national and the regional level to transform and defuse conflicts. “We cannot avoid conflicts per se. But conflicts are not always negative. What we must avoid is violent conflict,” he said. In Ghana, in contrast to the situation in other countries, religious differences play a less significant role in the emergence of conflicts; instead, they tend to be triggered by disputes over land and other natural resources.

Conflict transformation consultant Dr Wolfgang Heinrich pointed out that an independent civil society is important for conflict management, particularly in fragile states. “Governments in fragile states are part of the solution and part of the problem. Civil society should not get too close to the government or to the violent non-state actors if it is to contribute to successful conflict management. However, it would be helpful if international actors gave more support to local civil society engagement in the multi-stakeholder dialogue.”

Reforming social structures, empowering women

On a self-critical note, Bishop Asante observed that not enough had been done in Ghana to involve women and young people in the peace committees’ work. This chimed with the experiences of other participants in the discussion who work on the role of women in peace processes. As Dr Simone Wisotzki, a member of the Executive Board of the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), pointed out, international studies provide clear evidence of the importance of women’s engagement for peace. Peace processes that involve women are more sustainable; societies with more gender equality are more peace-

ful. Women are often the victims of violence and expulsion during armed conflicts, so their experience is crucial for sustainable conflict management and reconciliation processes.

Nonetheless, there is often a low level of women's participation locally. Professor Jurma Tikmasan, Board member of Nisa Ul Haqq Fi Bangsamoro (Women working for justice in the Bangsamoro), reported on the situation in the Philippines: "We have a high level of women's participation in the peace process at the national level, but locally, their importance is often underestimated." Even so, the Philippines is one of the few countries to have developed a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Dr Sophia Close, Senior Advisor on Gender and Peacebuilding at Conciliation Resources in London, pointed out that the debate about gender equality is often regarded locally as an international discourse that has little to do with realities on the ground. She therefore recommended not putting gender at the forefront of grassroots engagement but exploring in more depth the dynamics of interaction between men and women, boys and girls and how society can move towards more gender justice.

Recognising youth as a partner

When it comes to involving young people in peace processes, there is room for improvement. Martine Kessy Ekomo-Soignet, Founder and Executive Direc-



Nicolas Boissez, Rev. Geraldine Fobang und William Tayeebwa (l.t.r)

tor of URU, a youth organisation in Bangui, made it clear that "Resolution 2250 is about more than politics. We are not only victims. We are also partners. Young people therefore need a stronger voice on issues that concern their future." Young people should have the opportunity to work together on building their future – as a general principle, not only in relation to peace. However, many of the international

funding programmes are not particularly helpful in this respect as they apply narrow criteria and do not respond flexibly to young people's needs and ideas, she continued.



Martine Kessy Ekomo-Soignet

Dr William Tsuma, UN Peace and Development Advisor in Zimbabwe, pointed out that the general context is also a factor determining whether young people make positive or negative use of their capabilities. Policy-makers have a responsibility here as well. Lorraine Degruson, Leading Coordinator at the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) in The Hague, agreed: "Young people don't want others to talk about them and not with them. Genuine youth participation does not mean allowing them to participate in project implementation. Genuine participation means enabling young people to be involved in planning and monitoring as well." She called for a new vision of young people in peace processes – as partners, not merely as recipients of cash handouts.

Facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue

The examples provided by the international experts showed that there is no blueprint for local peacebuilding that can be used in all contexts. Paul van Tongeren, Honorary Chair of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) in The Hague, criticised the fact that even now, local peacebuilding from within society often goes unnoticed. He called for more analysis of the successes achieved by local peace committees so that other countries are encouraged to set up these structures. Local peace committees contribute to conflict prevention in line with the "sustaining peace" concept, he said. The

other experts agreed that for national governments and international organisations, engaging with local peacebuilders is worthwhile.

The ability to create space for and engage in dialogue, to meet on equal terms and to listen to one another

is as important as ever. This applies not only to local conflict parties but also to the various stakeholders at local, national and international level. Although this is not a new insight, it should be recognised as a core principle in civil conflict management and implemented more widely and effectively in future.



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

In cooperation with the

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Imprint

The Development and Peace Foundation (sef.) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. As a cross-party and non-profit-making organisation, the sef. provides an international high-level forum for shared thinking on urgent peace and development issues.

The reports to the conferences and events of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef.) provide information about the discussions and results in a compact form.

Published by
Development and Peace Foundation (sef.)/
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (sef.)
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Editor
Dr Michèle Roth
Translation
Hillary Crowe

Design Basic Concept
Pitch Black Graphic Design
Berlin/Rotterdam

Layout
Gerhard Süß-Jung

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