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PRACTICE PAPER

Practical approaches to localisation in peacebuilding

Kenya

Contents

Introduction

Kenya has experienced cycles of unresolved conflicts during both the colonial and post-independence eras. Most of these conflicts have been localised and expressed as intercommunal/inter-ethnic violence, gang-related violence, sexual and gender-based violence and cycles of election-related violence.[1] The causes and dynamics of these conflicts are multifaceted and overlapping, rooted in historical grievances, political rivalries, resource scarcity, and structural inequalities.[2]

Over the years there have been various efforts to address these conflicts in Kenya, ranging from local mediation to policy reforms, including devolution of power and resources. These efforts have had some success, but challenges persist to achieving sustainable peace, including lack of commitment and political will for reform, failure to address root causes, and perpetuation of reciprocal violence among individuals and communities. A multifaceted approach is needed, combining efforts to strengthen governance institutions, reform land-tenure systems, promote inclusive development, and foster reconciliation between communities and adherence to human rights by both state and non-state actors.

This paper was produced as part of the Practical Approaches to Localisation project, funded by the Swedish Postcode Lottery Foundation. The research project, based in Lebanon, Syria, Kenya and Rwanda, aims to ensure that local realities and voices on localisation are included in international debates around the topic.

Opportunities for localisation in peacebuilding are not being fully realised. Through dialogue-based research with local peacebuilding actors, the project has identified the specific needs, contexts and realities that are shaping localisation efforts in Kenya. This practice note details the analysis, findings and recommendations from the research. The paper is aimed at local and national civil society organisations (CSOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and donors involved in localisation in peacebuilding.

Methodology

This report is based on a series of consultations held across the country in two phases between May 2022 and August 2024. The first phase involved regional workshops, bringing together several counties in one-day sessions in Nairobi,[3] Mombasa,[4] Kisumu,[5] Nakuru[6] and Eldoret.[7] Each workshop involved participants from local peacebuilding structures including civil society, community leaders, religious institutions and government agencies. Phase two brought together members from the five regions in two two-day cross-regional dialogues, with sessions held in Eldoret and Nairobi. A total of 75 participants engaged in the process with 35 participants in Nairobi (19 men and 16 women) and 40 in Eldoret (22 men and 18 women), largely drawn from the participants of the first round of workshops.

Figure 1: Research participants dissagregated by gender and location
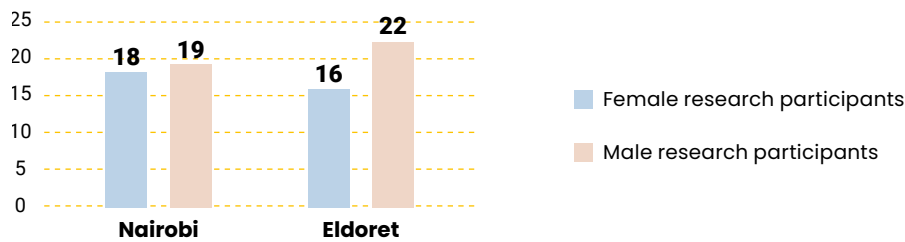
The workshops employed participatory, qualitative methodologies, drawing on participants' existing knowledge and engagement in local peacebuilding efforts. The workshop design ensured diverse representation and integrated community stakeholder feedback. The two-phase approach enabled corroboration and validation of data collected at the regional consultations. The workshop data was supplemented with data from a literature review document analysis and follow-up interviews.

The potential of localisation in peacebuilding

The cycles of conflict in Kenya are rooted in historical grievances, political rivalries, resource scarcity, and structural inequalities. Conflict hotspots include the Rift Valley, urban areas – primarily in the informal settlements of Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, the north-eastern pastoralist drylands, and along the coastal belt. In the north-eastern, conflict-prone drylands, intense competition over land, water and other resources, particularly among pastoralist communities, amidst historical marginalisation and the recent discovery of oil in Turkana county, have intensified tensions between different ethnic groups, leading to an escalation of traditional violence and intensified cattle rustling. The lack of clear land-tenure systems and historical injustices in land allocation have further exacerbated these conflicts. Political power struggles and the instrumentalisation of ethnicity by political leaders have also played a significant role in fuelling violence. Politically mobilising people based on their ethnicity pits different communities and clans against each for political power.[8] Structural inequalities, such as regional disparities in development and high levels of poverty and unemployment, especially among youth, have also contributed to the persistence of conflict in Kenya. Furthermore, state-sponsored violence, including by security forces in counter-terrorism operations and targeting the political opposition, has further eroded trust and exacerbated grievances among citizens.

Kenya has a long history of peacebuilding and conflict resolution through formally recognised processes and largely informal community initiatives.[9] Such efforts are guided by the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the National Policy on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (2015), the National Cohesion and Integration Act No. 12 of 2008, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Act No. 6 of 2008, and the National Action Plan on Arms Control and Management (2006), among others.

Despite this history of peacebuilding and a robust policy and regulatory framework, conflicts in Kenya are still rampant and social cohesion largely remains a mirage. One of the key challenges to

Participants at the INGO and Donors Dialogue Forum on Localisation in Peacebuilding, Nairobi, Kenya, 2024
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sustainable peacebuilding has been the application of externally oriented peacebuilding models that lack resonance with communities' values and realities, and therefore lack community ownership. The institutionalisation of peacebuilding through a neo-liberal lens has proved a faulty model.[10] This has entailed formalising peacebuilding through policies and structures to sustain peace, but which have largely been borrowed from the West.[11] Although this was meant to ensure long-term peacebuilding through increasing national resilience, in practice it has undermined the very processes it seeks to advance.

Firstly, institutionalising peace has undermined local agency by increasing the costs of volunteering while diminishing the autonomy, innovation, flexibility and scope of local peacebuilding.[12] Within formalised structures, local peace actors are expected to perform more tasks such as collecting early-warning data that feeds into broader systems, taking time and resources away from work in the community. Furthermore, these new tasks respond to formal structures and parameters largely defined elsewhere in a top-down model, unlike the informal networks on the ground that largely respond to specific needs at a certain locality. This dynamic undermines local engagement, innovation, leadership and ownership.[13]

Secondly, feedback from research participants highlights that the introduction of financial incentives for participation has distorted the value-based nature of peacebuilding, turning it into an income-generating exercise for some volunteers. This has dampened enthusiasm for volunteering, with participants increasingly demanding financial incentives for engagement in peacebuilding work, as illustrated by one respondent:

> *"Community members no longer want to volunteer for peace work. Any engagement has to have a financial incentive, even when it is about their own security. This is because community members believe civil society organisations have a lot of donor money for peace work, and it is therefore only right that they too benefit from the same."*

The process of formalising local peace structures within state administrative structures has introduced bureaucratic obstacles, hindering the ability of local peace actors to respond flexibly to local needs and dynamics. Furthermore, this approach has reinforced power inequalities between local actors and state agencies and donors. As one research participant explained:

> "Peace committees no longer represent the wishes and values of the community. They have been infiltrated by government agencies and local political actors who control who sits on these committees and what peace agenda is prioritised. They are largely seen as an arena for politicians and state actors to reward their cronies."

The use of local knowledge and institutions to solve local conflicts, spearheaded by communities, has been integral to Kenyan society since the precolonial period. The interactions with western models of peacebuilding, introduced during the colonial era, supplanted traditional institutions with western liberal models that were often at odds with local community histories, institutions, values and practices. Nonetheless, traditional ways of conflict resolution remained important, albeit less visible. This changed in the mid-1990s with the establishment of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC) by local women to respond to rampant inter-clan conflicts in Wajir at the time (see box below).[14]

WPDC: A model of local peacebuilding

The Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC) was established in 1995 in response to the intense communal fighting in Wajir district, north-eastern Kenya. The conflict had been ongoing since 1992 resulting in more than 1,200 deaths, 2,000 injuries and rapes, and significant destruction of property and infrastructure. The WPDC was formed by a group of volunteer women from different clans who decided to act to stop the violence by reconciling women who had been affected by the clan conflicts. They formed the Women for Peace group, which later merged with the Youth for Peace group to form the Wajir Peace Group (WPG). The committee's initial activities included door-to-door canvassing for peace leveraging their traditional roles as mothers. For instance, young girls would traditionally be given away for marriage to unite two clans. In this sense, Somali women were considered not to belong to any clan and could therefore move freely between warring clans. The women used this tradition to travel between clans in efforts to broker peace.

The WPG later approached elders to encourage a ceasefire and organise meetings to resolve the ongoing conflicts. Their initial attempts to engage the elders of the leading clans were met with limited success because women were traditionally not involved in peacebuilding at a community level. The women changed their strategy, approaching elders from the minority Kona clans, which were not directly involved in the conflicts. These elders managed to convene the other elders from the major clans and negotiations for peace took off, culminating with the Al Fatah Declaration on cessation of hostilities. Publicly, the women allowed the male elders to take the lead, but they maintained direct influence in the negotiations. Subsequently, the women traversed the county, recruiting more people into the peace initiative and organising activities to explore avenues for sustainable peace, leading to the formation of the WPDC in 1995.

Participants at the Nyanza regional workshop, Kenya 2024 © International Alert Kenya

The challenges of localisation in peacebuilding in Kenya

Even as localisation as an antidote to the failings of liberal peacebuilding gains currency, there are a number of challenges that continue to obstruct its conceptualisation and implementation.

For localisation, we need to understand who we mean by 'local actors', but arriving at a shared understanding of what 'local' means is challenging. International actors, especially the UN, often use the term 'local' to refer to 'national' ownership.[15] This risks peacebuilding being state-centric and does little to engage local communities in peacebuilding processes. It can also lead to the strengthening of elites within peacebuilding who supress local initiatives and grassroots voices. One of the greatest criticisms levelled at government interventions in the conflict-prone North Rift area is that the government has securitised peacebuilding, often isolating local peacebuilding actors and instead prioritising security agencies who employ traditional, hard security approaches. As a result, the conflict keeps reoccurring. According to a participant from Tiaty in Baringo county:

> "The conflict in Tiaty will never end as long as the government keeps deploying the military to deal with the warring groups. Instead, the government should invest in the community's social economic wellbeing including education, food security and health, and work with community leaders in community peace and safety. That way, government is seen as an enabler of peace and not as a source of insecurity as is currently happening."

A second concern with the concept of 'local' in Kenya arises from the ethnicised nature of politics and identity. With devolution, ethnic identities in multi-ethnic counties have become amplified in a scramble for resources and power. This in turn has awakened tensions between immigrants and the indigenous population – for example, in the coastal areas and the Rift Valley – creating new forms of ethnic-based marginalisation. A participant from Narok county said, "The Maasai community that have been systematically marginalised by immigrant communities deserve to have more say in local peacebuilding and governance since they are the original inhabitants of the county." Although this view contradicts inclusivity, it is widely held by traditionally marginalised communities in Narok, and elsewhere, and is a real challenge to localisation at the grassroots.

Political interference can also undermine the localisation in peacebuilding efforts, especially in areas with high levels of political competition or where the government views local actors with suspicion. This can manifest as manipulation of peacebuilding initiatives to serve political agendas or exclude certain groups. The same is also true of business interests. One participant from the Nandi-Kisumu border explained, "Big business actors in Nairobi have commercialised cattle rustling and often fund the nefarious activities at the community level, yet they are outside our reach as community peacebuilders and government seems unable or unwilling to deal with them."

Cultural barriers, differences and traditional beliefs can sometimes hinder peacebuilding efforts, especially when they conflict with modern notions of peace and reconciliation. Blind emphasis on 'local' may lead to romanticisation and legitimisation of harmful traditional practices that can serve to reinforce existing power asymmetries and maintain constraining social and gender norms. For instance, some cultural practices promote gender inequality or discrimination against certain groups, which can undermine inclusive peacebuilding.

The risk of isolation and atomisation of localised peacebuilding is another obstacle. Local peacebuilding initiatives can create localised zones of peace, benefitting the local population, but with limited impact on the wider conflict. These efforts are rarely connected to the state and other actors outside the locality and as a result are fragmented and thus insignificant in the wider context. Furthermore, when local truces are achieved, they are often fragile and subject to shifts in the wider conflict.

Many local actors lack capacity to engage in all phases of the planning and implementation of peacebuilding processes, which can undermine local ownership. According to research participants, the greatest weaknesses are in proposal development, monitoring and evaluation and financial accountability. Additionally, levels of literacy, the scale of local peacebuilding needs, status and agency (especially in the case of volunteers) all limit the abilities of local actors to implement peace processes according to donor requirements.

What constitutes localisation in peacebuilding in Kenya

Recent years have seen a shift towards prioritising local-level conflict dynamics, but there is still no consensus on what 'local' peacebuilding in Kenya actually means.[16] Participants described localisation in various different ways, presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Definitions of localisation in peacebuilding by research participants

Ownership of peacebuilding processes at the local level	Local solutions to local problems
Empowerment of local institutions	Appreciating local values, knowledge and skills and their contribution to peacebuilding
Building strong local partnerships bringing together community leaders and government	Making sure marginalised groups like women, youth, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities etc. fully participate in decision-making processes
Donors and other external actors including government respecting and giving space for local agency	Local communities identifying, defining and implementing their own challenges and resolution pathways
Linking the global to the local without subjugating the local	Local communities doing peacebuilding in their own ways

Drawing on these perspectives, in this report the term 'localisation' is understood both spatially and ideologically.

> **What is local in the context of peacebuilding in Kenya?**
>
> **Spatial localisation** involves locating peacebuilding interventions in the places and among the communities where conflict occurs, rather than planning them externally, far from sites of conflict.
>
> **Ideological localisation** refers to bottom-up approaches where authentic grassroots actors define the conflict and the interventions needed, rather than international donors and organisations.

This definition of localisation acknowledges, however, that conflicts are embedded in networks that extend beyond their immediate localities and substantially influence the goals and interests of the conflict actors. Localisation therefore seeks to centre the peace interests of local communities and

provide local actors with resources (financial and non-financial) to build and protect peace amongst themselves in their communities. As one research participant put it, "Localisation is about communities identifying and resolving their conflicts, using their approaches in a 'doing-it-their-way' approach."

Key elements for effective localisation

Participants of the regional dialogues identified seven elements as key interconnected dimensions of effective and holistic localisation in peacebuilding in Kenya. These represent the good practice and key underlying principles for effective localisation in peacebuilding developed directly from consultations and feedback with research participants.

Figure 3: Key elements in localisation in peacebuilding in Kenya
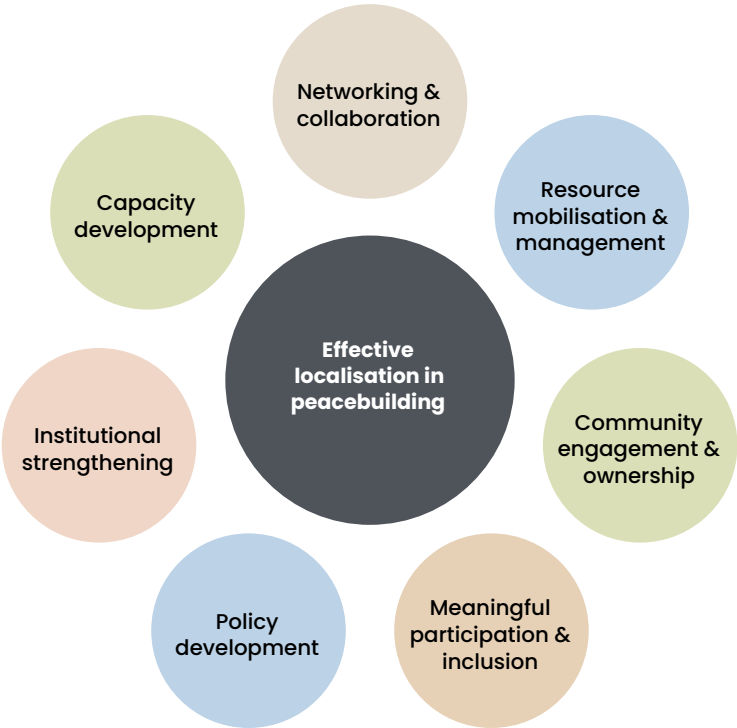
These elements of effective localisation recognise and build on traditional mechanisms for resolving conflicts, which are rooted in local history, society and culture and have evolved over the years. Localisation recognises that the past should not be romanticised and social change is inevitable, but approaches must be grounded in the realities, values and traditions of communities for better adaptability, resilience and sustainability. These elements are explored in detail below.

1. Meaningful participation and inclusion

Localisation in peacebuilding should shift power and decision-making to local actors, recognising that they possess the most intimate knowledge of their context, conflict dynamics, needs, and capacities. Participation should not be tokenistic but rather truly transformative, ensuring that many and diverse community voices and interests inform the peacebuilding process.

Meaningful participation acknowledges that communities are not homogeneous. There will be fractures along age, gender, ethnic, religious, ability, economic and other lines. The diversity of perspectives captured in the research underlined that all these voices and interests should be considered in a conflict-sensitive way to avoid exacerbating tensions or reinforcing existing divisions and power asymmetries. In Kenya, these divisions are especially salient and are often exploited by the political class. Furthermore, most of the existing community peace structures are not fully representative of all groups, especially not women, youth and people with disabilities. This is illustrated by one participant, an elder from the North Rift region:

> *"While women and youth are increasingly being incorporated into local peace structures, their impact is yet to be felt. Women are hardly ever granted a mandate to deliberate directly on decisions affecting the community. Furthermore, there is almost a silent agreement that even in places where they do so, unless the decision is endorsed by the male elders, then it cannot be owned by the community."*

Research participants identified approaches and good practice that could enhance meaningful participation and inclusion while addressing the challenges of diverse interests:

- Mapping out and acknowledging local power dynamics including vested interests: this involves developing the capacity of local actors, especially marginalised groups, to ensure that everyone has equal access to information and resources to participate in decision-making, regardless of their social status, gender, or ethnicity.
- Developing a nuanced understanding of local conflict and peace dynamics: this can be achieved through a participatory appraisal with the community to understand the diverse experiences of the conflict and the needs of the various groups in the community. Locally-led conflict analysis may also serve as a first step in conflict resolution, since it brings people together across divides and opens new channels of communication.
- Adopting inclusive and contextualised approaches that recognise the diverse perspectives and experiences of different communities in Kenya: communities must also engage with groups that may be perceived as spoilers for peace at the community level, including gangs and militias, to understand their grievances and engage them in resolution, without empowering them to do more harm. In the Mount Elgon region, former members of the Sabaot Land Défense Force (SLDF), a local militia involved in inter-communal violence, were trained as peace ambassadors to reach out to local gangs and other violent groups. This same strategy is being used in Mombasa county.

2. Capacity development

Feedback from the regional dialogues reaffirmed the importance of building capacity by strengthening the abilities, skills and resources of local actors, organisations and communities involved in peacebuilding efforts.[17] Two key areas emerged:

Developing and mapping local skills: This involves providing local actors with technical skills, knowledge and expertise in conflict analysis, resolution, transformation and peacebuilding, as well as mapping and enhancing local and indigenous knowledge, relationships and resources for peace, especially in places where local interventions have been successful and sustainable. The research identified the positive example of the Mabanga Peace Accord in Bungoma county, negotiated by elders and signed in 2011. Traditional authorities managed to restore peace among the Babukusu, Iteso, and Sabaot communities, which had been in conflict since the early 1990s.[18] The process involved indigenous approaches to reconciliation and conflict resolution, driven by local communities and facilitated by civil society. In a break from tradition, one of the key facilitators of the process was a woman who was subsequently awarded a Head of State Commendation in recognition of her efforts towards the reconciliation process.

Developing skills in using technology: This includes mobile applications and social media to facilitate communication, early-warning systems, and the dissemination of peacebuilding messages. Innovative approaches and solutions to peacebuilding challenges should be encouraged, leveraging local creativity and ingenuity, especially among the youth, in areas such as music, arts, sports and culture.

3. Institutional strengthening

Participants underscored the need to strengthen the capacity of local institutions, such as peace committees, community-based organisations (CBOs) and grassroots initiatives including elders, women, youth and groups representing people with disabilities, to effectively plan, implement and monitor peacebuilding activities. This involves enhancing governance structures, leadership skills and organisational capacity to ensure sustainable peacebuilding outcomes, as defined at the community level. According to a participant from the Coast region dialogue:

> *"Project documents including those of financial reporting and monitoring often reflect logic that may be alien or at variance with realities on the ground. This leads to allegations of corruption and misappropriation from the INGOs and donors who may not appreciate local realities."*

Institutional strengthening also entails building capacity for monitoring and evaluation in community peacebuilding. Good practice highlighted by participants included the co-creation of tools and metrics with communities, based on their understanding of success. An example is the contested Nandi/Kisumu boundary, where one metric of success is the ability of community members to cross county boundaries to trade or visit relatives without fear of attack. Success is also defined by how well businesses operate in this conflict zone, but standard monitoring and evaluation documents may not capture this.

4. Resource mobilisation and management

This involves facilitating access to financial resources, networks and partnerships that strengthen the capacity of local peacebuilding actors to implement projects, sustain their activities, and scale up their impact within communities.[19] It includes encouraging collaboration and networking, and creating effective partnerships with state and non-state actors (including county government structures). This response from one participant echoes the discussions during the dialogue sessions, emphasising the importance of the effective use of resources that encourages appropriate, cost-effective, locally led approaches and a culture of volunteering:

> "Community meetings that ordinarily used to be held in open spaces, under trees and other community facilities have since been moved into expensive hotels where participants are provided with food and transport allowances. This is wasteful and leads to wastage of resources and creates a culture of commercialisation of peacebuilding at the community level, which kills volunteerism."

5. Networking and collaboration

Research participants felt that coordination and collaboration among stakeholders (local communities, CSOs, government agencies and international organisations) promote community peace and stability and avoid duplication, maximising the impact of peacebuilding initiatives. Elements of this approach identified in the research included building trust and relationships among

Valeria Mukhula displaying her medal of recognition for her contribution towards the Mabanga peace process.
© Valeria Mukhula

actors and taking a bottom-up approach based on equality, mutuality and transparency. Participants stated that approaches should show trust and respect for local actors to lead the peacebuilding process and should include feedback loops at every level to enable partners to openly express any conflicts arising. Resolving conflicts amicably through dialogue was highlighted as a good practice to address the unequal power dynamics in international/local partnerships. As one participant stated:

> *"Partnerships with international organisations can often feel abusive, especially when local organisations have to continually undergo due diligence and capacity assessments with parameters defined by the donors. Furthermore, transparency and accountability in these partnerships is often one way, with donors and INGOs hardly disclosing their own capacity gaps and weaknesses."*

Partnerships and collaboration among local peacebuilders, CSOs, government agencies, and international partners should recognise and leverage collective expertise, resources and experiences and encourage joint learning through a flexible reciprocal process. These partnerships must enable local actors to lead and take ownership of peacebuilding processes and transform the hitherto hierarchical partnership structures (see figure 4 below).

Figure 4: Relationships among partners: hierarchical and transformed in localised peacebuilding
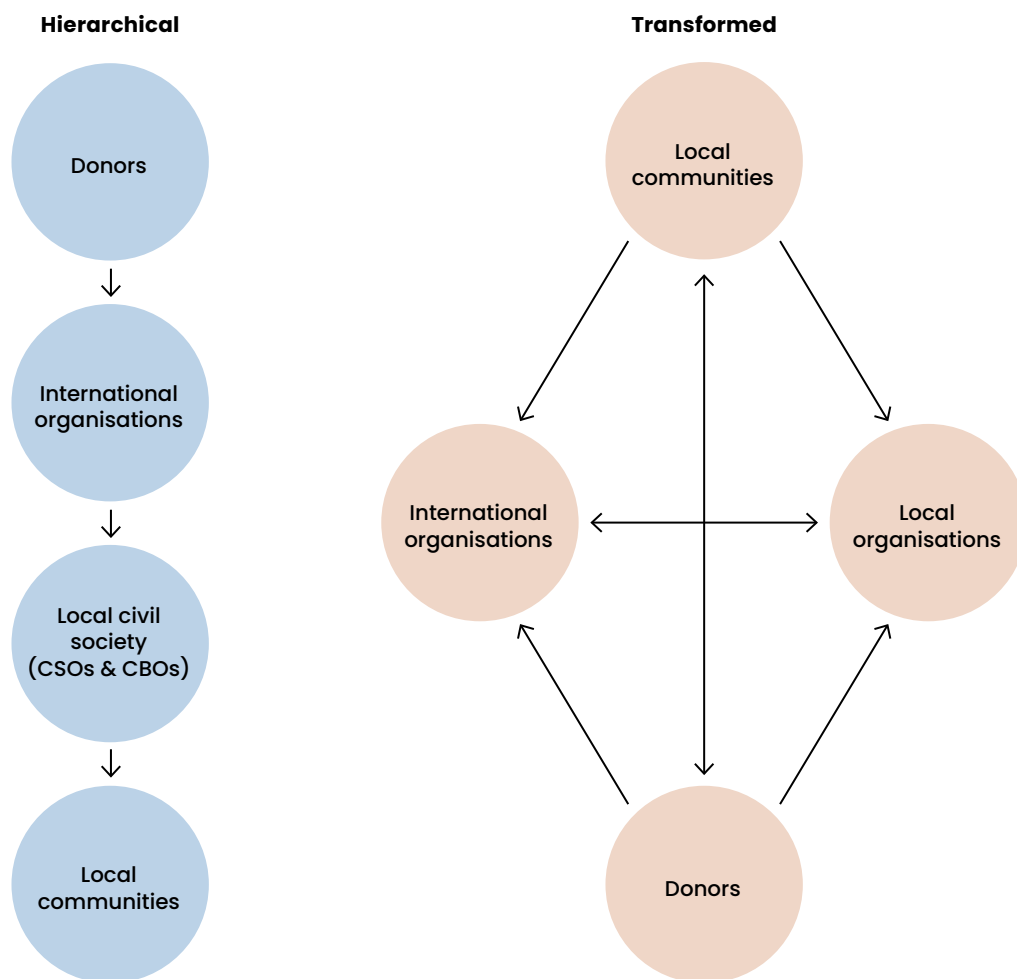
Participants at the North Rift and South Rift regional dialogue sessions, Kenya, 2024 © International Alert Kenya

6. Community engagement and ownership

Active participation and leadership by local communities during peacebuilding processes are essential to ensure that their needs, concerns and priorities are addressed in ways that are context specific and culturally significant, as identified by the communities themselves. One of the greatest challenges of peacebuilding in Kenya has been gatekeeping at the community level, which marginalises sections of the population, leading to a lack of ownership.[20] Most participants agreed that as part of localised community engagement it is important to create spaces where diverse community members can actively engage in decision-making processes. These spaces must accommodate women, youth, elders, religious leaders, marginalised groups and government officials. In some circumstances, it may be helpful to gather the views of, for example, youth and women, in single-group situations, particularly in communities that are still very patriarchal and where women's voices are seldom heard within community-level decision-making.

The research emphasised the importance of strengthening existing local peacebuilding institutions and structures to empower local actors to take ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. These local institutions include councils of elders, women and youth groups, religious institutions, self-help groups and peace committees. Local actors not traditionally engaged in peacebuilding such as business associations also have a role to play in holistic peacebuilding.

Participatory approaches such as community dialogues, participatory action research, inclusive peacebuilding platforms, among others, enable local actors to take the lead in decision-making, planning and implementation. This ensures that peacebuilding initiatives are responsive to local needs and contexts and are owned by the community. Furthermore, there need to be mechanisms to build trust between different actors at the local level to foster collaboration and cooperation.

Power imbalances between different ethnic groups and between local actors and external peacebuilders can be addressed by promoting inclusive decision-making processes and ensuring that all stakeholders have an equal voice in peacebuilding initiatives. This is especially critical in areas where conflicts are primarily due to ethnic groups competing over resources such as Narok and much of the Rift Valley.

The community should be encouraged to establish mechanisms for continuous feedback to assess the effectiveness of the peacebuilding efforts and inform any necessary adjustments. Adaptive management practices should be used to respond to changing circumstances and emerging challenges in peacebuilding efforts.

7. Policy development

Kenya has made great strides in developing policies in support of peacebuilding at the national level. Although this is not yet reflected at the county level, there are ongoing efforts to develop county-level frameworks that address the unique challenges and needs of local communities in promoting peace and stability. For example, 16 counties to date have developed local action plans to localise Kenya's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2020–2024 (KNAPII). The development of these county action plans has involved extensive dialogues at the county level, especially targeting women from different backgrounds. As a result, the action plans are diverse and innovative, responding to the varied challenges of women in the different county contexts.

The County Peace and Security Forums provide another example of localised spaces anchored in legal frameworks for local actors to participate in peacebuilding and security decision-making processes at the county level. These are made up of diverse stakeholders including community leaders, national and county government officers, and CSOs.

> **Tana River County Peace Declaration**
>
> In November 2023, community leaders from warring ethnic groups, primarily the Orma, Wardei and Pokomo communities in Tana River passed the Tana River County Peace Declaration. The declaration, negotiated by community leaders with support from local civil society and the county government of Tana River, established rules and regulations to reduce ethnic conflicts in the county. To help sustain the peace, the communities committed to creating administrative structures and resource-management committees that will establish traditional grazing laws to address the ongoing herder-pastoralist conflicts.

Research participants identified good practice in policy development:

a. Policies should be grounded in the experiences, needs and aspirations of local communities. This requires engaging with community members, leaders, and organisations to understand their perspectives on peacebuilding and the challenges they face. However, these must also be in line with national policies and frameworks and with Kenya's international obligations.

b. Policies should be developed at the community level, including resourcing, capacity-building, networking and collaboration, inclusive participation, and M&E of peacebuilding work. This

should be participatory, identifying what is contextually relevant, what does and does not work, and what adjustments are needed to policies and programmes to truly reflect the principles of localisation.

c. Government policies at county and national levels should support localised peacebuilding efforts and provide legal and institutional frameworks for their implementation. These should support decentralised governance structures that empower local authorities and communities to manage their own peacebuilding processes. These decentralised structures should be anchored in county-level governance institutions and build on existing practice.

d. Policies should address the socio-economic and political root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality and historical grievance, through sustainable development initiatives that promote economic empowerment, social cohesion and political inclusivity. Peacebuilding must be understood in its wider context. According to a participant from Nairobi's informal settlements:

"You cannot go to the community to talk about social cohesion, yet people are jobless and without food. Peace should also be about addressing the basic needs of the community, otherwise it will be seen as irrelevant."

Shifting the power: the role of INGOs in localisation in peacebuilding in Kenya

INGOs can empower local actors to take ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. This involves a shift of power and decision-making to the community level whereby local peacebuilders work directly with the donors. This requires the following:

- **capacity development for local actors** in programme design and implementation, M&E, resource mobilisation and peacebuilding topics identified in a joint process with the community;
- **advocacy and lobbying** for policy change and legislative reforms that support peacebuilding and conflict prevention, ensuring that local actors have a stronger voice in decision-making processes;
- **fostering collaboration** and facilitating networking among local peacebuilding actors, international organisations (including donors), and government agencies; and
- **shifting power dynamics**: perhaps most importantly, INGOs should actively work to address power imbalances by recognising and valuing local knowledge and expertise and ensuring that local actors have a genuine voice in decision-making processes.

Recommendations

For donors and INGOs

1. Empower and partner with local peacebuilders to amplify reach and effectiveness.

- Collaborate closely with local actors to help them build and test innovative models based on their contextual realities and scale up their initiatives. Support them in expanding the scope and reach of their work, and in building links with other local actors, including county and national government.
- Provide tailored technical assistance to local peacebuilders, based on a joint assessment of their unique opportunities, challenges and capacities. Leverage the complementary strengths of local and international knowledge and expertise.
- Facilitate and fund the meaningful participation and influence of local actors in national peace processes. Ensure their perspectives and priorities are incorporated. Use diplomatic channels and political leverage to safeguard and expand the operating space for local peace actors. Protect them from undue restrictions or threats from both national and international actors.

2. Enhance sustained funding for localised peacebuilding.

- Facilitate local actors to lead in designing, overseeing, and implementing their own initiatives, use funding mechanisms that provide space to remain responsive to local needs, and adapt approaches as needed.
- Use flexible funding models, including core funding to enable local initiatives to achieve measurable impact and transform knowledge and attitudes into lasting behavioural and structural changes.
- Increase funding and transparency by conducting a comprehensive audit of current funding allocated to peacebuilding initiatives in Kenya and publicly commit to increase it to a negotiated amount over a longer period.

3. Adopt transformed practices and attitudes in support of local peacebuilding actors.

- Simplify demands on grant management by fostering mutual trust and collaboration, using adaptive programming and reducing compliance burdens.
- Encourage a culture of informed risk-taking and tolerance by incentivising staff to spend more time with local peacebuilders and providing more support to local initiatives.
- Align performance management systems to prioritise collaboration with local peacebuilders and provide training to staff on conflict-sensitive practices, as well as having more flexible reporting requirements, including participatory ways of capturing results.
- Design country strategies and programmes that are inclusive of local voices and actions, reflecting their roles and priorities and conduct these processes with communities and local peacebuilding organisations.

- Make grants to international organisations contingent on their support for and collaboration with local peacebuilding initiatives

For local communities and actors

1. Identify, learn and scale up what works locally in peacebuilding.

- Systematically document and share successful, local peacebuilding interventions, detailing specific approaches and outcomes and sharing this across local networks to facilitate learning and exchange of best practice.
- Create learning networks and platforms where local actors can come together to share experiences, lessons learned, and challenges. These platforms can foster peer-to-peer learning, mentorship and collaboration, enhancing the capacity of local actors to replicate successful initiatives.
- Undertake research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness and impact of local peacebuilding initiatives. This data can help identify key factors contributing to success, refine strategies, and inform evidence-based decision-making for scaling up initiatives. This can be undertaken in collaboration with research institutions.
- Use technology such as online platforms, social media, and mobile phones to enhance communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among local actors.

2. Advocate for policy to support localised peacebuilding.

- Engage with policy-makers and international partners advocating for policies that support local peacebuilding at both national and county levels, such as increased funding for local initiatives, legal recognition of CBOs, and integration of local knowledge into national peacebuilding strategies.
- Ensure that local voices are heard in decision-making at all levels, from community forums to national dialogues. This ensures that peacebuilding policies and programmes are responsive to local needs and priorities.
- Raise awareness about the importance of local ownership and participation in peacebuilding and localisation efforts through public campaigns, media engagement, and community events.
- Develop policy to guide engagement with and among local actors, government and international actors including donors. This should be guided by best practice and what works at the community level towards sustainable peacebuilding.

3. Promote partnerships and collaboration.

- Build strong partnerships with government officials and institutions at national and county levels to ensure the coordination and alignment of peacebuilding efforts.
- Collaborate with other CSOs, including women's groups, youth organisations, and faith-based organisations, to leverage resources and expertise.
- Seek partnerships with international organisations and donors who are committed to supporting localisation in peacebuilding to support access to additional funding, technical expertise, and global networks.

4. Support community mobilisation and ownership.

- Encourage community members, especially marginalised groups including women, youth and people with disabilities, to actively participate in all stages of peacebuilding initiatives and ensure peacebuilding work incorporates their needs. This fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that solutions are tailored to local needs.
- Encourage communities to organise themselves to mobilise their agency. These groups can play a crucial role in mobilising resources, implementing projects, and advocating for community interests.
- Identify and support local leaders who can champion peacebuilding efforts within their communities. This can include traditional elders, religious leaders, women, youth, and other influential figures.
- Diversify funding and resources away from an over-reliance on western donor funding by mapping local resources such as local philanthropy, and identifying and mainstreaming community resources including cash donations, in-kind contributions and volunteers.

Endnotes

1   C. Elder, S. Stiganrt and J. Claes, Elections and violent conflict in Kenya: Making prevention stick, 2014

2   O. Mwangi, "Kenya violence: 5 key drivers of the decades-long conflict in the north and what to do about them", The Conversation, 9 November 2022, https://theconversation.com/kenya-violence-5-key-drivers-of-the-decades-long-conflict-in-the-north-and-what-to-do-about-them-193466

3   Two consultations were held in Nairobi. The first round brought together participants from Nairobi and neighbouring counties, including Kajiado, Kiambu and Machakos. The second workshop brought together representatives of INGOs, primarily based in Nairobi, to discuss what localisation would look like from their perspective.

4   Participants from Kwale, Mombasa, Kilifi, Tana River and Lamu

5   Participants from Migori, Homabay, Nyamira, Kisii, Kisumu, Siaya, Vihiga, Kakamega, Busia and Bungoma

6   Participants from Nakuru, Kericho, Boment and Narok

7   Participants from Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo Marakwet, Baringo, West Pokot, and Turkana

8   International Alert, 2022, Uwiano, machafuko au utengano: The path towards August 2022 elections in Kenya, https://www.international-alert.org/publications/the-path-towards-august-2022-elections-in-kenya/

9   Formal: National Cohesion and Integration Commision, Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC), Judiciary and Formal Courts, Peace Committees, Peace and Security Sector Reforms; informal: council of elders, peace declarations, *barazas* (informal gatherings) and peace caravans

10   N. Githaiga, "When institutionalisation threatens peacebuilding: The case of Kenya's infrastructure for peace", Journal of Peacebuilding and Development, 15(3), 2020, pp.316–330

11   Ibid. This has led to increasing formalisation of peacebuilding structures, both in terms of resourcing (primarily through financial resources from both the Kenyan government and donors) and capacities (the use and promotion of tools for peace, literacy, and financial accountability that are often enacted through training and the framing of the peacebuilding processes, including needs on the ground, to align with the donor's (often western) language and understanding).

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid.

14   L. Khabure, Committed to peace or creating further conflict? The case of Kenya's local peacebuilding committees, 2014, https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/committed-peace-creating-conflict-case-kenyas-local-peacebuilding-committees/?location=kenya&theme=

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20   A. Atputharajah, The impact of resource dependence on the localization of humanitarian action: The case of Kenya, Local engagement refugee research network paper No. 10, July 2020, https://carleton.ca/lerrn/wp-content/uploads/LERRN-Working-Paper-No.-10-Localization-in-Kenya.pdf

Acknowledgements

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