

Commissioned by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) in partnership with PeaceNexus Foundation and UN Women (UNW) programme, provides a comparative analysis of local-level peacebuilding initiatives funded by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) from 2015 to 2021, and situates the Fund's work against global research and practice on local peacebuilding. Informed by four case studies led by young researchers recruited through National Youth Leadership Forums modality in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, and the Western Balkans, the Review offers insights on how local peacebuilding is conceptualized and operationalized in a range of contexts and regions, with a focus on the involvement of young people and volunteers in local peacebuilding initiatives. The Review offers practical recommendations for the PBF and its fund applicants and recipients as well as the community-based peacebuilding practitioners at large to help guide the design of future local peacebuilding programming.

The definition of 'local peacebuilding' may seem intuitive, but in practice there is a lack of clarity about what distinguishes local from other types of action. Although a clearer distinction between local and national levels within UN policy documents has begun to emerge in recent years, the terms 'local' and 'national' are still occasionally used interchangeably. Consequently, the voices, goals and concerns of actors in conflict-affected communities may become muted while national leaders speak on their behalf. In contexts where tension between national authorities and local communities is the driving force behind conflict, conflating 'national' with 'local' peacebuilding in this way threatens to contribute to underlying tension and grievance. Within PBSO, local peacebuilding is commonly described as efforts at the national level or as actions that engage local civil society. This should be distinguished, however, from a narrower definition of 'locally-led' peacebuilding which entails that peacebuilding interventions are both designed and implemented by local actors - the definition that applies to a smaller proportion of PBF-funded projects. Consultations with local actors as part of the Thematic Review also showed that local actors in areas not affected by recent fighting frequently reject the term 'peacebuilding' altogether and instead focus on ways in which legacies of past conflict may still be at play. Given these sensitivities, initiatives that explicitly label themselves as 'peacebuilding efforts' and employ jargon or associated fuzzy concepts such as 'social cohesion' frequently face resistance or incomprehension by those local communities.

While the approval of projects with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as direct recipients of PBF funds has risen steadily over the years, CSOs still receive a smaller fraction of overall PBF support, which reflects the primary mandate of the PBF to drive more effective, more strategic, and more cohesive peacebuilding action of the UN Country Teams. While the PBF as a centrally managed, global instrument may not be the ideal donor for small, grassroots organizations, the Review recommends the PBF to identify ways in which it can foster stronger and more meaningful partnerships between its fund recipients and local peacebuilders, enhancing system-wide accountability to conflict-affected populations. The Review found that the majority of PBF-funded projects are designed by fund recipients in a top-down fashion, without significant influence by local actors on project priorities and objectives. In pushing for greater engagement of and mutual accountability with local communities, the PBF and its fund recipients must be sensitive to questions about which organizations or actors get to speak on behalf of which communities.

