Practical approaches to localisation in peacebuilding
Lebanon

SUMMARY

The Practical Approaches to Localisation project, documents local realities and voices on localisation in Lebanon, Syria, Kenya and Rwanda and incorporates them into the international conversation around the topic.

The research in Lebanon concluded in July 2024, two months before the hostilities in the South expanded into a war affecting the whole country.

The research comprised a participatory study conducted between January and July 2024, consisting of a literature review, interviews and focus groups with representatives of 27 peacebuilding organisations, an online survey with 51 representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) active in peacebuilding, and key informant interviews with nine professionals involved in localisation.

Lebanese context

- Since October 2023, local civil society and peacebuilding interventions have shifted focus to address the immediate needs of people affected by violence and displacement.
- The conflict has intensified political divides and socio-economic pressures in a country already fractured by political and economic instability.
- Localisation efforts in Lebanon have been ongoing since the end of the civil war in 1990. Several localisation mechanisms have been established, including the Localisation Taskforce in 2022.
- Lebanon has a strong peacebuilding sector and donors have made efforts to strengthen local and institutional capacity for peacebuilding and social stability work.

Findings

- Local CSOs aspire to a localisation that gives increased decision-making power to local actors, greater access to resources and funding, and integration of local knowledge and perspectives into peacebuilding efforts.

- The main barriers to localisation are insufficient and decreasing funding, lack of trust between local communities and international organisations, shift in focus to immediate humanitarian needs, and imbalance of power between local NGOs and INGOs.
- Actors at all levels working on peace need to continue their efforts on coordination, capacity-building and advocacy, while pushing for a more horizontal dialogue and agenda setting with donor agencies and a genuine shift in power to local organisations.

Localisation in Lebanon

- Participants largely agreed on the definition of a 'local actor'. The most popular definitions according to survey responses were local NGOs (92%), individuals and community members working on grassroots initiatives (91%); and local government officials (78%).
- CSOs want to see recognition of local expertise, increased transparency and accountability, empowerment of marginalised groups, and increased coordination and collaboration between NGOs and CSOs.
- Two-thirds of survey respondents (66.7%) had observed progress towards localisation of peacebuilding efforts over the past two years.
- Lebanon has traditionally had a strong civil society, which has enabled faster progress with localisation compared with other countries in the region.
- Many INGOs are prioritising the co-design of projects, creating more horizontal decision-making mechanisms, and investing in developing skills among local staff. Some donors are encouraging local NGOs to take the lead on social cohesion projects.
- The Localisation Taskforce, which includes local and international NGOs and donors, developed the Localisation of Aid Framework for Lebanon and oversees the implementation of its Action Plan.

Barriers to localisation of peacebuilding

- The main barriers to localisation identified by participants were insufficient resources for local actors and lack of trust between local communities and international organisations.
- Funding constraints and the imbalance of power between INGOs and national NGOs are further barriers.
- Peacebuilding is a lower priority in view of the humanitarian and security needs in Lebanon. The allocation of funding also reflects this.
- Donors supporting civil society actors are at risk of resorting to 'localisation by default' whereby they fund local actors directly to reduce costs, without addressing their capacity needs.
- Local CSOs are more risk averse and vulnerable to failure due to their embeddedness in communities and unstable funding streams.

Elements for successful localisation in peacebuilding

- Coordination between national and local NGOs and CSOs.
- Capacity strengthening and peer learning on peacebuilding and social stability approaches.
- Shift in power away from international organisations and donors to local actors, which requires multi-year, flexible funding.
- 'Triple-nexus' approach integrating peace work within humanitarian and development programmes
- Involvement of local institutions such as municipalities and social development centres in peacebuilding.

- Collaboration with international NGOs and United Nations agencies to use their expertise and influence at a national level to support local actors.

Recommendations

For national and local NGOs and CSOs

- Enable knowledge sharing and coordination between national and local NGOs and CSOs to develop joint context analyses and peacebuilding strategies.
- Advocate with donors to ensure project plans and budgets include the necessary resources.
- Plan for continued capacity strengthening, integrated into upcoming projects.
- Explore options to diversify funding sources.

For international NGOs

- Make long-term commitments to local actors and sustain dialogue on the type of peacebuilding work that is relevant, impactful and sustainable.
- Ensure that local NGO and CSO partners have direct communication lines with donors.
- Co-design projects with local actors and trust local assessments of the level of change that is feasible.

For donor agencies and funding programmes

- Engage civil society to jointly develop programming goals in peacebuilding and social stability.
- Provide funding frameworks that correspond to the actual needs of local organisations and reinstate core funding.

Read the full learning paper **here**.
Find out more about the project: **https://bit.ly/localisation-IA**

Funded by:

SVENSKA POSTKODLOTTERIETS STIFTELSE