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Participatory Action Research Mutual Inquiry for Effective Local Peacebuilding

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Questions about peacebuilding's effectiveness often center around whether particular initiatives have measurable outcomes. But how do we measure levels of success unless we know what success looks like? The surest way to understand whether peacebuilding efforts are effective is to ensure that people in the communities where they are carried out are driving definitions of success. In recent years, our team at New York University's Peace Research and Education Program consequently has rejected efforts by external actors to establish indicators of success and instead engaged in processes of mutual inquiry with partners in their communities to define indicators of success through the use of Participatory Action Research. Facilitating dialogue about what constitutes peacebuilding success increases the likelihood that subsequent programs will be aligned with locally generated definitions and increases levels of trust between local and international partners, enhancing the likelihood that joint efforts will lead to effective peacebuilding in the eyes of local actors.

Understanding what is meant by peacebuilding effectiveness is both a complicated and straightforward endeavor. On one hand, it is clear that peacebuilding can only be considered effective if it benefits those who are most affected by or at risk of suffering from the consequences of violence. However, determining which people qualify as "most affected" can be a contentious process—and forces peacebuilding practitioners to prioritize some local voices over others.

Our work at New York University's Peace Research and Education Program (PREP) suggests that the answer lies with Participatory Action Research (PAR)—a participatory approach that develops deep understandings of priorities and effects as they are experienced at the local level. Only by asking—and carefully listening to—members of particular communities can we hope to learn what types of interventions actually change people's lived experiences for the better on a day-to-day basis.

This approach differs significantly from standard practices of Global North funders and INGOs that tend to rely upon predetermined indicators of success that are often a mismatch for understanding the efficacy and impact of local peacebuilding

efforts. Such blueprint approaches often apply assumptions that miss cultural or situational nuances and, in doing so, “the most promising opportunities for improving the field of international peacebuilding, reducing global violence, and building a more just and secure world” (Moix, 2020, p. 16). They also have the potential to exacerbate the international community’s sense that peacebuilding is ineffective and, consequently, is not a good investment.¹

In this chapter, we examine how PAR has generated positive partnerships between PREP, an international actor from the Global North, and Moomken (based in Tripoli, Libya) and FUNRESURPAZ (based in Algeciras, Colombia), and facilitated peacebuilding within communities emerging from violent conflict. The two case studies provide an opportunity to explore what effectiveness is as defined by local actors.² Surprising insights on how effectiveness is defined emerge from conversations with leaders of the two organizations that co-design and implement peacebuilding research and action with varying degrees of proximity to the direct impact of the work they carry out in partnership with PREP.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach that puts into practice the idea that local communities are both the repositories and guardians of valuable knowledge, and that members of those communities are best positioned to lead efforts to uncover and apply that knowledge in their specific contexts. The approach’s grassroots, bottom-up origins are rooted in the Global South where scholars such as Fals Borda in Colombia, Anis Rahman in Bangladesh, and Marja-Liisa Swantz in Tanzania engaged in action research in the midst of and in an effort to support class and gender emancipatory movements in the 1970s (Bradbury, 2015; Swantz, 2015). PAR is meant to “[put] research capabilities in the hands of the deprived and disenfranchised people so that they can transform their lives for themselves” (Park, in Hagey, 1997).

PAR is just one aspect of the broader field of participatory research and its emphasis on reflection and action is particularly well-suited as a research process in communities that have been affected by violence. As Stiefel (2001) writes:

Societies emerging from war face a range of problems, all connected and urgent. But one overshadows and affects all the others: the destruction of relationships and the loss of trust, confidence, dignity and faith. More than the physical, institutional or systemic destruction that war brings, it is this invisible legacy, grounded in individual and collective trauma, that is most potent and destructive. It has the potential to undermine the solutions to all the other problems, be they economic, technical, institutional, political, humanitarian or security-related. (p. 265)

PAR aims to address those damaged relationships through the facilitation of joint inquiries that can help rebuild understanding of groups’ different realities, undermining damaging stereotypes and false assumptions that tend to emerge before, during, and after war. It similarly attempts to restore “trust, confidence, dignity and faith” through a shared research process that invites community members to work as co-investigators (sometimes alongside external actors). As they work together to learn about their respective communities’ strengths and needs, they can once again

begin to see each other for who they really are rather than for what opportunistic political elites portrayed them to be.

Not only can PAR help to repair the torn social fabric of a place by weaving people back together one thread at a time during a process of mutual discovery, it also can help amplify voices that are often silenced during violent conflicts. Typically, international actors respond to mass violence with a range of predetermined tools and resources: humanitarian aid to assist displaced populations, mediation processes to push warring parties toward agreement, and development assistance to facilitate a return to normal economic behavior. It all arrives neatly packaged as a combination of material and technical assistance, usually following some sort of rapid needs assessment that disguises itself as a “deep consultation” with local actors when it is most often nothing more than a brief negotiation with local elites. Rarely do local communities have the opportunity in crisis situations to ask their own questions, generate their own data, and formulate their own proposed responses to pressing problems. PAR enables them to do all that and more.

Because of PAR’s emphasis on reflection and action, it also provides a platform for local actors to participate in real processes of conflict transformation. PAR researchers do not only explore the situation in their community as it is commonly understood; they also seek to develop new and deeper understandings that can help to shift the attitudes and behaviors that may have supported violence in the first place. PAR, carried out properly, supports a process of what Paolo Freire (2014) calls “conscientization” as a necessary step in conflict transformation.

Galtung (1996) writes that “conscientization, raising the general level of consciousness, will and must take place” and that “[t]he goal is an acceptable formula, defining a new formation; new structures, new institutions” (p. 265). As he continues:

The process is basic, for how can a conflict be consciously transformed unless the parties to a conflict are conscious subjects, true actors? Otherwise, the conflict will transform the actors as objects . . . The party is only a passenger taken for a ride, not a driver presiding over the process. (Galtung, 1996, p. 74)

Once local actors have deepened their awareness of their own context, they are in a much better position to formulate policies and programs for future action that can move them away from their violent past.

Some social scientists criticize PAR on the basis that it “may merely extract what everybody already knows for the benefits of the researcher, rather than generating new knowledge for the participants or helping them develop ways forward” (Mayoux, 2006, p. 123). Others question PAR’s almost-exclusive reliance on qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, workshops) that may limit traditional determinations of “validity” (Hagey, 1997). Lather (1986), however, offers the concept of catalytic validity, which, “refers to the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (1973) terms ‘conscientization,’ knowing reality in order to better transform it.” (p. 67). As an alternative means to assess research validity, catalytic validity offers a “recognition of the reality-altering impact of the research process itself, [and the] need to consciously channel this impact so that respondents gain self-understanding and, ideally, self-determination through research participation” (p. 67).

The mechanisms of PAR tend to better position participants for the actions needed in their communities—in a way that quantitative data gathering through survey research cannot. PAR

presupposes that the very exercise of engaging social actors in such processes leads to political action, which is generated by and unfolds in the very process of research. It presumes to provide an answer to the problem of transferring ownership of the research results and processes to those ultimately intended to benefit from them, and that the value of this by far outweighs possible limitations on scientific rigor. (Stiefel, 2001, p. 273)

The very notion of “rigor” in this case suggests the idea that there is in every community a body of universal knowledge that can be understood, learned, and applied so that one situation of violent conflict can be addressed based on other peoples’ experiences elsewhere. PAR fundamentally rejects this assumption in favor of the belief that—although there are basic universal process principles that can be followed (such as exhibiting mutual respect and engaging in deep listening)—every local population must formulate its own unique response to the challenge of violence based upon its own specific history and other social, political, and economic factors that have come together to create the conditions present in that context.

PAR comes with challenges beyond questions of scientific validity and rigor. Decisions around which local actors are represented, who is considered local (e.g., someone based in the capital or someone living in the community in which the work is being implemented), and who gets to decide who is a co-researcher and who are the research participants have the potential to do harm, exacerbate divisions, and set back peacebuilding processes. Researchers can intentionally or unintentionally serve as gatekeepers, excluding others based on gender or political affiliation, for example, and contribute to the maintenance of a status quo that perpetuates destructive conflict. The involvement of international actors such as PREP can exacerbate tensions and divisions between local actors or can support more inclusive processes. It is on this point that we see the immense value of dialogue and collaboration between what Autesserre (2014) calls insiders (the local actor) and outsiders (in this case, PREP) to ensure researchers not only bring key actors together, but also “hold together” actors across “the politics of difference” to “build more inclusive, transformatory practice” (Cornwall, 2003, pp. 1325 and 1338). Through processes rooted in the principles of PAR, PREP has worked closely with its local partners to ensure that we neither overlook nor exclude and reinforce existing divisions.

LOCALLY LED PEACEBUILDING: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDIES IN LIBYA AND COLOMBIA

PREP, located within the Center for Global Affairs at NYU’s School of Professional Studies, supports local networks of peacebuilders as they attempt to transform their communities during and after situations of violent conflict. While the nature of our peacebuilding support varies from partnership to partnership and may include the co-design and facilitation of peacebuilding workshops, joint PAR projects, or accompaniment in the institutional development of formal peace and conflict transformation university programs, participatory action principles are a consistent feature of

our work. We, as action researchers at PREP, have witnessed the effectiveness of our active listening and participatory action strategies among the researchers at our affiliate organizations, specifically Moomken (Libya) and FUNRESURPAZ (Colombia). The peacebuilding projects we have co-developed and carried out with these partners have prioritized the voices of local community members and have wrestled with questions about which voices deserve priority, and how we can best support them (instead of simply intervening) as international partners. In Libya, we have witnessed the importance of conducting municipal-level peace and conflict assessments that revealed community-level peacebuilding priorities that differ significantly from international priorities. In Colombia, we have watched our partner organization operate flexibly while conducting sensitive research that reveals deep community needs at a moment when national and international actors have determined that even carrying out such research is impossible or unwise.

Through deep listening and reflective interview processes—which shed light on the knowledge, needs and problems of the affected communities—we learned from the leaders of both organizations about how they measure the effectiveness of their own projects. The insights drawn from the multi-hour conversations included in this chapter are a deeper dive into reflections that have arisen throughout our collaborations with members of both organizations and reveal how PREP’s approach of highlighting local voices has further strengthened local partners’ abilities to define effective peacebuilding work and partnership.

Libya

After eight years of civil war, Libya’s two armed groups—the United Nations-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA)—reached a cease-fire in October 2020, and began a process of implementing an interim unity government until the elections for a transitional government that were set to occur in December 2021 (ISS Africa, 2020). However, the 2011 revolution that overthrew Col. Muammar Gaddafi as Libya’s leader left many municipalities, communities, and tribes in conflict and without proper access to basic needs such as health care; many experienced a general sense of insecurity in this time (Watanabe, 2019). The resulting lack of national leadership and structure demonstrates how the typical United Nations-led postwar reconstruction framework does not necessarily lead to increased security but instead to the continuation of destabilization and growing citizen distrust in their government (Watanabe, 2019). Our partners at *Moomken* (“possibly” in Arabic)—a civil society media and awareness organization founded in 2013—are trying to find sustainable solutions to these postwar issues through peacebuilding, capacity building, and humanitarian efforts (Moomken, 2020). PREP has supported Moomken by facilitating training on conflict analysis and positive peace in 16 different municipalities with the goal of helping affected communities better understand their own conflicts and helping local leaders find and apply appropriate methods for building and sustaining peace. In this way, PREP aims to support Moomken in the type of “conscientization” effort that Galtung (1996) describes as a necessary precursor to true conflict transformation.

Prior to its work with PREP, Moomken’s most notable use of conflict analysis strategy occurred through a reconciliation effort in the city of Nalut, which lies 60 kilometers from the Libyan-Tunisian border. Residents faced difficulty crossing the bordering highway and reaching their homes amid violent conflict in the area.

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Issues of separation and resource sharing were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Corey & Elbakoush, 2020). Moomken (along with the US Institute of Peace) succeeded in creating a joint committee that opened movement across the highway, ended armed violence, and fostered collaboration in fighting the spread of COVID-19.

In addition to these clear outcomes measured by typical Global North monitoring and evaluation metrics and activity output indicators, one of Moomken's leaders, Malik Elkebir, believes that the organization has achieved an unrecognized success in terms of the positive reputation it has built among the municipalities, which has positioned it to continue working in the area. The participatory process that Moomken facilitated, which included dialogues, peace visioning exercises and trainings on conducting and analyzing conflict analyses, enabled community members to offer solutions, show results, build relationships, and lead by example. Elkebir believes Moomken's effectiveness is proven by the fact that some municipalities see it as a good actor in resolving conflict and therefore request more support from the organization in terms of providing peacebuilding and conflict analysis tools (personal communication, February 17, 2021).

Similarly, external actors see Moomken as a helpful counterpart. One staff member of the U.S. Institute of Peace in Libya praised Moomken as an “unusually effective partner” in comparison to other Libyan civil society organizations that are often underdeveloped and under-resourced (Corey & Elbakoush, 2019). Moomken's innate understanding—expressed by Elkebir—that “effectiveness comes from inside the community, based on what the community says, within the community [itself]” sets it apart from other organizations that rely on international measurements to gauge the success of their work. Moomken also deeply exemplifies a core tenet of peacebuilding theory—the central importance of relationship building. As Elkebir said, “the most effective results you can't *measure* because they are determined by how good of a relationship you have with the municipality, and with the youth, whose relationship is most sustainable” (personal communication, February 17, 2021).

As a direct result of its work with PREP, Moomken now trains facilitators to utilize the Making Sense of Turbulent Context (MSTC)³ method of conflict analysis as part of peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity workshops. PREP was invited by the German Development Agency GIZ to introduce the MSTC approach to Moomken and accompany the organization in conducting participatory peace and conflict assessments in 16 selected Libyan municipalities in 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, PREP's influence on the project was limited to the production of eight online learning modules and a series of weekly seminars and meetings with Moomken researchers, who learned the MSTC approach, adapted it to the Libyan context, and carried out multi-day peace and conflict analysis workshops in each of the municipalities.

The participatory nature of the MSTC approach matched Moomken's belief in the importance of community participation. MSTC requires workshop participants to perform analysis at multiple levels, using tools and exercises such as Rapid Historical Phase Analysis, Actor Groups and Characteristics Analysis, and Trigger Events and Scenarios Analysis. Moomken adjusted MSTC to fit the context of Libya during a global pandemic, shortening workshops from a usual length of four days to three, and adding some less-complex exercises such as the “conflict tree,” which enabled

workshop participants to draw linkages between key actors, their connection to others and how to determine specific goals for each municipality.

The participatory analysis generated surprising insights; while preparatory conversations with international partners focused heavily on armed actors, the workshop participants much more frequently mentioned the lack of sanitation services and electricity, for example, as drivers of conflict in their communities. Elkebir additionally observed that participants in these workshops sometimes changed their minds about conflict dynamics in their own municipalities. He noted major shifts in some participants who simply did not grasp the root causes of conflict in their communities. This, too, is an example of how PAR produces “conscientization.”

Elkebir reflected on why he considered the partnership between Moomken and PREP to have been more effective than other relationships he has observed between international and Libyan actors. He cited several PREP actions that contributed to the success of the partnership, including: PREP’s support for the inclusion of diverse perspectives in Moomken’s workshops, its urging of Moomken to involve female facilitators in the project, its desire to work with Moomken as a unified team, as well as its flexibility in adapting to fully remote interaction during the pandemic. Furthermore, Elkebir pointed to PREP’s previous familiarity with the region and overall open-mindedness as factors that helped make the partnership a successful one.

Elkebir noted, in particular, that PREP’s team members showed a willingness to go beyond the outlined agenda of meetings and to work with each Moomken facilitator individually, encouraging them to rethink their ideas and to invite deeper reflective thought. These approaches reflect some of the nine principles for successful locally led peacebuilding partnerships as identified by Peace Direct (2020). These principles are thought to maximize local ownership, impact, and sustainability (Peace Direct, 2020). In its relationship with Moomken, PREP prioritized forming relationships beyond the project (principle 5), emphasized local leadership and knowledge by acting as a supportive—rather than a controlling—partner (principle 3), and practiced adaptive project management (principle 7) (Peace Direct, 2020). Elkebir, however, saw deeper meaning in the partnership that extended well beyond particular strategies and which were embedded in the relationship between PREP and Moomken: “They believe in us. Some partners don’t believe in us. NYU feels proud of us and that made us trust ourselves in the beginning and makes us stronger when we implement the projects” (personal communication, February 17, 2021).

Colombia

Fundación Región Sur Paz (FUNRESURPAZ), PREP’s partner in Colombia, is a local organization of action researchers based in Algeciras-Huila, a municipality highly impacted by violence during the more than 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia (FUNRESURPAZ, 2019). The group was formed in the run-up to the country’s referendum on the 2016 Peace Agreement ultimately signed between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP). FUNRESURPAZ uses art, music, dialogue, and qualitative participatory action research methods to strengthen the social fabric of its municipality and to promote peacebuilding thought and action. The organization’s ongoing collaboration with PREP began in 2019 when NYU students and FUNRESURPAZ researchers engaged in joint research in the municipality on perceptions of the reparations mechanisms laid out in the Peace Agreement.

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Like Elkebir, FUNRESURPAZ president Yessica Motta Galindo also expressed that the community most directly affected should ultimately decide what is effective and necessary to increase levels of peacefulness (personal communication, March 24, 2021). The group has been guided by principles of PAR—an endogenous approach in part developed in Colombia by sociologist Orlando Fals Borda—since its original quest to understand its community’s perceptions of the 2016 Agreement highlighted gaps in knowledge about human rights and the peace process in the municipality. The insight catalyzed the group’s shift to a methodology rooted in the principles of PAR in which researchers simultaneously generated knowledge with their fellow community members through focus groups and one-on-one interviews and raised the consciousness of residents of the municipality through workshops on the components of the Peace Agreement. Notably, Algeciras was only one of two municipalities in Huila department that voted in favor of the Peace Agreement in the highly polarized referendum. True to the spirit of PAR, FUNRESURPAZ continued to listen to its community members—with input ranging from women’s victims associations to reincorporated former FARC-EP combatants—and went on to document the historical memory of the municipality and ultimately apply for the municipality to be recognized as a victim of collective harm in order to receive collective reparations as laid out in mechanisms stipulated by the 2016 Agreement.

FUNRESURPAZ and Moomken both operate in national contexts that feature heavy involvement by the United Nations and other international actors. Yet the two cases diverge in a key way: whereas the Moomken team travels from the Libyan capital Tripoli to the communities in which it conducts its participatory work, the FUNRESURPAZ team members have lived their whole lives in the community in which they work. In the years since the group’s inception, many members have taken on government and civil society leadership roles in the municipality, drawing on newfound understanding generated through the group’s PAR work. They have translated that knowledge into policy and practice that facilitates social, cultural, and institutional processes at the nexus of development and peacebuilding. This has allowed for an accelerated and diffused process of the conscientization Galtung (1996) describes and has solidified the role of FUNRESURPAZ members and the community organizers they work with as fundamental subjects in the municipality’s efforts to build peace, rather than passive actors of the state (PREP, 2020).

Their participatory action work has increasingly led to self and external recognition of their roles as effective peacebuilders and has enabled them to develop a critical eye toward what constitutes effective peacebuilding. Motta Galindo expressed that she and her colleagues feel reaffirmed in their participatory approach in the face of growing resentment toward the government’s misdirected or altogether missing approach to peacebuilding in the municipality (personal communication, March 24, 2021). One such moment of illumination for the group occurred in the unveiling of a monument constructed to commemorate the victims of the armed conflict. Members of the community who have been personally impacted by violent conflict feel, Motta Gallindo said, that the government’s investment in a monument to honor the victims of the armed conflict—absent of any community engagement process—was superficially symbolic. Instead, Motta Galindo expressed that the women’s victims groups she works with would have preferred that money be invested in long-term, sustainable solutions such as psychosocial programs, education, and skills training that could prevent continued cycles of violence (personal communication, March 24, 2021).

FUNREURPAZ knows what victims associations are asking for because it cultivates relationships of trust with their members and actively listens to them. Moreover, the organization's use of art, music, and dialogue rooted in PAR principles have contributed to a new atmosphere in Algeciras with effects that extend far beyond the generation of new knowledge: community members are willing to openly address their histories and discuss collective and individual trauma in ways that have been healing for members of victims associations as well as FUNRESURPAZ researchers (personal communication, March 24, 2021).

We have witnessed this shift in openness, hopefulness, and sense of agency in peacebuilding firsthand in our ongoing collaboration with FUNRESURPAZ. Motta Galindo expressed that the methodological training, experimentation with new technologies, and new modes of working coupled with the discussion of ethics in human subjects research that PREP has shared with the organization have been critical for its growth as an effective actor and peacebuilding leader in the community (personal communication, March 24, 2021). Traditional models of project monitoring and evaluation and reporting may offer only surface-level measurements of effectiveness. Yet, perhaps more profoundly, the very themes at the core of a PAR approach such as trust, legitimacy, respect, and flexibility were consistently emphasized in her reflections on what made the partnership with PREP different—and more effective—from its work with other Colombian NGOs, government institutions, or international partners (personal communication, March 24, 2021).

These are aspects of what Motta Galindo calls the “human factor” of the work; “In comparison to other international and Bogota-based partners, PREP shows genuine interest in our well-being and checks in before and after delving into work” (personal communication, March 24, 2021). This practice consequently builds trust and respect between the two institutions that extends into the surrounding community as well. She further observed that with PREP, “The affected community is always delivered the results of the research, which gives credibility and legitimacy to all the peacebuilding processes, and above all it forms a beautiful relationship with the victims,” (personal communication, March 24, 2021). The inclusive design processes of the FUNRESURPAZ-PREP collaboration ensure that the collaborative action research projects are responsive to community needs and the feedback loops required in a PAR process have contributed to the repair of broken trust and relationships and have created a sense of dignity in a research process which can often be extractive or disempowering.

As members of FUNRESURPAZ measure their effectiveness according to the extent to which they center the people most affected by violence in their community, it comes as no surprise that this is a defining feature of how they evaluate what an effective collaboration with an institution in the Global North looks like. As with Moomken, these reflections speak to the core principles of being an international partner to local peacebuilders outlined by Peace Direct (2020). In addition to emphasizing local leadership, long-term partnerships, adaptability, and resilience, the working relationship with FUNRESURPAZ also focuses on mutual accountability and transparency (principle 4). Active listening is at the heart of this work; FUNRESURPAZ has recognized and adapted PREP's practice of active listening, with Motta Galindo noting that, “the person who listens has the ability to replicate what they listened to and explain it again to transfer the knowledge. The person who listens takes it in, asks questions, and offers suggestions. One is limited if they are

just hearing,” highlighting the central tenet of PAR: we must actively listen to bring about constructive change (personal communication, March 24, 2021).

CONCLUSION

PAR serves as a mechanism to heal and strengthen relationships within a community or between local and international actors, build trust, mitigate unbalanced power dynamics, and gain insight to what types of questions or actions will be most effective. Absent relationship building, active listening, reflection, and feedback loops that PAR both elicits and requires, the most effective peacebuilding approaches can be missed. In Libya, we learned through participatory conflict analysis that municipalities cited garbage on the streets and lack of electricity as conflict drivers more often than armed militia groups, though conversations on the prospects for peace in Libya almost always center on armed groups. In Colombia, we observed that national-level actors in the capital failed to engage the community members or survivors who had most directly been affected by the armed internal conflict in their memorialization process, missing the opportunity to respond to the stated needs of those whom the memorial intended to honor.

PAR has resulted in a conscientization both among the Moomken and FUN-RESURPAZ teams and has had ripple effects reaching those with whom they co-generate knowledge. This process has allowed for peacebuilding thought and action to proliferate and seep into institutional bodies, be they municipal governments (Colombia) or newly created peace committees (Libya).

Both of the case studies highlighted that honesty, respect, and trust are necessary to generate insight into what the most effective solutions are according to those most affected by destructive conflict. While the importance of the “human factor” is often overlooked in traditional methods of measuring success, as our local partners both affirmed, the legitimacy it creates is required for the sustainability necessary to continue carrying out effective peacebuilding work. Facilitating dialogue about what constitutes peacebuilding success increases the likelihood that programs will align with true local needs; the resulting increased levels of trust between local and international partners increases the likelihood of effective peacebuilding action as viewed by community-level actors.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The importance of developing deep, trusting, and mutually beneficial relationships with and between local actors cannot be overstated despite the additional time and extreme flexibility that might be required.
- There often seems to be a severe disconnect between what high-level international actors believe to be the most effective peacebuilding strategies and what local actors understand to actually be effective measures and approaches in their communities.
- Carrying out PAR catalyzes change at the community level by stimulating a reflective process that can lead to awareness raising (or “conscientization”) and, ultimately, important changes in attitudes and behaviors that contribute to effective peacebuilding.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Who qualifies as “local” and how local does an actor need to be in order to be considered truly representative?
- The pitfalls are well known, but what might be some benefits to the participation of international and high-level national actors alongside municipal actors in local peacebuilding?
- How might non-research-focused peacebuilding groups draw on principles of PAR to make their work more effective?
- How can traditional social science researchers begin to make a shift toward PAR to increase the effectiveness and impact of their research?
- What is lost or missed when peacebuilding evaluation focuses solely on traditional methods such as measuring project activities and tangible outputs?

NOTES

1. In a survey of the 1,000 largest U.S. Foundations, Candid & Peace and Security Funders (2020) found that just 0.9% of foundation funding was directed toward peace and security.

2. A local actor can be defined in a myriad of ways. As laid out by Connaughton and Berns (2019), local actors may be defined as those who design a peacebuilding intervention, implement a peacebuilding intervention, or who are impacted by the intervention and, “must deal with the conflict on a day-to-day basis and live with its consequences” (p. 4).

3. MSTC was originally developed by World Vision International. The multi-day participatory workshop methodology, which includes a range of interactive tools to collectively analyze historical, present, and future conflict and context trends, is laid out in detail in Michelle Garred’s (2015) *Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts: Local Perspectives on Large-Scale Context*.

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