

Rural stakeholder engagement in social cohesion, reconciliation and peacebuilding projects

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Question

How have social cohesion, reconciliation and peacebuilding projects effectively engaged with rural stakeholders?

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1. Overview

Community-level reconciliation, essential in conflict-affected contexts, involves efforts to promote intergroup relationships and to build trust. These processes are related to the development of social capital, which alongside the reduction of horizontal inequalities, is a key component of social cohesion. In Iraq and elsewhere, rural populations are often marginalised and have a much higher incidence of poverty. There is limited evidence, however, on effective ways to achieve social cohesion and peace in Iraq and elsewhere.

Areas identified in the literature where initiatives are needed to facilitate the building of peace, social cohesion and reconciliation in Iraq include:

- **Identity reconfiguration:** Religion, ethnicity and tribe are forms of identity that have been used to divide in Iraq. Approaches to reconfigure identity include redefining one's own identity, changing perceptions of the other group, and/or finding a new overarching identity.
- **Cultural heritage preservation:** Daesh leaders have engaged in efforts to culturally cleanse areas under its control, including some of the world's earliest examples of farming villages. A programme of collaborative, multi-party engagement is needed to effectively evaluate, promote and protect Iraq's heritage.
- **Dialogue and conflict resolution:** Strategies to promote social cohesion and reconciliation in Iraq include sessions and workshops designed to change attitudes, clarify and change perceptions and perspectives, develop communication skills, manage difficult conversations, and practice problem-solving skills.

This rapid review finds that there is an absence of readily available literature that identifies, discusses or evaluates projects that engage rural stakeholders in Iraq. Particular engagement with rural stakeholders in Iraq in the areas of peace, reconciliation and social cohesion appears to be minimal. Examples can be drawn from elsewhere in the world, however. As such, this report covers peace, reconciliation and social cohesion related-programmes and projects carried out in rural areas and with rural stakeholders in other country contexts. These examples demonstrate that rural actors, often marginalised and discriminated against, have the potential to effectively partake in programming that can have a local and national impact. Peace, reconciliation and social cohesion related-initiatives that have been adopted to engage rural stakeholders include:

Community-based participation and development: These programmes are designed to improve public service delivery and to build trust, social capital and inclusion by bringing community members together to work toward that goal.

- The participation of rural community members is a key aspect of community development programmes in Afghanistan. While they have produced successful results, research cautions against assuming that rural communities are unified and homogenous.
- Community-driven development in rural areas in the Kyrgyz Republic had some positive effects on unity and respect between various social and ethnic groups. They did not have much of an effect, however, on building trust and social cohesion, possibly due to short donor cycles.
- In rural Sudan, the Community Development Fund, which relied on "social mobilisers" to help identify community needs and assets, succeeded in creating more inclusive processes and greater civic action. It did not, however, strengthen social networks or

create social capital, which may in turn have undermined the effectiveness of the programme.

- The presence of community-based social organisations in rural villages in Myanmar is correlated with lower rates of vulnerability and higher levels of resilience. This is due in part to the ability of such organisations to foster income diversification, more savings and investment, and greater unity and solidarity.

Capacity development and leadership strengthening: In some rural areas, such as in Zimbabwe, traditional leaders play an important role in conflict resolution. While they could benefit from capacity building, in order to more effectively carry out this role, rural populations were generally content with their efforts. A rural programme in Colombia invests in influencing and capacity development of rural women's organisations to ensure that rural women lead and influence peacebuilding processes. It has changed the way in which rural women are perceived and has led to the successful lobbying of government on public policies benefiting rural women. Informal dispute resolution training workshops in rural Liberia have also led to higher rates of peaceful property resolution in rural areas.

Gender equality promotion: Programmes aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment should understand that challenges that women face differ between rural and urban settings. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, efforts to promote women's rights through training and to raise community awareness, as part of peacebuilding efforts, have contributed to security benefits and enhanced women's participation.

Peace education: Teachers often play a significant leadership role in rural communities. Lessons from an education for peace programme in rural Colombia include the need for teachers to be familiar with and to engage the wider community. In addition, the impact of programmes can be enhanced if trained teachers act as mentors to teachers in other rural areas. Effective teacher training and the retention of high quality teachers are also essential to successful peace education.

Learning and social inclusion: Libraries in rural areas can serve as key centres for learning, innovation and social inclusion. In rural Senegal, for example, a library and learning centre has sought to enhance social inclusion by providing access to quality information to vulnerable populations and to help address priority needs.

Business for peace: Rural business opportunity structures can build peace through poverty reduction and by providing the resources and social capital for rural populations to engage in conflict prevention and resolution. Footprints for Peace in Colombia attempted to build local peace by strengthening social interactions and reconciling social cleavages. It was effective in building social relations in part by engaging community members as local trainers (who would then oversee other trainings) and by addressing practical needs and having economic successes, such as increases in coffee production.

Media-based interventions: Radio programmes have great potential to transform perspectives as they can reach large rural and urban populations. A radio drama in Rwanda, which seeks to give voice to diverse perspectives, increased the propensity for historical perspective-taking among rural and urban stakeholders.

Network strengthening: The Rural Women Peace Link in Kenya has succeeded in forming strong networks of women leaders and creating spaces for local women to engage and participate in peace and development processes. Its unique positioning at the grassroots level earned the

organisation legitimacy; and its operational linkages between network organisations and local organisations makes it an ideal connector between local and international peacebuilding actors.

Peace committees: As small structures designed to enable local people to take responsibility for their own peace, they can have greater legitimacy due to their informality. Research on a peace committee established in rural Zimbabwe finds that peace committees can be effective, sustainable and replicable. Their strengths often lie in their ability to address the community's basic needs and challenges. They do not have the capacity, however, to deal directly with political level conflicts.

Drawing from these various experiences, programmes that seek to effectively engage rural stakeholders in peace, reconciliation and social cohesion should:

- Recognise that the needs of rural residents differ from those of urban residents.
- Involve the community in planning, identifying needs, decision-making, finding and implementing strategies and solutions.
- Carry out community consultation on perceptions of social cohesion and reconciliation.
- Assess and identify the best formations for addressing peace, reconciliation and social cohesion goals, such as networks or committees. While peace committees can resonate with local communities and be effective locally, networks can link larger groups and areas, including linking to international actors.
- Ensure that the particular goals identified are not overly ambitious for the particular formation and project.
- Foster structured dialogue and consultations with stakeholders to share experiences and innovative ideas.
- Recognise the important role of particular individuals, professions and spaces in rural communities, such as traditional leaders, teachers, libraries and community centres. They can be particularly effective in facilitating understandings of peaceful coexistence and social cohesion.
- Ensure that these and other important actors receive relevant training on peacebuilding and social cohesion.
- Amplify the effects of capacity building and training programmes (e.g. teacher training, conflict resolution training) by having trainees train others in nearby rural communities.
- Address the practical needs of rural stakeholders such as income-generation in order to create more incentives for participation. This, in turn, can help to promote resilience.
- Seek to target particularly marginalised rural groups, such as women, youth and the disabled, and support them in understanding their rights and to adopt leadership roles.
- Consider how media can be used to reach a larger percentage of rural populations.
- Ensure that enough time is given to projects and programmes as fostering social cohesion and reconciliation are long term processes.

2. Building peace, social cohesion and reconciliation in Iraq

Reconciliation efforts are essential in conflict-affected contexts at national and local levels, at the political level and at the social, community level (Steele, 2008). Community-level reconciliation involves efforts to promote intergroup relationships, to build trust and to challenge stereotypes and perceptions of the 'other' and of one's own group (Haider, 2016). These processes are related to the building of social capital, a key component of social cohesion, along with the reduction of horizontal inequalities (Brown and Zahar, 2015). There is limited evidence, however, on effective ways to achieve social cohesion and peace at various levels of society (Esenaliev et al, 2018). The following are some areas identified in the literature in which initiatives are advocated as important to facilitate the building of peace, social cohesion and reconciliation in Iraq.

Identity reconfiguration: In Iraq, religion, ethnicity and tribe are forms of identity that have been used to divide (Steele, 2008). Various approaches can be adopted to reconfigure identity. These include: discovering a different primary identity that all persons can hold in common; redefining one's own identity; redefining how one group perceives another group's primary identity; or finding commonality through a second-tier identity that could bridge ethnic or sectarian divides, such as members of the diaspora or those in mixed marriages (Steele, 2008).

Cultural heritage preservation: Daesh leaders have engaged in efforts to culturally cleanse areas under its control in order to eliminate tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to establish a single, homogenous way of life (Matthews et al., 2019). This includes some of the world's earliest examples of farming villages and many other socio-cultural attributes of human societies (Matthews et al., 2019). A programme of collaborative, multi-party engagement, including various Iraqi government bodies, is needed to effectively evaluate, promote and protect Iraq's heritage during peace and conflict, including legal and governmental practices (Matthews et al., 2019). It is essential that heritage and cultural issues are written into the planning of large-scale development projects in urban and rural areas (Matthews et al., 2019).

Dialogue and conflict resolution: Recommended strategies to promote social cohesion and reconciliation in Iraq include sessions designed to change attitudes, clarify perceptions, increase alternative perspective-taking, develop communication skills, and manage difficult conversations (Steele, 2008; Bilali and Vollhardt, 2013). Progress in relationship building can contribute to improvements in the ability of groups to engage in constructive dispute resolution (Steele, 2008). Conflict resolution training can entail a series of workshops that provide the opportunity to re-evaluate perspectives and to develop and practice problem-solving skills. These are necessary to help people resolve local disputes and develop concrete action plans to address divisive complex issues (Steele, 2008).

3. Rural initiatives: lessons learned and recommendations

Community-based participation and development

Community-driven or community-based development (CDD/CBD) programmes are designed to improve public service delivery by bringing community members together to work toward that goal. The belief is that by working together towards a common goal, community members become more cooperative and gain trust (Esenaliev et al, 2018). This can contribute to the building of social capital and more inclusive governing institutions (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015).

The local area development programme (LADP) in Iraq, a joint effort among several UN agencies, is a social and local development strategy aimed at alleviating poverty in three regions of Iraq (Suleimanya, Babylon and the Iraqi Marshlands). It has sought to engage key stakeholders; localise the objectives of the national development plan; build the capacity of district and governorate authorities to lead participatory planning; and strengthen the capacity of civil society actors to partner effectively with local government.¹

¹ For more information on the LADP, see: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/iraq-office/education/technical-vocational-education/local-area-development-programme/> Retrieved 23 June 2019.

Other community-based programmes that have specifically targeted rural areas include programmes in **Afghanistan**, where the **participation of rural community members is a key aspect of community development programmes**, such as the Citizens' Charter National Priority Program (Katz, 2017). Intended beneficiaries in target communities are asked to cooperate in the project for their common good based on their shared identity and interests (Katz, 2017). Despite the support for community-based approaches, they can be inappropriate for many places in rural Afghanistan, including where projects have achieved success. This is because a sense of community may actually be absent. As such, **assumptions about rural Afghan settlements as villages organised as homogenous, unified, harmonious communities need to be scrutinized** (Katz, 2017).

A significant number of young men from rural areas participated in violence in the **Kyrgyz Republic** in 2010 during the unstable political situation. Since then, the process of reconciliation has been slow and challenging (Esenaliev et al, 2018). Research on **community-driven development interventions directed at rural areas** in the country explores whether and how CDD improve social cohesion. The first approach was comprised of traditional CDD approaches including situational analysis, selection of target partners, participatory community needs identification sub-granting for local projects, and participatory monitoring and evaluation (Esenaliev et al, 2018). The second approach, CDD+, involved additional activities, such as community initiatives (e.g. deliberations, forum theatres), and technical assistance and capacity building for local authorities (e.g. trainings on local budgets and asset management, social auditing and legal assistance) (Esenaliev et al, 2018).

Results indicate that the CDD and CDD+ programmes have **had some positive effects on a sense of unity and respect between various social and ethnic groups**; participation in voting at national and local elections; and a sense of physical security. There were not, however, any statistically significant effects on trust in other people and on trust in local government (Esenaliev et al, 2018). Research also finds that **impacts on social cohesion may be limited by donor's short project cycles**. Larger and longer community-driven projects could have a larger impact on social cohesion (Esenaliev et al, 2018). In addition, they serve only as a partial tool to promote social cohesion. The degree of social cohesion depends on other factors that go beyond local social norms and local governance and extend to national policies and developments (Esenaliev et al, 2018).

In **rural Sudan**, the Community Development Fund (CDF) provided services to over two million people, including in the areas of health, education and utilities, with the aim of peacebuilding (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015). **"Social mobilisers" were sent to each village to help villagers come to a collective understanding of their community's development and infrastructure needs and identify assets** that could be used to help meet those needs (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015). They also taught the community that they had the capacity to solve some of their own problems through collective action and organised frequent community meetings for project planning, implementation and monitoring (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015).

A study of 24 rural communities finds that **while local governing processes became more inclusive, resulting in greater civic action among villagers, the programme did not create social capital**. It did not lead to the expansion of social networks or change in social norms. It is more likely for norms to be stronger when embedded in strong networks. **Programmes may have been more effective if they had been more successful at fostering social networks**. The failure to increase social capital undermines the possibility that villagers will maintain the new infrastructure produced by the programme (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015). It is also unclear

whether the participatory character of the programme was necessary for this greater civic engagement. It may be that any infrastructure project would have produced greater civic action (Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2015).

Community-based social organisations are both prevalent and diverse in **rural villages in Myanmar**, formed along traditional principles of reciprocity (Griffiths, 2018). These organisations collect and redistribute funds to help with healthcare, education and other social needs. A study of community organisations in twelve rural communities in Myanmar finds that there is a **positive correlation between a high percentage of communities with social organisations and lower rates of vulnerability** in those communities. This effect is greatest among the most vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities (Griffiths, 2018).

The ways in which community organisations can contribute to greater resilience include through lower rates of borrowing for consumption, creating a more enabling environment for effective income diversification, and less income inequality linked to gender, disability and poverty (Griffiths, 2018). Households in communities that did have a community social organisation had statistically significant **higher rates of resilience**. This was **due to lower rates of consumptive loans, lower rates of debt burden, higher rates of livelihood investment and savings, and greater organisation and unity in villages** (Griffiths, 2018). Community organisations, particularly those with a high level of youth involvement, can also improve interdependency, which in turn can contribute to the strengthening of community life and social cohesion (Griffiths, 2018). By providing a degree of solidarity, networking and access to new ideas, technology and information, social organisations can promote greater innovation and risk-taking by households. This in turn can result in successful income diversification and resilience (Griffiths, 2018).

Capacity development and leadership strengthening

Research on the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives in **Zimbabwean rural communities** finds that people generally acknowledge the importance of the role played by such leaders in resolving conflicts and disputes (Rukuni et al., 2015). Further, the study shows that the rural community was **content with the efforts of traditional leaders with conflict resolution**. Very few were concerned about the lack of training in conflict resolution such leaders received in advance of their role. This was compensated in part through consultations with other traditional leaders in nearby rural communities (Rukuni et al., 2015). Traditional leaders in rural communities, and their **ability to carry out conflict resolution effectively, could benefit, however, from some forms of capacity building**. This includes workshops or seminars to raise exposure to and **knowledge of state laws and their interpretation** that are relied upon along with traditional oral historical perspective (Rukuni et al., 2015).

The **Equality and Territorial Development for Rural Women programme in Colombia** seeks to ensure that rural women, particularly young, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian women, lead and influence peacebuilding processes and contribute to reducing inequality in the country. Its specific aim is to strengthen women's organisations and support leadership roles for rural women. It focuses on various thematic areas: violence against women and girls; access to safe water; care work; fiscal justice; land rights; livelihoods; and peacebuilding (Oxfam, 2017).

In order to achieve its aim, the programme invests in influencing and capacity development of rural women's organisations, linking them to established national organisations and networks. This is essential to achieving access to decision making spaces (Oxfam, 2017). Its specific methods of intervention include:

- The promotion of **spaces for dialogue among rural women** to strengthen their collective power;
- **Economic empowerment and leadership initiatives**, capacity building, knowledge generation and exchange and advocacy – aimed at influencing the use of resources and spaces;
- Campaigning to **increase the visibility of rural women** in public spaces in order to change cultural and social norms and attitudes; and
- **Strengthening networks** and alliances, and supporting advocacy and knowledge dissemination, in order to promote change in public policies and programmes (Oxfam, 2017).

A review of the programme, beginning in 2016, finds that it has resulted in significant changes in women's lives. In particular, it has brought together 26 rural women's organisations linked to 840 grassroots organisations; and has **successfully lobbied the government on public policies benefiting rural women** (Oxfam, 2017). Capacity development of rural and indigenous women's organisations and public campaigning alongside national media outlets, the programme has also **contributed to a change in the way that rural women are perceived**, from victims of violence and inequality to active change agents (Oxfam, 2017).

Informal dispute resolution training workshops in rural Liberia sought to teach ordinary residents the tools, skills and practices to resolve their own or others' interpersonal disputes, such as property disputes. Participants engaged in lectures, group discussion and role-playing exercises (IPA, n.d.). An evaluation of these workshops finds that they **resulted in higher rates of peaceful property dispute resolution** among communities and higher reported rates of satisfaction with the outcomes, particularly for long-standing disputes, than in comparison villages (IPA, n.d.). Despite concerns about the impacts on marginalised groups, the study finds that the training sessions did not lead to worse outcomes for women, youth, the poor, or Muslim minorities. Ethnic minorities, however, did not report any improvements in resolution rates or reductions in violence (IPA, n.d.).

Gender equality promotion

In order to contribute to the fulfilment of UN Resolution 1325 in the Middle East and North Africa, interviewees in the region recommend: **greater engagement of rural women to make them aware of their rights; and exposure of rural men to the benefits of a women, peace and security agenda** (Rayman et al., 2016). Changes at the national level will be undermined if rural women do not know their rights and if local governance continues to be dominated by male elites that do not see the benefits of a women, peace and security agenda (Rayman et al., 2016).

Programmes aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment should understand that challenges that women face differ between rural and urban settings (Steiner and Robertson, 2019). Donors should seek to support existing local and community-based projects, particularly on sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and divorce law (Steiner and Robertson, 2019).

Kurdish authorities in Iraq have failed in the past to invest sufficiently in training and educating women, particularly in rural areas, on their rights. MERI, a policy-research institute based in the **Kurdistan region of Iraq**, focuses on promoting women's rights as part of peacebuilding efforts (Rayman et al., 2016). **Efforts to strengthen women's training** over time have **contributed to**

security benefits and enhanced women's participation rather than focus on victimisation (Rayman et al., 2016). Yet, there have been limitations in accessing rural communities. **Outreach to women in rural areas needs to be complemented with raising awareness within the broader communities** as part of peacebuilding work (Rayman et al., 2016).

Peace education

Effective peace education can help to transform the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and relationships of its students (Diazgranados et al., 2014). If young people are exposed to ideas of peaceful coexistence and conflict transformation, these ideas could permeate into their communities (UNDP, 2019). The role of primary and secondary school teachers and teaching is thus particularly important in conflict-affected and divided societies, where they have the potential to promote sustainable peace and contribute to social cohesion (Sayed and Novelli, 2016). In many such societies, **teachers** are held in high esteem at the socio-cultural level by local communities. They often play a significant leadership role in rural communities, **particularly when they are among the few who have literacy skills** (Sayed and Novelli, 2016).

In rural Colombia, an **education for peace programme**, Juegos de Paz, is part of a wider programme to identify and develop competencies for citizenship that students should learn in school (Diazgranados et al., 2014). Each school partaking in the programme has three intensive **teacher trainings, on-site visits from coaches and a formal evaluation** of the process and impact of the programme. There is also a chance for teachers to meet again at the end of the school year to engage with the evaluation. In addition, the **teachers seek to multiply the impact of the programme throughout the region by serving as mentors to other teachers at nearby rural schools** (Diazgranados et al., 2014). Since the adaptation and piloting of the curriculum to the Colombian context, educators involved with the programme have trained over 168 teachers and reach more than 5500 students in 35 rural schools every week (Diazgranados et al., 2014).

The citizenship competencies identified through consultation with teachers, political leaders and other experts fall under the areas of living together and resolving conflict peacefully; participation and democratic responsibility; and plurality and respect for differences (Diazgranados et al., 2014). The programme included a three-day workshop for teachers and introduced them to a curriculum that adopts a mix of cooperative games, reflection and children's literature. The focus is on helping students to develop the skills, attitudes and relationships they need to become peacemakers. Subsequently, the students engage in student-driven community service learning projects, where they identify a problem in their community and adopt democratic forms of decision-making to determine and implement a plan of action (Diazgranados et al., 2014).

Findings and recommendations from research on **peace education** include:

- **Teachers need to be familiar with and to engage the wider community** and draw them in to their community of learners. For example, students interested in sustainable community agriculture should speak to, learn from, and collaborate with community members who are familiar with these issues and processes (Diazgranados et al., 2014).
- The **shared goal of teaching peace education**, and taking part in training sessions to achieve this goal, has the potential to help teachers **overcome any differences** and prior antagonism (Diazgranados et al., 2014).
- **Teacher training is exceptionally important** and attention must be paid to how such support and professional development is delivered to teachers (Sayed and Novelli, 2016).

- Student trust and **confidence in teachers is essential** for student transformation (Diazgranados et al., 2014).
- Teachers should be afforded the status, salary and conditions of service commensurate with their role as agents of peacebuilding and social cohesion, in order to **ensure that high quality teachers can be attracted, retained and motivated** (Sayed and Novelli, 2016).
- Consideration should be given to mainstreaming peacebuilding and social cohesion into the curriculum and giving it dedicated and **equal status to other core subjects** (Sayed and Novelli, 2016).

Learning and social inclusion

Libraries in rural areas can serve as key centres for learning, innovation and social inclusion. As knowledge managers, including digital knowledge, libraries are well placed and equipped to connect people and information to solve everyday challenges, such as health and employment issues (Fall, 2018). The Lamabaye Learning Centre (LLC), for example, built in a **rural area in Senegal**, has sought to enhance social inclusion by providing **access to quality information to vulnerable populations and to help address priority needs** (Fall, 2018). Libraries in other rural areas have also attempted to play such a role, for example, a rural library in Guatemala offers rural residents nutrition classes (Fall, 2018).

In order to effectively develop and promote a policy of social inclusion and social transformation, libraries should (see Fall, 2018):

- Integrate such policies into their local strategic development plan;
- Identify community needs;
- Work with other relevant local actors;
- Present themselves as places of innovation;
- Partner with relevant organisations such as the National Employment Agency in order to be a key resource centre for job search and entrepreneurship;
- Adopt strategies of education and lifelong learning; and
- Create an area of trust and security, particularly for the most vulnerable.

It can be challenging, however, for rural libraries, to fulfil these roles and to conduct these programmes and initiatives due to lack of resources (Fall, 2018).

Business for peace

Rural business opportunity structures and economic empowerment programmes can build peace by **lifting rural populations out of poverty** and taking away incentives to join conflict or criminal actors (Miklian and Bickel, 2018). They can also **provide rural populations with the resources and social capital to participate in other aspects of society, including conflict prevention and conflict resolution** (Rayman et al., 2016). Consumer goods and agriculture can also serve specifically as a business-positive sector for peace, such as coffee as a potential peacebuilding crop (Miklian and Bickel, 2018).

The **Footprints for Peace (FOP)** peacebuilding project by the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de **Colombia** (FNC) is designed to encourage rural community conflict resolution through democratic and peaceful means. The module adopted a top-down cascade methodology, whereby **trainees subsequently oversee the teaching of local trainers** as local FOP representatives

(Miklian and Bickel, 2018). FNC created a list of potential trainer candidates from their farmer database (Miklian and Bickel, 2018). **Educational booklets** in the project identified types of violence, mistreatment, and conflict through daily life situations, relying not on teachings of conflict history, but on metaphors, drawings, plays, dances, and games based on everyday life situations (Miklian and Bickel, 2018).

FOP attempted to **build local peace by strengthening social interactions and reconciling social cleavages** at the communal level (Miklian and Bickel, 2018). A study finds that 64 percent of respondents believed FOP improved local social fabrics (including increased dialogue, social cohesion, integration, new friendships and communication), and 80 percent said that FOP generated at least one **positive economic outcome** in the local community, mostly for coffee production skills. Trainers also noted the sense of **gender empowerment and hope** facilitated by FOP's trainings (Miklian and Bickel, 2018).

Key success factors of the project include (see Miklian and Bickel, 2018):

- Trust in and reputation of implementer: **FNC's positive reputation** as an implementing agent before the project began was essential in gaining participants as they felt privileged to be selected.
- The **engagement of community members** as local trainers is considered essential to FOP's success as they were able to counter trust and legitimacy barriers.
- FOP maintained **specific goals**, focusing on long-term community rebuilding rather than violence reduction. It targeted family-level and village-level violence, aiming to break down societal and interpersonal barriers (e.g. gender, class, age and domestic violence). It did not attempt to tackle complex conflict dynamics and reduce violence among conflict actors.
- The combination of peacebuilding and development goals were best achieved where **trainers were active and engaged** and less successful where trainers were less engaged.
- **FNC was not only good for peace but also good for business**, including through better supply chain communication with their farmers. **Addressing practical needs**, such as delivering new coffee trees, got people excited about working. It is also important because some farmers skipped meetings or left the programme due to trade-offs between attending sessions and tending to farm duties.

Media-based interventions

Mutually opposing narratives of a conflict often prolong conflict mentalities and obstruct conflict resolution and reconciliation. Perspective-taking (a willingness to consider (former) adversary groups' perspectives regarding the history of the conflict) has the potential to transform mutually exclusive narratives of the conflict into more inclusive narratives (Bilali and Vollhardt, 2013). It has become an important tool in conflict resolution workshops, intergroup dialogues, and peace education. **Mass media programmes that adopt historical perspective-taking have the potential to extend target beneficiaries beyond a small number of participants to larger populations in rural and urban areas** (Bilali and Vollhardt, 2013).

A radio drama in Rwanda, broadcast to rural and urban populations, seeks to give voice to diverse perspectives across fictional conflict groups and within each group and to engage with the narratives of various groups. This includes potentially listeners' own perspectives, opening up the possibility of making people more open to engaging with the other group's narrative (Bilali and

Vollhardt, 2013). This more subtle intervention may be less likely to backlash than interventions in which participants are told to adopt a specific perspective (Bilali and Vollhardt, 2013).

A study on the effectiveness of a long-running popular reconciliation radio drama in the context of post-genocide Rwanda finds that exposing participants to the voice of one of its main characters and to characters with different ideological positions and conflict roles **increased the propensity for historical perspective-taking**. About half of the respondents were from rural areas (Bilali and Vollhardt, 2013).

Network strengthening

A group of women peacebuilders working under the National Council of Churches in **Kenya** started the **Rural Women Peace Link (RWPL)** in the early 1990s. 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”. It also aims to empower rural women and build their self-esteem such that they could promote and maintain peace in their respective areas of origin (Kirimi, 2018).

RWPL participants aimed to strengthen the network by reaching out to other women’s organisations and actors such as local peacebuilding organisations, elders’ councils, and peace committees in the region and by engaging women on peacebuilding and conflict resolution issues. It succeeded in forming strong networks of women leaders in the northern Rift Valley of Kenya (Kirimi, 2018).

RWPL’s unique positioning at the grassroots level has earned the organisation legitimacy and created spaces for local women to engage and participate in peace and development processes. The long-standing trust and operational linkages between network organisations and local organisations makes them **ideal connectors between local and international peacebuilding actors**. Their experience with implementing local projects also renders them an important resource for international actors aiming to support relationship-building and peacebuilding (Kirimi, 2018).

Key recommendations for network organisations and their supporters and financiers include (see Kirimi, 2018):

- **Promote regular structured dialogue and consultations with stakeholders** to share experiences and innovative ideas, strengthening collaborative approaches to peace and development.
- Foster **financial sustainability** through resource mobilisation and donor-funding of not only project activities but also the secretariats and basic functioning of networks.
- **Build the capacity of network members** in governance, leadership and knowledge management through regular programming.

Peace committees

Peace committees, self-initiated and formed by and of ordinary members of the community, are responsive mechanisms designed to **enable local people to take responsibility for their own peace** – to determine themselves the kind of peace, justice and social change desired (Chivasa, 2017). They are small local structures, usually guided by culture and specific cultural norms, and

without official bureaucratic structures. This **informality affords them greater legitimacy in their host communities** (Chivasa, 2017).

As part of efforts to promote reconciliation processes in Iraq, UNDP is supporting the establishment of local peace committees in various parts of the country to increase trust within and between communities and authorities, enhance social cohesion and better address civic concerns. This project began in 2017 and will continue until 2021.²

Research on a ward-level peace committee established in **rural Zimbabwe** finds that peace committees can be effective, sustainable and replicable. Their strengths as community-led initiatives often lie in their **ability to address the community's basic needs and challenges**. Such committees, however, often do not have the capacity to deal directly with political level conflicts (Chivasa, 2017).

² For more information, see:

http://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/operations/projects/democratic_governance/reconciliation.html
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