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Inclusion and Accessibility in Peacebuilding

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Inclusion and Accessibility
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About the Inclusion and Accessibility **Expert Study Group**

Humanity United convened the expert study group (ESG) from *January to May of 2025*; it was co-chaired by Hadeil Ali, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Joseph Sany, United States Institute of Peace; and Kehinde Togun, Humanity United. The ESG consisted of practitioners and policymakers who participated in a series of conversations to develop concrete strategies and recommendations for a more inclusive, accessible, and effective peacebuilding ecosystem.

Members of the study group express their *support for the general findings and recommendations* the group reached but do not necessarily endorse every statement or judgment in this report. The co-chairs and expert study group members *participated in their personal capacities*. The views expressed are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of their institutions or employers or of the coordinating institutions.

Co-Chairs' **Note**

As we confront multifaceted global challenges to our collective security, from protracted conflicts to widespread social and political violence, it is more crucial than ever to recognize that justice and enduring peace hinge on the integration of diverse identities, voices and experiences.

The role of **diversity in peacebuilding** cannot be understated. Diverse participation is not merely about representation; it provides the assurance that every voice, particularly those historically marginalized, has a seat at the table. Whether along ethnic, cultural, gender, or socioeconomic dimensions, when specific groups are sidelined, grievances fester and grow, sowing the seeds of conflict. Addressing these grievances through **inclusive dialogue** is paramount. When peace agreements are reached, the relevance of inclusive participation becomes even more apparent. As the late Harold Saunders wisely noted, *while leaders may sign agreements, it is the people who ultimately make peace*. This profound insight reminds us that sustainable peace is built on interpersonal relationships and collaborative efforts rather than mere political transactions.

Recognizing diverse voices means deep engagement with the unique histories, struggles, and aspirations of various communities. In peacebuilding, this means moving away from a **one-size-fits-all approach** and toward one that recognizes the complexities inherent within each conflict. It requires understanding that conflicts are not just political or territorial but are deeply intertwined with cultural and historical narratives. For instance, indigenous perspectives on land, community, and conflict resolution can differ vastly from conventional Western frameworks. Thus,

consolidating peace must integrate these viewpoints, crafting solutions that resonate within the specific cultural contexts of each community.

However, the journey toward justice and true inclusivity is fraught with challenges and dilemmas. Although this report highlights many obstacles to diversity, equity, and accessibility, it is essential to acknowledge the layers of cultural barriers that can impede these efforts. In particular, the inclusion of identities such as **persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ individuals** poses challenges in contexts where these identities historically face discrimination or where their rights may be challenged on the premise of cultural sovereignty. For example, in various areas of the world, advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights is sometimes perceived as an imposition of Western values. Ignoring such perceptions can stifle meaningful dialogue and diminish potential allies.

As peacebuilders, this is where the focus on dialogue becomes pivotal. Peacebuilding efforts must prioritize creating spaces for conversations that include voices from all sides while acknowledging the historical and cultural contexts that shape perceptions around identity. Encouraging **local ownership** of the peace process is crucial, as it fosters trust and facilitates the gradual acceptance of more diverse perspectives. Moreover, genuinely inclusive approaches can lead to innovative solutions that address dilemmas arising from conflicting values and beliefs.

As we explore the recommendations put forth in this report, it is evident that embracing diversity is not merely a moral imperative; it is a **strategic necessity for effective peacebuilding**. When diverse voices are included in the dialogue, the outcomes are more likely to align with the aspirations of the broader community, as people see themselves reflected in the solutions being proposed. Peacebuilding initiatives designed by diverse teams often exhibit greater creativity and innovation, leading to more sustainable outcomes. Research supports the notion that diverse groups generate better ideas and solutions, in part because they bring varied perspectives to the table.

Moreover, the dialogue on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in peacebuilding opens up significant avenues for understanding and addressing **root causes of conflict**. Conflicts are often a symptom of deeper societal rifts such as inequality, social injustice, and exclusion. By engaging with diverse communities, peacebuilders can unearth these underlying issues and develop holistic strategies that prioritize healing relationships and rebuilding trust. This approach encourages a shift from reactive measures to proactive solutions by fostering environments that cultivate resilience and reconciliation.

We must also remain vigilant about the evolving global context in which these peacebuilding efforts occur. The current disruption in the global order presents both opportunities and challenges. Traditional power dynamics are shifting, and questions of **legitimacy, accountability, and representation** are more pronounced than ever. This report's recommendations contribute to navigating these complexities, positioning inclusivity not just as a goal, but also as a mechanism for enhancing the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives. We acknowledge that while policies and practices need to evolve, the peacebuilding field also has to focus on shifting the norms and values that underpin the field and have been major sources of pain, tension, and stagnation in the areas we seek to work.

We encourage readers to consider the **intersectionality of identities** and how these intersections influence individual experiences of conflict and peace. Recognizing that people do not exist in isolation from their social contexts is vital. Factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can intersect in complex ways that influence how individuals and groups interact with conflict and pursue peace. By understanding these dynamics, we can develop more nuanced and effective strategies that resonate within the unique cultural landscapes of the regions we seek to influence.

In conclusion, this report serves as a call to action for practitioners, policymakers, and all those invested in

the realm of peacebuilding. It illuminates the multifaceted relationship between diversity, inclusion, and sustainable peace. As we continue to confront the intricate dynamics between conflict and peace, let us recognize that **embracing diversity in our peacebuilding efforts is not just beneficial, but essential**. By fostering environments and processes that honor the richness of our collective humanity, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable world. The recommendations presented herein serve not only as a blueprint for actionable steps but also as an invitation to engage in a deeper exploration of what it means to truly include and empower all voices within the peacebuilding narrative.

We are grateful to the expert study group who joined us as thought partners, graciously helped make sense of the current peacebuilding context, and made recommendations that fit these precarious times. We also thank practitioners who joined us to share their expertise and lived experience addressing the issues discussed in this report. Additionally, we owe a debt of gratitude to Jessie Steinhauer and Lyndi for their excellent support in drafting this report and managing the ESG process. The work now belongs to us as a collective and a peacebuilding community. Together, let us champion the cause of inclusivity in peacebuilding, crafting pathways that lead not only to the cessation of violence but to the flourishing of vibrant, resilient communities empowered to create and sustain peace long after conflicts have subsided. The journey ahead will be challenging, but it is one that promises profound rewards for our global community when we dare to embrace the full spectrum of humanity in our quest for peace.

Sincerely,

Hadeil Ali, Joseph Sany, and Kehinde Togun

Executive **Summary**

As violent conflict escalates and traditional aid systems undergo profound disruption, the peacebuilding field faces an urgent challenge: to ensure that those most affected by conflict can meaningfully shape, lead, and sustain peace efforts. Sustainable peace is impossible without embedding **justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (JDEIA)** as foundational principles in every dimension of peacebuilding. *Exclusion, whether political, economic, or social, is not just a symptom of conflict — it is a root cause.* Inclusion, therefore, is not simply a peripheral concern. It is central to the prevention and resolution of conflict.

Despite growing recognition of the need for change, the peacebuilding industry remains dominated by Western donor models, white norms and supremacy, elites, and decisionmakers from the world's most powerful countries. Even amid recent policy shifts and funding cuts, **Western bilateral donors, philanthropic foundations, think tanks, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs)** continue to **set agendas, control funding flows, and shape decision-making processes**. That reinforces exclusion by sidelining the knowledge, agency, and lived experiences of those most affected by conflict. Reform efforts have too often been superficial, *failing to dismantle the systems*, practices, and worldviews that marginalize diverse and locally-rooted leadership and ownership.

In this context, in *early 2025*, **Humanity United convened an Expert Study Group (ESG) on Inclusion and Accessibility in Peacebuilding** to interrogate these entrenched inequities and chart a path toward change. The ESG brought together experienced practitioners and policymakers to develop concrete strategies for a more inclusive, accessible, and effective peacebuilding ecosystem.

Building on the groundwork laid by a 2022 community of practice, the ESG drew lessons from the **Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)** and **Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS)** agendas, *decolonizing aid initiatives*, and broader movements to diversify the peace and security field. The resulting recommendations synthesize collective insights and lived experience, pointing toward a *fundamental realignment of power* in peacebuilding across decision-making, knowledge production, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms.

Key Findings

The ESG identified **persistent challenges and emerging opportunities**. The peacebuilding industry remains dominated by **Western-centric actors, norms, and frameworks**, comprising donors, international non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and policymakers who continue to sideline local and proximate actors. Many actors and institutions still fail to acknowledge how their worldviews, narratives, and norms perpetuate exclusion and reinforce **power imbalances**. At the same time, policy shifts, shrinking civic space, and donor retrenchment — especially among traditional bilateral funders — compound risks for communities that are already on the margins.

Yet disruption also creates opportunity. As traditional models recede, new space is emerging for **community-centered, locally led and owned approaches**. The ESG emphasized that embedding inclusion and accessibility is not just a moral imperative but a **strategic necessity for effective and sustainable peacebuilding**.

Background

1 Expert Study Group Formation and Purpose

In spring 2025, **Humanity United convened the Expert Study Group (ESG) on Inclusion and Accessibility in Peacebuilding**. The study group was co-chaired by Hadeil Ali, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Joseph Sany, United States Institute of Peace; and Kehinde Togun, Humanity United. This initiative built upon the work of a community of practice developed by these three institutions in 2022, which emerged in response to the persistent gap between aspirational commitments to *justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (JDEIA)* and the structural inequities that continue to define global peacebuilding efforts.

From **January to May 2025**, the ESG brought together diverse policymakers and practitioners across global and U.S. contexts for a series of **facilitated roundtable discussions**, each of which was framed by a core question and relevant guest speakers. Drawing on deep *collective expertise and lived experience*, the group identified barriers, surfaced lessons learned, and developed **actionable recommendations** to embed inclusion and accessibility across the sector.

The conversations and findings that framed this ESG report built upon a robust foundation of work, including landmark frameworks like the **Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security agendas**, efforts to *decolonize aid*, and initiatives to *diversify the peace and security field*. The ESG sought to deepen, connect, and synthesize these existing initiatives by weaving together lessons across movements and approaches to explore what an *intersectional peacebuilding architecture* could look like in practice.

This report presents the ESG's findings and recommendations to **advance sustainable, equitable peacebuilding** and strengthen the sector's capacity to uphold inclusion and **accessibility as strategic imperatives** for just and lasting peace.

2 Strategic Areas of Inquiry

The ESG structured its work around a central question: **How can peacebuilding donors, policymakers, and practitioners strengthen inclusion and accessibility to effectively support the sector's initiatives?** Four sub-questions guided the analysis:

Reimagining Partnerships and Financing

As global bilateral funding declines, what needs to change within peacebuilding institutions, including workforces, to ensure full inclusion and accessibility? What are some ways to reimagine financing and partnership models?

Countering Over-Securitization

In a new geopolitical landscape and given the growing trend of preventing and "resolving" conflict with an over-securitized approach, how can we elevate peacebuilding efforts that center local/proximate actors to help mitigate this trend?

Including Marginalized Communities

How can peacebuilding efforts more effectively include people with disabilities, youth, and LGBTQI+ communities? What have we learned as a field about how inclusion can protect human rights and advance social cohesion?

Systemic Reforms for Equity

What practices or systems are necessary (or need reform) for indigenous communities, migrants, and communities of color to effectively engage in peacebuilding spaces and processes?

What Do We Mean by "Peacebuilding"?

Peacebuilding, as a concept, was once limited to the scope of peacemaking and directly mediating conflict. In the UN system today,

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> *peacebuilding refers to efforts to assist countries and regions in their transitions from war to peace and to reduce a country's risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities for conflict management, and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development.[1]*
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> "

This ESG operated under the belief that sustainable peacebuilding requires proactive, preventative strategies that address underlying drivers of conflict and forced migration like resource scarcity, inequality, and systemic marginalization. Strategies ranging from funding that expands food supply and environmental resilience to proactive inclusion can build up structures of cooperation and partnership. A systems-based approach that brings in a broadly defined scope of peacebuilding actors is critical to lay the foundations for lasting peace, whether through restorative post-conflict practices or by preventing conflict in the first place. Policymakers, funders, conveners, researchers, and on-the-ground practitioners all have an important role within the sphere of peacebuilding, and were important voices within the ESG to ensure that a comprehensive selection of "peacebuilders" could be represented—all with the knowledge that this is only one very small step in a long journey.

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1 United Nations, "Peace and Security," n.d, https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/peace-and-security#:~:text=Within%20the%20United%20Nations%2C%20peacebuilding,foundations%20for%20sustainable%20peace%20

3 Challenges and Opportunities

The ESG's work unfolded at a moment of **profound disruption in the global peacebuilding landscape**. Across the United States and other Western donor nations, the foreign aid architecture faces severe strain. In the U.S., a new administration has **defunded development agencies** and is seeking to shrink the nation's global footprint. Similarly, other Western governments, such as the United Kingdom and France, are also drastically reducing their development assistance.[2] Beyond Overseas Development Assistance, philanthropic support for international development and peacebuilding has proven inconsistent, often shaped by narrow priorities, low risk tolerance, and a tendency to prescribe projects rather than support locally driven approaches.[3] These cuts carry **immediate and devastating consequences**: jeopardizing food security, halting essential health services, and threatening livelihoods in already fragile contexts.[4] People are dying as life-saving programs are dismantled, and communities on the margins are pushed deeper into crisis.

This retrenchment creates ripple effects that extend far beyond any single program. It shrinks civic space, emboldens repressive regimes, and undermines local movements working to build peace. Communities become more vulnerable to violence, repression, and displacement.[5] As Western donors retreat, **authoritarian regimes and armed actors rush to fill the vacuum**, offering coercive forms of support and reshaping conflict dynamics.[6]

This crisis is compounded by broader geopolitical shifts that make conflict more protracted, peace more elusive, and inclusive solutions harder to implement. As peacebuilding resources contract and global defense expenditures reach historic highs, violent conflict is increasing in frequency, duration, and complexity.[7] Civil society actors, particularly those from marginalized communities, are also navigating shrinking civic space, growing personal risk, and limited institutional protection or support.[8] At the same time, the **global order is shifting toward multipolarity**, with new state and non-state actors reshaping mediation and conflict-resolution processes in ways that challenge traditional Western frameworks.[9]

The fragility of the current system underscores the **urgent need to transform existing aid models** and reimagine the peacebuilding field itself. While the Western aid model's tendencies to create dependency, marginalize local expertise, and entrench asymmetrical power dynamics are well established, there is a better path forward.[10]

The convergence of today's crises creates a narrow but powerful window for transformation. The same forces destabilizing the peacebuilding architecture are also generating possibilities. There is an **opportunity to move beyond donor-driven frameworks toward models that center local leadership** and support the development of sustainable, self-determined systems. However, without intentional reinvestment in inclusive and intersectional peacebuilding that is rooted in local communities and societies, the current retreat amidst attempts to rebuild risks deepening inequalities, reinforcing asymmetrical structures, and weakening the durability of peace.

Many peacebuilding institutions remain constrained by colonial legacies and donor-driven priorities that privilege elite voices over local community-led solutions. Despite vocal commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion, **exclusion remains the norm** in how power is held and how decisions are made. Inclusion is a strategic imperative, not simply a normative ideal. Decades of research affirm that

peace processes are more legitimate, durable, and effective when they meaningfully include those most affected by conflict. When people from marginalized communities participate meaningfully, peacebuilding gains in effectiveness, stakeholder trust, and long-term resilience.[11] Mounting demands for decolonization, localization, and justice invite

a structural shift in how peace is imagined and enacted.[12] The urgency of this moment demands more than technical fixes or symbolic representation. It calls for a structural and **paradigm shift that centers the leadership, knowledge, and agency of those too often sidelined**.

2 Zainab Usman and Washington, "Are the World's Largest Donors Cutting their Bilateral Aid to Africa?," Carnegie Endowmentfor International Peace, October 2024, https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2024/10/africa-development-aid-oecd-china?lang=en

3 DylanMatthews, Raaval Bains, and Dmitri Kotsiras, "Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation: A PracticalResource for Civil Society, Donors, INGOs, and Intermediaries" (Peace Direct, September 2023), https://www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships/

4 Ian Mitchell and Sam Hughes, "Which Countries are most exposed to US Aid Cuts; And What Other Providers Can Do,"Center for Global Development, February 2025, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/which-countries-are-most-exposed-us-aid-cuts-and-what-other-providers-can-do; Charles Kenny and Justin Sandefur, "How Many Lives Does US Foreign Aid Save?," Center forGlobal Development,March 2025, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/how-many-lives-does-us-foreign-aid-save

5 "Impact of UK Aid Budget Cut on Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding," Conciliation Resources, February 2025, https://www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/impact-uk-aid-budget-cut-conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding?utm_source=chatgpt.com; "What Is Happening to U.S. Humanitarian Assistance? Will the United States Continueto Save Lives?," Center for Strategic & International Studies, April 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-happening-us-humanitarian-assistance-will-united-states-continue-save-lives

6 Armenak Tokmajyan, ""No People, No Problems:" The Growing Appeal of Authoritarian Conflict Management," CarnegieEndowment for International Peace, January 2024, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/01/no-people-no-problems-the-growing-appeal-of-authoritarian-conflict-management?lang=en; Joseph Siegle, "Winning the Battle of Ideas: Exposing GlobalAuthoritarian Narratives and Revitalizing Democratic Principles," National Endowment for Democracy, February 2024, https://www.ned.org/winning-the-battle-of-ideas-exposing-global-authoritarian-narratives-and-revitalizing-democratic-principles/

7 Siri Aas Rustad, "Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946-2023" (Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2024), https://www.prio.org/publications/14006; Clionadh Raleigh and Katayoun Kishi, "Global Conflicts Double over the Past FiveYears," ACLED, December 2024, https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index

8 Andrew Firmin, Ines Pousadela, andMandeep Tiwana, eds., "State of Civil Society Report 2024" (CIVICUS, March 2024), https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2024; Samuel Sharp, Stephanie Diepeveen, and Ellie Collins,"Civic Space: Shrinking or Shifting?," ODI Global, March 2023, https://odi.org/en/insights/civic-space-shrinking-or-shifting/

9 Tokmajyan,""No People, No Problems:" The Growing Appeal of Authoritarian Conflict Management."

10 Angelle Kwemo, "Making Africa Great Again: Reducing Aid Dependency," Brookings, April 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/making-africa-great-again-reducing-aid-dependency/; Maxwell Gomera, "Africa Doesn'tNeed Aid. It Needs Control Over Its Critical Minerals.,"Al Jazeera, April 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/4/12/africa-doesnt-need-aid-it-needs-control-over-its-critical-minerals

11 Desiree Nilsson, "Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace,"International Interactions38, no. 2 (April 2012): 243–66; Thania Paffenholz et al., "Preventing Violence Through Inclusion: From Building PoliticalMomentum to Sustaining Peace" (Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative, 2017); "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches toPreventing Violent Conflict,"United Nations(World Bank, 2018), https://hdl.handle.net/10986/28337; Duncan Hiscock andTheresa Dumasy, "From Conflict Analysis to Peacebuilding Impact: Lessons from the People's Peacemaking PerspectivesProject" (Conciliation Resources, Saferworld, 2012)

12 Lisa Schirch, "Decolonizing Peacebuilding: A Way Forward Out of Crisis" (Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation,in collaboration with Toda Peace Institute, April 2022)

Findings

Building on the work of others committed to inclusion and accessibility, the Expert Study Group (ESG) surfaced critical insights into the persistent barriers, systemic inequities, and emerging opportunities shaping the peacebuilding field today.

Exclusion Persists
Despite Reform Efforts

Systemic barriers remain entrenched

Despite progress symbolized by landmark initiatives such as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agendas, **meaningful inclusion in peacebuilding remains halting and inconsistent**. ESG participants underscored that physical, institutional, attitudinal, and communication barriers continue to systematically exclude persons with disabilities, youth, LGBTQI+ individuals, Indigenous peoples, and communities of color.

For example, although persons with disabilities face disproportionate impacts in conflict settings, **few emergency response initiatives are designed with their needs in mind**. Similarly, youth-led and women's organizations in conflict-affected contexts often survive on minimal, unstable levels of funding that constrain their influence and reach. LGBTQI+ activists and organizations are frequently excluded from peacebuilding spaces altogether, often due to discriminatory laws, social stigma, or assumptions by donors and implementers that engaging with these groups is too politically sensitive or risky.

Localization rhetoric versus reality

While the principle of localization is widely endorsed in global peacebuilding and development rhetoric, **its implementation remains uneven and often superficial**.[13] Many efforts focus on incorporating Global South actors into Global North–driven agendas,[14] rather than shifting decision-making power or enabling local leadership to define priorities on their own terms.

Donor-driven models still dominate, relegating local organizations to subordinate implementation roles and excluding them from core processes of agenda-setting, strategic planning, and resource allocation.[15] In conflict settings, local peacebuilders face increased security risks, and localization efforts may be contested or derailed by spoilers or by serving the narrow interests of specific groups.[16]

Partnership models often remain essentially transactional, dictated by donor timelines and success metrics, while **institutional hierarchies, implicit biases, and exclusionary language practices perpetuate neo-colonial and racist power dynamics**.[17] Compounding these institutional barriers is a reluctance among some Global North actors to critically examine their own power, privilege, and positionality, ultimately undermining genuine reform efforts.

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13 Matthews et al., "Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation."
14 The terms "Global North" and "GlobalSouth" are used here as shorthand to reference broad political and economic divisionsrooted in historical power imbalances and colonial legacies, while acknowledging the limitations and contested nature of thisterminology. These terms do not map neatlyonto geography but aim to reflect how colonialism, racism, imperialism, andeconomic structures shape global power dynamics. ESG members emphasized the importance of recognizing the diverseidentities, interests, and agency of individual states and communities, cautioning against treating the "Global North" and "GlobalSouth" as monolithic blocs. Despite the limitations, this report employs these terms as a concise tool for characterizing persistentinequalities in global power and resources.
15 Shannon Paige and Dmitri Kotsiras, "Time to Decolonise Aid: Lessons and Insights From a Global Consultation" (PeaceDirect, May 2021), https://www.peacedirect.org/time-to-decolonise-aid/.
16 Alys Brown and Ruth Simpson, "Trust, Legitimacy, Capacity, and Power: Practical Approaches to Localisation inPeacebuilding" (International Alert, 2024).
17 Peace Direct, "Localisation and Decolonisation: The Difference That Makes the Difference," 2022, https://www.peacedirect.org/localisation-and-decolonisation/.

What do we mean by **"Localization"?**

The term in peacebuilding means to **shift power, resources, and decision-making to local actors**, centering their knowledge, leadership, and lived experience. It involves strengthening local capacities for peace, transforming unequal power dynamics between international and local actors, and fostering inclusive, equitable partnerships rooted in trust, transparency, and mutual learning.[18]

Effective localization is **context-specific and conflict-sensitive**, emphasizing ethical engagement, adaptability, and participation across divides that include women, youth, and marginalized groups. While interpretations vary, successful localization prioritizes **legitimacy, shared leadership, and long-term investment in local systems and solutions**, offering a more sustainable, responsive, and just approach to peacebuilding.[19]

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18 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Strengthening Participation, Representation, and Leadership of Local and National Actorsin IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms: Guidance Note," 2021.
19 Brown and Simpson, "Trust, Legitimacy, Capacity, and Power."

Growing Momentum for Fundamental Transformation

The ESG identified growing momentum across parts of the peacebuilding field for a shift toward **decolonization** — a deliberate effort to dismantle the racist, colonial, and neo-colonial norms and frameworks that remain embedded in global peacebuilding systems.[20] Participants emphasized that this work goes **beyond redistributing resources or introducing technical fixes**. It requires sustained reflection and action to confront fundamental questions about **power, legitimacy, and accountability:** *Who holds decision-making authority?Who sets priorities? Whose knowledge, lived experiences, and leadership are recognized and valued?* True transformation requires reconsidering who sets the table in the first place and stepping aside to enable others to lead.

To meaningfully advance this shift, **dominant actors– including donors, INGOs, and otherintermediaries– must actively interrogate how their own practices, norms, and values havereinforced exclusion**. Grappling with these questions is essential to ensure that inclusion movesbeyond rhetorical commitment to become a transformative force; one that reshapes worldviews,narratives, and ways of working.

Participants also cautioned against treating inclusion as a one-size-fits-all solution. Without acritical examination of how inclusion is defined and operationalized, and without examiningassumptions behind commonly used terms and approaches, even well-intentioned reforms riskreproducing the very hierarchies they seek to dismantle.

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20 Paige and Kotsiras, "Time to Decolonise Aid."

Structural Forces
Undermine Inclusion

Funding architecture as a central barrier

The ESG identified the global funding architecture as a central obstacle to advancing inclusive, locally-ledpeacebuilding. While the field widely acknowledges that local actors deliver moresustainable, contextually grounded results, **current funding systems continue to overwhelminglyfavor large international organizations**.[21] A majority of bilateral peacebuilding funding flows todonor-country institutions, leaving only a small fraction to reach local or proximate actors–andan even smaller share to grassroots women's or youth-led organizations.[22]This severelyconstrains local organizations' ability to operateconsistently, scale their efforts, or sustain long-term impact.

These imbalances reflect deep-seated **donor risk aversion and outdated assumptions about localcapacity**.[23] Complex reporting requirements, administrative burdens, and short-term fundingcycles disproportionately disadvantage smaller, local organizations. Instead of empowering localleadership, funding often passes through intermediary entities that are better positioned to meetdonor compliance demands but often less equipped to design solutionstailored to local realities. As a result, **partnership models become largely bureaucratic**, shaped by donor priorities andtimelines, with rigid earmarking and project-based funding cycles locking local actors intocontinual fundraising and limiting their flexibility, autonomy, and sustainability.[24]

Despite broad consensus around the value of locally led peacebuilding,[25] **global reform efforts,such as the Grand Bargain, have so far failed to close the gap between rhetoric and practice**.[26] Participants emphasizedthe urgent need to move beyond aspirational language and focus onidentifying concrete levers of change, from reimagining the role of intermediaries to pilotingnew, flexible funding mechanisms, and developing approaches that shift not only where fundingflows but how decisions are made and what kinds of work are prioritized.

21 Phil Vernon, "Local Peacebuilding: What Works and Why" (Peace Insight, 2019); Severine Autesserre, "InternationalPeacebuilding and Local Success: Assumptions and Effectiveness,"International Studies Review19, no. 1 (2016): 114–32.;United Nations Security Council,Resolution 2282 (2016), S/RES/2282 (April 27, 2016), https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016).

22 Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, "Financing forPeacebuilding:Advancing Opportunities for Local Civil Society," 2021.; Euan Ritchie, Charles Kenny, Ranil Dissanayake, and Justin Sandefur,"How Much Foreign Aid Reaches Foreign Governments?," Center for Global Development, May 2022

23 Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Mary Martin, "Local Ownership Challenges in Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention," LondonSchool of Economics and Political Science, January 2017.

24 Arbie Baguios, Maia King, Alex Martins, and Rose Pinnington,Are We There Yet? Localisation as the Journey towardsLocally Led Practice: Models, Approaches and Challenges, ODI Global, January 2022.

25 Peace and Security Funders Group,Funding Local Peacebuilding: Guiding Principles and Strategies for Funders, 2020.

26 Liz Hume and Leslie Mitchell,"Strengthening Locally-Led Peacebuilding: Policy to Action," Alliance for Peacebuilding, May2022, https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/afp-publications/strengthening-locally-led-peacebuilding-policy-to-action121321pzkjb-fzscy-d53h

External pressures intensify challenges

The structural pressures facing the peacebuilding sector exist within a volatile and rapidly evolving geopolitical and civic landscape. Civil society actors, particularly those from marginalized communities, are navigating shrinking civic space, heightened surveillance, and mounting legal and physical threats, especially under authoritarian regimes. **Global defense spending is rising while international aid contracts dwindle**, widening the gap between security-focused investments and peacebuilding resources.

The ESG began convening just as the Trump administration commenced its dismantling of the foreign aid infrastructure with the dissolution of USAID and the curtailing of the State Department. As a result, ESG members discussed the need for new paradigms in a context where the US government, previously a leader in development, was in deep retreat – a major challenge and an opportunity for reimagining.

The dismantling of U.S. peacebuilding architecture mirrors similar retrenchment across other Western donor countries and organizations. As traditional donors cut back, **players like China and the Gulf States are stepping in**, often directing their support toward strategically important countries, emphasizing high-profile infrastructure projects that meet the demands of elites rather than sustainable projects that meet broader needs and strengthen civil society.[27] These efforts increasingly blur the lines between humanitarian and development aid and prioritize **security and power over values like human rights, equality, or justice.**[28] As the global order becomes more multipolar, new state and non-state actors are reshaping mediation and conflict resolution dynamics, **challenging the dominance of traditional Western frameworks and underscoring the urgent need for more context-sensitive, adaptive approaches that center local and proximate leadership**.

Communication crisis and narrative challenges

Thepeacebuilding field faces a **fundamental communication crisis** that extends beyond resourceconstraints. The field is struggling with how inclusion and peace are understood, valued, andsupported across society. This crisis manifests in two critical ways: **harmful narratives aboutmarginalized communities and inadequate communication strategies** within the field itself.

ESG participants highlighted how marginalized groups are often portrayed as burdens or passiverecipients of aid rather than as leaders and change-makers. This kind of narrative can haveserious consequences: it distorts policy priorities, reinforces exclusion, and weakenspeacebuilding efforts by ignoring the valuable knowledge and leadership these communitiesoffer.

These narrative challengesare compounded by **growing attacks on core values like individualfreedoms, equity, and human rights**. Authoritarian and repressive actors are using emotionalappeals, wedge issues, and coordinated campaigns to weaken public support for inclusive andparticipatory forms of governance and peace.[29] At the same time, the peacebuilding field hasstruggled to respond with strong, effective counter-narratives.

Participants identified critical weaknesses in the peacebuilding sector's ability to communicate itsrelevance and impact beyond professional circles. The field has become highly professionalized and much of its discourse remains inward-facing, shaped by assumptions of shared understanding and agreement about the value of its work. However, much of the publichas nevercritically engaged with these core values and concepts, leaving inclusive peacebuilding approaches vulnerable to deliberate distortion and misrepresentation.

Data gaps and challenges

Efforts to build inclusive and effective peace are increasingly constrained by **persistent data gaps and the erosion of global information infrastructure**. Recent funding cuts have jeopardizedcritical data sources used to monitor conflict trends, assess humanitarian needs, and protect aidworkers in volatile contexts.Platforms such as the Armed Conflict Location & Event DataProject (ACLED) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, along with other locallygrounded datasets, are experiencing disruptions as local data-producing partners scale back orcease operations entirely.[30] In many fragile contexts, where reliable information is already scarce, **open-source humanitarian data is at growing risk of becoming outdated or inaccessible**, undermining timely decision-making for crisis response, aid allocation, and peacebuildingefforts.[31]

These challenges are even more acute when it comes to **intersectional data**, which is crucial foridentifying and understanding the distinct needs, risks, and experiences of marginalizedpopulations. The erosion of this data threatens to obscure the lived realities of those mostaffected by violence and exclusion. Without reinvestment in **independent, inclusive, and context-sensitive data systems**, peacebuilding efforts risk becoming less informed, less equitable, andincreasingly reactive.
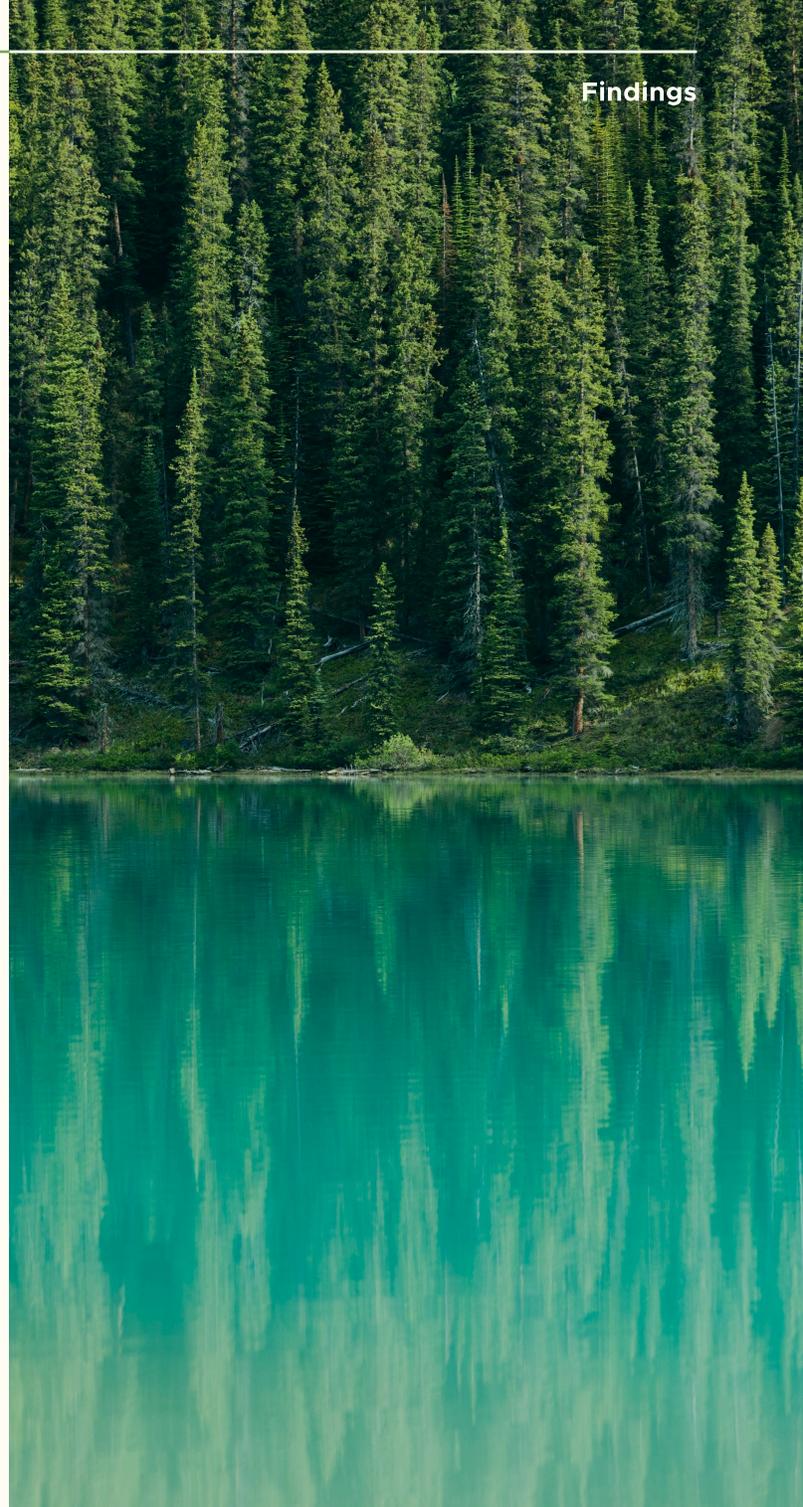
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The Strategic Case for Inclusion

Evidence of effectiveness

ESG participants noted evidence that consistently shows **civil society participation reduces thelikelihood of peace agreement failure by more than half**;[32] while the **meaningful inclusion ofwomen significantly increases the longevity of peace agreements** over both short and longperiods.[33] Youth engagement promotes civic renewal and innovation, while marginalizedcommunities, including LGBTQI+ populations, Indigenous peoples, and persons withdisabilities, bring essential knowledge, leadership, and bridging capacities to peace processes.[34] **Inclusion strengthens legitimacy, enhances public support, and reduces the appeal of violence** asa tool for influence or grievance expression.[35]

Moreover, attacks on these communities, particularly LGBTQI+ and racial and ethnic minority communities, often serve as **early warning indicators of broader societal breakdown, repression, and democratic backsliding**. Anti-rights and authoritarian actors frequently target LGBTQI+ groups and racial and ethnic minorities first, using attacks on their rights as entry points to erode civic space, undermine democratic institutions, and normalize state-sanctioned violence.[36] Failing to recognize and respond to these early warning signs not only perpetuates exclusion but **weakens the overall resilience and stability of societies** at risk of conflict.

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What Do We Mean by "Inclusion"?

This term refers to the **meaningful participation and representation of all individuals and groups**, particularly those who are historically marginalized, excluded, or disproportionately impacted by conflict, in decision-makingprocesses, institutions, and social structures that shape peace and security. This encompasses not only formal representation in peace processes, but also ensuring that **diverse perspectives, experiences, and needs are recognized, valued, and integrated** into policies, practices, and peacebuilding initiatives. It requires actively addressing structural barriers that prevent meaningful participation, including discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, class, age, disability, sexual orientation or other identities. **Genuine inclusion means that marginalized groups have real influence** over decisions that affect their lives and communities through the deliberate transformation of power imbalances and the creation of more equitable systems. This involves the broader transformation of political, economic, and social structures that contribute to sustainable peace, recognizing that **exclusion often constitutes a root cause of conflict**. Inclusion acknowledges that those who have experienced the consequences of violence and marginalization possess essential knowledge and insights that are critical for building lasting peace.

Inclusion as strategic necessity

In addition, the complex, interdependent challenges facing the world today — including **rising demographic diversity, climate change, and the growing influence of non-state actors** — demand inclusive, cross-sectoral solutions. These challenges cannot be effectively tackled through top-down or one-size-fits-all approaches. **Inclusion is essential** because it brings to the table the diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and context-specific knowledge necessary to craft solutions that reflect the realities and needs of affected communities.

Local peacebuilders and civil society actors are uniquely positioned to identify and address the underlying drivers of conflict and polarization, strengthen social cohesion, and build resilient communities from the ground up. Without intentional inclusion of historically marginalized voices, efforts risk overlooking critical vulnerabilities, missing opportunities for innovation, and failing to secure the broad-based legitimacy needed for sustainable peace.

Despite this robust body of evidence, peacebuilding efforts remain **dominated by elite-driven, securitized models**. Principles of Justice, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (JDEIA) are too often treated as aspirational add-ons rather than foundations for the long-term success and sustainability of peacebuilding and development efforts. As foreign aid budgets shrink and funding becomes increasingly contingent on demonstrating tangible returns such as trade advantages or security outcomes, there is a growing risk that the **strategic importance of inclusion and intersectionality will be sidelined. Yet these principles are central to building durable peace.**

Systemic Transformation Is Essential

The ESG identified that while the challenges facing the peacebuilding field are systemic and deeply entrenched, **pathways for transformation are emerging**. Current efforts fall short because they focus on technical adjustments rather than addressing the hierarchies, values, and assumptions that underpin the field. Inclusion-focused programming or one-off capacity-building efforts are insufficient on their own. **Genuine change requires understanding what systemic transformation actually looks like, adapting to increasingly complex global realities, and building upon innovations that are already demonstrating success. Without a shift in whose voices are centered, how decisions are made, and how power is shared**, efforts to localize or diversify peacebuilding risk becoming performative or technocratic rather than transformative.

Adapting to Complex Realities

The ESG stressed the need for **strategies that are sensitive to local context**, especially in unstable or authoritarian environments. In these settings, openly promoting inclusion can be risky or politically sensitive. Instead, building trust through local efforts, especially in less politicized areas like health or education, may offer safer ways to promote inclusion.

The group noted a growing need for **stronger safety and support systems**. As civic space shrinks, many organizations and peacebuilders face increasing risks. ESG participants stressed the importance of being prepared for backlash and highlighted the need for **digital security, legal support, community-led safety plans, and care for those doing this work** to help keep inclusion efforts going in difficult conditions.

As dedicated inclusion funding becomes increasingly constrained, the ESG found that **mainstreaming inclusive practices across all programming is essential**. However, participants highlighted that such mainstreaming cannot be superficial. It requires **significant shifts in how programs are designed**

implemented, and evaluated, along with changes to funding systems that fail to incentivize or reward substantive inclusion.

Participants also reflected on how peace processes are evolving to become more fragmented, iterative, and informal. These shifts pose challenges for inclusion frameworks and strategies that have traditionally focused on formal, comprehensive peace agreements. The ESG identified a **gap in current research and practitioner tools**, which often overlook the dynamics of partial settlements or localized negotiations.[37] As a result, the group pointed to the need for **new theoretical frameworks and practical tools** that can sustain inclusive approaches even in nontraditional or transitional peace processes. This includes broadening how the field defines and responds to safety and security — for example, **integrating more expansive notions of security, such as protection from gender-based violence and other identity-based threats**, to better reflect the lived experiences and needs of marginalized communities.[38]

Seeds of innovation and change

Despite the scale of the challenges facing the peacebuilding field, the ESG identified promising innovations and entry points that illustrate the potential for systemic change. Participants highlighted how the **COVID-19 pandemic served as a revealing stress test, exposing the limits of traditional international responses while showcasing the adaptability and effectiveness of locally led, trust-based approaches**. In many cases, these approaches outperformed externally driven efforts, particularly where international actors were constrained by global disruptions.

The ESG also observed a growing influence of r**egional organizations and South-South partnerships** which are offering credible alternatives to Western-led frameworks.[39] These solidarity-based models reflect a broader shift toward **horizontal, culturally grounded approaches to peacebuilding**. Participants noted that these developments point to an evolving role for international actors, one that is **more facilitative than directive**, and emphasized the importance of making space for proximate and local actors to lead.

Funding mechanisms emerged as another critical area of transformation. The ESG noted that **locally managed peace and development funds, participatory grantmaking processes, and reimagined intermediary roles** are demonstrating how financial resources can

be governed in ways that elevate local leadership, build community ownership, and increase sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.[40]

Beyond funding, participants identified a range of innovative practices aimed at **shifting entrenched power dynamics and narrative norms**. One illustrative example discussed was a youth summit for democracy where **young people were keynote speakers while government officials were keynote listeners**. This format offers a window into a promising model for authentic intergenerational dialogue and the disruption of traditional hierarchies. ESG members also noted that **digital platforms and diaspora networks** are expanding the boundaries of participation, enabling new forms of hybrid engagement that combine local insight with global reach.[41]

Finally, the ESG highlighted the emergence of **coalition-building efforts** across traditionally siloed movements. Participants pointed to collaborations among **disability rights, Indigenous, LGBTQI+, racial and ethnic minority, and youth-led groups** as powerful examples of intersectional organizing. These coalitions not only **amplify collective voice and resilience** but also reflect a broader recognition that different forms of exclusion are interconnected and rooted in shared systems of power.

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Crisis as a
Catalyst for Change

The ESG recognized that this is a moment of both **serious challenge and rare opportunity** for the peacebuilding field. Structural pressures are forcing the field to rethink outdated approaches, adapt, and innovate. Participants noted that civil society and local peacebuilders, especially those from marginalized communities, are meeting these challenges with creativity, resilience, and strong local leadership. Rather than retreating in the face of adversity, many are experimenting with new models that center inclusion, shift power, and build trust from the ground up. The study group also observed that as the traditional, Western-led peacebuilding structures lose influence, space is opening for locally led approaches to take root, many of which draw on long-standing community knowledge and practices that have often been overlooked or underfunded.

While the field faces clear gaps in intersectional data and risks losing valuable open-source resources due to shifting funding priorities, ESG participants emphasized that the field is not starting from scratch. A substantial body of knowledge — drawn from lived experience, practice-based learning, and existing research — already exists about what inclusive and effective peacebuilding requires. The greater challenge lies in the lack of political will and institutional readiness to act on this knowledge. **Turning evidence into action** means confronting entrenched interests, shifting decision-making structures, and redistributing power. Participants stressed that this moment demands more than symbolic gestures — it calls for **structural reforms** that embed inclusion and accessibility at the heart of the peacebuilding sector.

Recommendations

This section presents an overview of the primary recommendations for each stakeholder group, organized by Near-Term Priorities and Long-Term Transformations. These recommendations are designed to embed inclusion, equity, and accessibility at the core of peacebuilding strategies, structures, and systems.

	Near-Term Priorities	*Long-Term Transformation*
Philanthropic Donors	• Reform funding models to share power, centercare, and strengthen local leadership	• Transform funding architecture to advanceequity and local leadership and ownership
Philanthropic and Bilateral Donors	• Expand early warning and rapid responsefunding and capabilities • Strengthen community-led research anddiverse knowledge production	• Transform giving paradigms from charity toreparative justice • Acknowledge colonial and exploitative origins of philanthropy and assistance andaccept responsibility • Center local peacebuilders and solidaritynetworks
Policymakers	• Mainstream context-and risk-aware inclusionacross the full spectrum of peacebuilding • Develop strategic narrative capacities andstrategies that promote the value of inclusivepeacebuilding	• Decolonize conceptions of legitimacy,expertise, and success • Foster coordination among a diverse andevolving donor landscape • Redefine the role of donor country andmultilateral organization policymakers fromdirecting to enabling • Build and sustain intersectional coalitions forstructural change
Peacebuilding Intermediaries	• Strengthen early warning and protectionsystems • Build organization-wide accountability forinclusion and accessibility • Build field-widecapacity and accountabilityto mainstream inclusion • Document and share innovations fromrepressive contexts • Strengthen narrative capacity to defendinclusive peacebuilding	• Embrace radical humility and unlearn "helper" mentalities • Advance internal organizational transformation toward inclusion • Restructure power and governance systems toembed inclusive leadership • Redefine expertise and transform knowledge systems • Build strategic communications infrastructureto advance inclusive peacebuilding

Recommendations
Overview

To drive systemic reform across the field, the ESG developed targeted recommendations for four key stakeholder groups: **philanthropic donors, bilateral donors, policymakers, and peacebuilding intermediaries**.

Donors are called to reimagine funding models by shifting resources and decision-making power to communities most affected by conflict, particularly historically marginalized groups. This requires moving beyond project-based models to provide flexible, multi-year core support that

1. *values and trusts local judgment and expertise,*

2. *fosters equitable and mutually accountable partnerships that explicitly address power imbalances,*

3. *resources wellness and protection systems designed by and for local actors,*

4. *funds locally led research and knowledge production,* and

5. *invests in leadership pipelines that center marginalized voices.*

Such realignment strengthens legitimacy, increases trust, and ensures that funding strategies reflect on-the-ground realities and solutions rather than external agendas.

Peacebuilding Intermediaries

are international non-governmental organizations, think tanks, and other intermediary organizations are challenged to reform their internal structures, norms, and external practices to build more inclusive systems. This includes:

1. *embedding intersectional approaches across operations, programming, and governance,*

2. *prioritizing the protection of frontline and marginalized peacebuilders,*

3. *expanding definitions of "expertise" to elevate lived experience, traditional knowledge, and local insight,*

4. *shifting from extractive to authentic power-sharing partnerships with local actors,* and

5. *leveraging institutional platforms to amplify underrepresented voices and challenge exclusionary norms and practices.*

Policymakers should foster enabling conditions by embedding inclusion across the full spectrum of decision-making. This involves:

1. *ensuring that local actors, particularly those representing intraregional marginalized communities, are central to funding decisions, strategic and operational planning, peace process design and implementation, policy development, and knowledge production, connecting peacebuilding with broader social movements and cultural strategies that bring expertise in grassroots organizing, resistance, and coalition-building,*

2. *leveraging convening power to align strategies with inclusion goals by amplifying context-sensitive, locally led and owned peacebuilding efforts that draw on authentic indigenous knowledge systems and community-driven solutions,* and

3. *decentering themselves and elevating local insights, policymakers can create enabling conditions for more resilient and inclusive peace processes.*

These recommendations lay the groundwork for coordinated transformation across the peacebuilding field by calling for a deep challenge to and restructuring of traditional dynamics, narratives, and norms. This moment of disruption offers a rare opportunity to move beyond symbolic inclusion toward **genuine structural transformation**. What is needed now is **collective will, sustained commitment, and bold collaboration** to turn this vision into reality.

The following section provides the full set of detailed recommendations, offering deeper context and specific actions that philanthropic donors, bilateral donors, policymakers, and peacebuilding intermediaries can take to advance inclusion, equity, and accessibility.

Philanthropic Donors

Near-Term Priorities

1 **Reform Funding Models to Share Power, Center Care, and Strengthen Local Ownership**

— Provide flexible, core support

To shift power, fund differently: offer flexible, generous, and long-term support groundedin trust. Set explicit targets for multi-year, unrestricted funding to local and proximateorganizations. This approach enables these organizations to lead with autonomy, planbeyond short grant cycles, and remain resilient in today's volatile and uncertain funding environment. Invest directly in a diverse ecosystem of local and proximate peacebuildingactors, such as mutual aid networks, Indigenous organizations, faith-based groups, andgrassroots movements, recognizing that no single model or voice can represent thecomplexity of local contexts.

— Embed reflective practice to challenge assumptions and power dynamics

Engage in ongoing self-reflection to critically examine the dominant worldviews, values,and institutional frameworks that shape funding priorities and relationships. This includes reckoning with historical and present-day power imbalances, interrogating saviorism and technocratic biases, and embracing humility as a core funding posture. Invest in sustainedinternal learning processes to unlearn paternalistic or neo-colonial norms and habits andmove toward trust-based and solidarity-driven partnerships.

— Invest in wellness and care services for peacebuilders

Invest in mental health services, rest, and culturally grounded wellness practices (such as Indigenous healing) as essential — not peripheral — components of peacebuilding. These resources reduce burnout, mitigate trauma, and strengthen long-term leadership capacity, especially for peacebuilders working under chronic stress or threat. Such practices can also help heal different forms of trauma, including intergenerational trauma, which is a key driver of conflict.

— Shift decision-making power

Pilot and scale participatory grantmaking and equity-centered funding models that allow affected communities to determine priorities and shape funding decisions. This realignment of power not only fosters legitimacy and trust but also ensures that funding strategies reflect lived realities and context-specific needs.

— Reduce structural barriers to access

Adapt due diligence, eligibility, language, and compliance requirements, often modeled on Global North standards, to better include grassroots, informal, and historically underfunded actors. This is essential to level the playing field and avoid reinforcing inequities.

— Co-design capacity-strengthening approaches

Develop financial, operational, and governance capacity-strengthening programs in collaboration with local partners. By grounding capacity-strengthening approaches in mutual learning rather than one-way technical assistance, donors can avoid imposing inappropriate models and instead strengthen local systems sustainably.

Long-Term Transformation

1 **Transform Funding Architecture to Advance Equity and Local Leadership**

— Establish transformational partnerships based on equity and shared power

Shift from transactional grantmaking to long-term, trust-based partnerships rooted in equity, transparency, and mutual accountability. These partnerships must go beyond simply funding activities to investing in relationships that are centered on listening, co-creation, and shared decision-making. Donors must hold themselves accountable not just to their own commitments, but to the goals and expectations of the communities and movements they aim to support. Transforming how donors fundamentally engage with local actors is necessary to redistribute power and cultivate the conditions for sustainable, locally led, and owned peacebuilding.

— **Redefine the role of intermediaries to support local leadership**

Many current funding systems rely on large, international intermediaries whose practices can unintentionally reproduce inequality by marginalizing grassroots and proximate actors. Donors should reform intermediary roles to ensure they facilitate rather than gatekeep access to resources. This includes requiring regular feedback mechanisms from local partners, establishing transparent power-sharing agreements, and protecting the autonomy of local actors. Doing so strengthens accountability, elevates diverse leadership, and improves funding flows to those closest to the work.

— **Resource coalitions led by marginalized groups**

Directly fund and support alliances and networks that are led by communities traditionally excluded from peace processes. These groups often develop highly context-specific and innovative strategies but lack the institutional access or capital to scale their impact. Long-term support strengthens their autonomy, legitimacy, and ability to shape the field.

— **Reform internal cultures and redefine success beyond Western paradigms**

Transformational funding cannot occur without reimagining internal ways of working. Philanthropic institutions must question how organizational culture — including metrics of success, timelines, and leadership models — are rooted in Global North, often white-dominant, patriarchal, and neo-colonial frameworks. Reform should begin with acknowledging these origins, listening to critiques from grantees and partners, and developing alternative norms rooted in care, accountability, and community-defined outcomes. Evaluation systems must also shift from rigid log frames to more emergent, narrative, and context-sensitive models of impact that align with the values and lived experiences of local communities.

Philanthropic and Bilateral Donors

Near-Term Priorities

1 **Expand Protection for Peacebuilders, and Invest in Early Warning and Rapid Response**

— Support peacebuilders under threat

Develop and fund rapid-response mechanisms that provide timely legal defense, media support, emergency relocation, and financial assistance to peacebuilders facing acute threats. These systems must be grounded in local knowledge and networks to be both effective and safe.

— Invest in community-led early warning systems

Fund local infrastructure for early warning that draws on community insight to anticipate emerging threats and de-escalate conflict before violence occurs. These systems contribute to long-term resilience by reinforcing local agency and enabling preventative, not just reactive, action.

2 **Strengthen Community-Led Research and Knowledge Production**

— Reimagine monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

Transition from compliance-driven, extractive M&E practices toward inclusive,participatory learning frameworks. Support community-defined indicators of success,center qualitative insightsand storytelling, and reduce administrative burdens that pulltime and energy away from frontline peacebuilding. Learning should serve those closestto the work and strengthen adaptive, reflective practice.

— Shift norms around what counts as knowledge

Knowledge production is a political act and a site of power. Donors must move beyond narrow, technocratic definitions of evidence and intentionally resource research and storytelling that challenge dominant peacebuilding narratives. This includes uplifting diverse and underrepresented ways of knowing, including Indigenous, feminist, queer, and youth perspectives, and recognizing lived experience, oral tradition, and collective memory as valid and valuable forms of knowledge. This shift requires not only funding new research but also alternative formats and methodologies. Transforming whose knowledge is valued and how it is produced helps redistribute power and lays the groundwork for more just, inclusive, and contextually grounded practice.

— Fund community and locally-owned research

Invest in research that is shaped and led by local actors, using participatory, decolonial, and feminist methodologies. Community-driven research generates contextually grounded insights, builds local ownership over both process and outputs, and ensures that peacebuilding strategies reflect lived realities rather than external assumptions and paradigms.

— Create inclusive and accessible knowledge platforms

Support the development of secure, multilingual platforms for research and knowledge exchange that use diverse, accessible formats such as oral histories, visual media, and plain-language reports. These platforms must protect sensitive information, especially in repressive environments, while democratizing access across geographies, literacy levels, and abilities.

Long-Term Transformation

1 **Acknowledge Colonial and Exploitative Origins of Philanthropy and Development Assistance and Accept Responsibility**

— Acknowledge Colonial and Exploitative Origins of Philanthropy and Development Assistance and Accept Responsibility

Donors must undertake honest historical reckoning of how philanthropy and development assistance emerged from colonial extraction, structural violence, and global inequality. This requires acknowledging and accepting responsibility for historical and ongoing harm and examining their role in creating and maintaining the very conditions that drive the conflict, displacement, and marginalization they seek to address.

2 **Transform Giving Paradigms from Charity to Reparative Justice**

— Shift worldview from charity toreparative justice

Donors must fundamentally shift their conceptual framework from charitable benevolence toward approaches grounded in reparative justice. This involves examining paternalistic beliefs that position donors as benefactors helping recipients and, instead, recognizing that funding can represent the redistribution of resources and power to communities that have been systematically excluded from global wealth and decision-making. This transformation involves replacing inherent power imbalances with relationships rooted in mutual accountability, repair, and the recognition that affected communities possess the knowledge, agency, and legitimacy to determine their own paths toward justice and peace.

3 **Center Local Peacebuilders and Solidarity Networks**

— Invest in intersectional leadership development over the long term

Support robust leadership pipelines for historically excluded groups by resourcing mentorship, sponsorship, and advancement initiatives. These investments should be designed to identify, nurture, and sustain intersectional leaders over time, not just through individual capacity-building but also through systemic change in who is seen, heard, and trusted as a leader. Strong, inclusive leadership ecosystems are essential for the long-term resilience of peacebuilding movements. Invest in more communication and pipelines between local actors and international philanthropic organizations to build trust and partnership.

— Promote solidarity and collaboration between affected communities

Invest in knowledge-sharing and coalition-building among Indigenous, community-based, and proximate peacebuilders globally, moving beyond models that privilege certain actors or regions. These horizontal collaborations should connect affected communities directly, bypassing centralized gatekeepers like United Nations agencies or international intermediaries, to share contextually grounded, culturally resonant approaches to conflict resolution and community healing. By facilitating direct exchanges between communities with lived experience of conflict, regardless of geography, donors can support authentic and more autonomous networks that challenge dominant Western-centric peacebuilding norms and frameworks and contribute to a more pluralistic and locally owned peacebuilding ecosystem.

Policymakers

Near-Term Priorities

1 **Mainstream Context-and Risk-Aware Inclusion Across the Full Spectrum ofPeacebuilding**

— Mainstream inclusion across all stages and formats of peace processes

Policymakers should ensure that inclusion is embedded across all peacebuilding efforts, not just formal peace agreements, but also interim arrangements, local or partial deals, informal dialogues, and community-level reconciliation. As peace processes become more fragmented and localized, inclusive approaches must extend beyond elite negotiations. These less formal efforts often lack attention and clear inclusion frameworks. Targeted policy guidance, resources, and technical support are needed to close this gap and ensure peacebuilding reflects the needs of marginalized communities.

— Adapt inclusion strategies to political constraints and varying risk contexts

In fragile, repressive, or highly polarized contexts, promoting inclusion requires nuanced approaches that account for different types of marginalization and risk. For communities facing severe persecution, such as LGBTQI+ individuals in contexts where their identities are criminalized, embedding inclusion and equity objectives within less politically sensitive sectors like education, health, or economic development may provide safer pathways for support while protecting individual safety. Support may also include discrete coalition-building, capacity development, or advocacy through allied organizations, rather than visible programming that could expose vulnerable individuals to violence or persecution. However, for marginalized groups whose exclusion from decision-making is itself a driver of conflict, such as Indigenous communities (e.g., over land or resource rights) or ethnic minorities systematically denied political participation, the strategy must directly elevate their voices in political processes, peace negotiations, and resource allocation. This means addressing power imbalances and structural exclusion, while incorporating protection measures for those who may face backlash for participation.

Long-Term Transformation

1 Decolonize Conceptions of Legitimacy, Expertise, and Success

— Interrogate and transform underlying assumptions

Policymakers must fundamentally interrogate and transform their underlying assumptions about who constitutes a legitimate peacebuilding actor, what forms of knowledge count as expertise, and how success should be defined. This requires moving beyond Western-centric frameworks that privilege formal education, institutional credentials, and technocratic approaches toward recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems, lived experience, spiritual and traditional healing practices, and community-defined outcomes as equally valid measures of expertise and progress. Policymakers should embrace pluralistic worldviews while actively challenging their own cultural biases about conflict causation, resolution processes, and what sustainable peace looks like.

2 Foster Coordination Across a Diverse and Evolving Donor Landscape

— Convene and support inclusive dialogue across traditional and emerging donors

As the peacebuilding ecosystem becomes increasingly multipolar—with rising influence from non-Western bilateral donors and regional organizations—ideological differences, fragmented agendas, and inconsistent standards risk weakening collective impact. Policymakers should use their convening power, diplomatic relationships, and multilateral leadership roles to create regular dialogue and coordination mechanisms among diverse peacebuilding actors, fostering mutual understanding of each others' goals, values, and strategies.

— Facilitate inter-ministerial collaboration and whole-of-government approaches

Given declining foreign aid funding globally, effective peacebuilding requires moving beyond traditional foreign affairs and defense silos. Policymakers should institutionalize collaboration across ministries of health, education, justice, and social welfare to address root causes of conflict through integrated policy approaches. Establish funded, formal inter-agency mechanisms with clear mandates to coordinate peace and social justice initiatives across government portfolios.

— Advance shared frameworks for inclusive peacebuilding cooperation

Champion shared principles and frameworks, grounded in inclusion, accessibility, and equity, that can serve as common baselines for coordination across diverse donor communities. Integrate inclusive peacebuilding standards into foreign assistance strategies, bilateral cooperation agreements, and multilateral funding frameworks.

3 **Redefine the Role of Global North Policymakers from Directing to Enabling**

— Shift from directive to enabling roles in peacebuilding partnerships

Rather than setting the agenda or leading implementation, policymakers from donor countries and multilateral organizations should fundamentally reposition themselves as strategic allies. This requires transferring decision-making authority from those with institutional power to those with intimate, authentic knowledge of conflict contexts, such as community leaders, survivors, Indigenous communities, and local peacebuilders. Policymakers should use their political capital, diplomatic recognition, and convening power to amplify and protect locally led and owned efforts, recognizing that their primary value lies not in their expertise about conflict resolution but in creating enabling conditions for those with authentic local knowledge and lived experience. In politically repressive or contested contexts, external actors can help safeguard civic space and marginalized leaders by utilizing tailored strategies such as engaging behind the scenes, raising international attention, or facilitating diplomatic engagement to help prevent reprisals and expand space for local agency without imposing external frameworks or priorities.

4 **Build and Sustain Intersectional Coalitions for Structural Change**

— Support cross-sector, cross-movement coalitions that link peacebuilding with justiceand equity movements

Policymakers should promote and resource coalitions that unite peacebuilding actors with movements for racial justice, disability rights, gender equity, Indigenous sovereignty, LGBTQI+ rights, and climate justice. These alliances foster deeper structural change and bring holistic, intersectional approaches to peacebuilding policy.

5 **Recommit to Data Transparency and Inclusive Evidence Systems**

— Rebuild peacebuilding data systems and open data infrastructure

Declining investment in global data transparency undermines evidence-basedpeacebuilding. Allocate funding to rebuild and protect systems that track peacebuildingfinancing, conflict trends, and civic-space conditions. Ensure public access to enableaccountability, strategic coordination among donors, and informed policy debates.

— Support participatory research and community-led evaluation

Invest in methodologies that enable conflict-affected communities to co-design research, contribute to data collection, and interpret findings. This approach improves data quality, enhances program relevance, and addresses power imbalances in peacebuilding knowledge production.

— Challenge Western-centric notions of evidence and expertise

Recognize that what counts as "evidence" is often defined by Western academic and policy institutions. Policymakers should expand the definition of credible knowledge to include oral histories, storytelling, traditional conflict resolution practices, and community-based systems of knowledge. Doing so affirms the legitimacy of diverse epistemologies and promotes pluralism in peacebuilding strategy and evaluation.

Peacebuilding Intermediaries

Near-Term Priorities

(1) Improve Early Warning and Protection Systems

— Integrate identity-based risks into conflictmonitoring

Expand early warning systems to track and respond to threats targeting marginalized groups, including women, LGBTQI+ individuals, ethnic and religious minorities, and Indigenous peoples. These indicators often serve as early signs of broader escalation and structural violence. Centering identity-based threats improves predictive accuracy, reinforces local trust in warning systems, and allows for more timely, preventative action.

— Support self-protection strategies for at-risk peacebuilders

Equip peacebuilders, especially those from marginalized communities, with resources to design and implement personalized safety strategies. This includes tools for digital security, access to mutual aid networks, legal support, and emergency evacuation or shelter plans. Empowering peacebuilders to assess their own risk and act autonomously is essential to sustaining civic leadership in increasingly repressive and polarized contexts.

— Establish coordinated rapid-response networks

Collaborate across organizations and sectors to develop standing protocols for rapid collective response to attacks, including media engagement, legal defense, advocacy, and physical protection. By reducing isolation and enabling faster mobilization, these networks build shared resilience and demonstrate solidarity in action.

2 **Build Organization-Wide Accountability for Inclusion and Accessibility**

— **Audit and reform structural barriers**

Undertake regular internal reviews of policies and practices across recruitment, promotions, mentorship, and leadership development to identify barriers to equity and inclusion. Use the findings to implement targeted structural reforms, such as redefining job qualifications, creating formalized career pathways, and building inclusive leadership pipelines. Consider making these audits public as a model of transparency and to encourage others to take similar steps.

— **Ensure comprehensive accessibility**

Conduct holistic accessibility audits across physical environments, digital platforms, communication formats, and programming to ensure alignment with universal design and linguistic inclusivity standards. Accessibility must be proactively built into all aspects of operations, not treated as an afterthought, so that people with disabilities, linguistic minorities, and other marginalized groups can meaningfully participate in peacebuilding efforts.

— **Implement inclusive tracking and transparency systems to monitor progress**

Establish mechanisms to collect, analyze, and report disaggregated data on staff demographics, leadership representation, decision-making power, and partner feedback. Use this data to benchmark progress, surface disparities, and hold leadership accountable to inclusion goals. Transparent reporting on who holds power, and how it is shared, can drive continuous improvement and create organizational cultures of learning and equity.

3 **Mainstream Intersectionality and Inclusion across Peacebuilding Practice**

— **Build field-wide capacity to mainstream inclusion across programming**

As funding for dedicated inclusion initiatives declines, inclusion must be embedded as a foundational element of peacebuilding programs, not treated as an add-on. This includes integrating intersectional analysis and inclusive approaches across the entire program lifecycle, from problem identification and strategy design to implementation, evaluation, and learning. Building baseline capacity across the field to apply inclusive practices systemically, rather than in siloed initiatives, strengthens program effectiveness, community trust, and long-term relevance.

— **Institutionalize adaptive programming grounded in community feedback**

Ensure programs can evolve in response to rapidly shifting political, social, and security dynamics by embedding real-time feedback loops, reflection spaces, and learning mechanisms. Adaptive approaches that are responsive to community needs allow inclusion efforts to remain relevant, avoid harm, and seize emerging opportunities, while fostering a culture of co-creation and responsiveness.

— **Develop and applycommunity-centered inclusion metrics**

Ensure programs can evolve in response to rapidly shifting political, social, and security dynamics by embedding Move beyond simplistic participation counts to evaluate the depth and quality of engagement by marginalized groups. Co-create indicators with communities to assess leadership continuity, power shifts, and the extent to which programs address underlying exclusion. Community-centered evaluation frameworks improve accountability and provide a clearer picture of systemic impact from the perspective of those most affected.

— Unlearn "saviorism" and control narratives in program delivery

Practitioners must examine internalized beliefs about who drives change, who deserves trust, and what success looks like. Moving away from extractive or prescriptive models requires humility and a redefinition of one's role as a facilitator rather than a fixer.

4 Document and Share Innovations from Repressive Contexts

— Capture creative strategies under constraint

Systematically gather and share approaches used by peacebuilders and social movement leaders working in high-risk or politically constrained settings, such as underground networks, cultural strategies, and creative resistance methods. When sharing this knowledge, take care to protect identities and sensitive operational details.

— Bridge peacebuilding and social justice movements

Highlight how tactics from broader social movements, such as feminist, disability justice, and Indigenous sovereignty movements, offer powerful models for inclusive and transformative peacebuilding. These movements bring hard-earned lessons in sustaining advocacy, building coalitions across difference, and maintaining hope under repressive conditions. Fostering mutual learning between peacebuilding actors and social justice organizers challenges entrenched silos and cultivates collective resilience. Coordinated efforts around advocacy, cultural strategies, and strategic communications can help shift dominant narratives, build public support, and advance more inclusive approaches to peace. Cross-movement solidarity also expands the knowledge base of what works in difficult environments, enabling adaptive, context-specific strategies grounded in lived experience.

5 Strengthen Narrative Capacity to Defend Inclusive Peacebuilding

— Deploy targeted messaging strategies to build public and political support

In the face of growing skepticism, backlash, and policy deprioritization, make the case for inclusive peacebuilding through storytelling, plain language, and values that resonate broadly. Messages should connect emotionally while also clarifying tangible impact through evidence to communicate the value and effectiveness of inclusive peacebuilding. Narratives should make visible how exclusion drives violence and how justice, belonging, and equity are essential for sustainable peace.

— Establish rapid-response communications protocols

Create adaptive protocols for responding to narrative attacks such as smear campaigns, misinformation, or scapegoating of peacebuilders. These protocols should enable quick coordination among key partners, provide clear messaging guidance, and equip trusted messengers to respond swiftly in volatile media environments.

Long-Term Transformation

1 **Embrace Radical Humility and
Unlearn "Helper" Mentalities**

— Undergo internal transformation to become genuine learners and allies

Intermediary organizations must undergo internal transformation to shift from seeing themselves as problem-solvers and capacity-builders to becoming genuine learners and allies. This requires confronting and dismantling saviorism, paternalistic assumptions about local capacity, and beliefs that external actors bring superior knowledge or solutions. Organizations should cultivate institutional cultures rooted in radical humility, acknowledging that their role is to support, amplify, and follow rather than lead or direct. This worldview shift involves fundamentally redefining organizational purpose from "helping communities" to "being in solidarity with movements" and recognizing that meaningful change comes from within communities, not from outside intervention.

2 **Advance Internal Organizational
Transformation Toward Inclusion**

— Embed structural inclusion at all levels

Move beyond one-off diversity initiatives to institutionalize inclusion across all dimensions of organizational functioning, including leadership pipelines, compensation structures, governance processes, and accountability systems. This transformation requires a systemic approach that redistributes power internally and positions inclusion not as a value-add, but as a prerequisite for legitimacy, relevance, and effectiveness in peacebuilding.

— Foster reflective, anti-racist, and intergenerational organizational cultures

Create space within institutions for continuous dialogue, learning, and self-assessment that explicitly addresses racism, exclusion, and privilege. This includes supporting intergenerational collaboration and mentorship to challenge hierarchies, deepen collective insight, and sustain organizational memory and evolution. A culture of learning is essential to adapt to new challenges while holding inclusion as a non-negotiable principle. Practitioners must also reflect on how their own language, branding, and frameworks can unintentionally reinforce dominant power dynamics.

3 **Redefine Expertise and Transform Knowledge Systems**

— Recognize, value, and learn from diverse forms of knowledge

Acknowledge that the most critical expertise for peacebuilding resides within the lived experiences and knowledge systems of local peacebuilders and affected communities. This requires moving beyond superficial consultation to patient listening, creating sustained spaces where community members, survivors, traditional healers, Indigenous knowledge keepers, and local practitioners can share their understanding on their own terms. Value these knowledge systems, including lived experience, traditional and Indigenous wisdom, cultural and spiritual frameworks, oral histories, and community-rooted practices, as equally valid and often more relevant than academic credentials or technical training. Learn from these expertise sources by integrating them meaningfully into hiring decisions, research methodologies, program design, and decision-making processes at all organizational levels. This means not just extracting insights from communities but allowing their ways of knowing to fundamentally reshape how peacebuilding work is conceived, implemented, and evaluated.

— Invest in community-based knowledge leadership

Fund and elevate knowledge producers from affected communities and historically marginalized groups such as Indigenous and feminist scholars, faith leaders, and youth advocates, as strategists, not just storytellers. Position them to set agendas, lead research, and shape field-wide discourse.

— Transform frameworks, language, and evaluation systems

Revise knowledge tools, like theories of change, logframes, and outcome metrics, to align with community-defined goals. Replace extractive or rigid models with participatory, context-rooted approaches to reshape what is measured, valued, and prioritized in peacebuilding.

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4 Restructure Power and Governance Systems to Embed Inclusive Leadership

— Embed the leadership of historically excluded groups across all areas ofpeacebuilding

Ensure that Indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+ individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized actors hold real decision-making power in strategy, operations, and resource allocation. Their leadership should be structurally embedded, from advisory boards to executive teams, and backed by accountability mechanisms.

— Build durable systems to mainstream inclusion and ensure internal accountability

Long-term transformation depends on equipping institutions across the field with the systems, tools, and standards to make inclusion sustainable. This includes regular training, co-developed inclusion benchmarks tied to program quality, and mechanisms to track progress and course-correct. Mainstreaming inclusion also requires reckoning with internal power dynamics within local communities and institutions, such as gatekeeping by local elites, patriarchal norms, or intra-community discrimination, that can perpetuate exclusion within locally led efforts.

— Institutionalize inclusive governance and consent-based approaches

Establish and uphold governance models that reflect principles of transparency, collective agency, and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). These approaches are especially critical when engaging Indigenous, rural, or displaced communities, and should be embedded throughout the full program lifecycle. Inclusive governance means that communities most affected by conflict are not merely consulted but hold real power to shape agendas, strategies, and outcomes.

5 Build Strategic Communications Infrastructure to Advance Inclusive Peacebuilding

— Invest in sustained narrative capacity

Treat narrative strategy as a foundational pillar of inclusive peacebuilding, not public relations. Invest in systems for message testing, storytelling, strategic framing, and creative content that make the case for inclusive peace.

— Support grassroots communicators and trusted messengers

Invest in voices rooted in their communities—artists, organizers, journalists, spiritual leaders—who can bridge divides, translate values, and build solidarity across differences. These communicators can shape how inclusive peace is understood within their own communities and beyond.

— Establish rapid-response mechanisms to defend inclusive values

Equip the field and prepare communications infrastructure to counter backlash, polarization, and disinformation.

Peace Connect
Addendum

The recommendations from the Expert Study Group are meant to be **practical and implementable**. Before publication, the co-chairs were fortunate to share these recommendations during a global convening of peacebuilders at *Peace Connect in Nairobi*.

Participants in the session believe the recommendations **resonate** and would **improve the field's effectiveness** if applied. Fundamentally, they agreed that **political will** and a **genuine desire to change how the sector operates** has been a missing ingredient — without it, the field will remain hampered by its **white-western legacy** that leaves many behind as "beneficiaries" or patients to be treated. Peacebuilders made additional suggestions for stakeholders, which we have included below.

As with the ESG, we are **deeply grateful** to Peace Connect participants who shared their thoughts at the session and in follow-up conversations during the convening.

Philanthropic and Bilateral Donors

- One way interventions appear has bureaucracy, however, when donors engage ethically and responsibly, they enable organizations to conduct internal assessments that are co-create with local actors before moving to program implementation.

- Donors need to be more intentional about not creating or reinforcing competition among organizations and they should be mindful how their involvement may inadvertently cause societal harm.

- Donors need to be in better habit of co-creating projects with local actors and move away from an over-reliance on logframes that might move implementers away from designing and implementing more effective programs.

- It's also important for donors to prioritize their own improvement — they should set aside time and energy to continue to grow in order to be better at what they're seeking to accomplish.

Policymakers

- Leverage local knowledge and ensure they're not acting in a vacuum or in ways that might further minimize local actors.

- Ensure that interventions don't exclude marginalized groups — by accident or intentionally. For example, if an intervention requires cell phones to participate, it likely means a significant portion of the population will be unable to benefit or particapte.

- As civic space is shrinking across the globe, become more intentional about creating (and expanding) an enabling environment that allows local actors to flourish.

- When policies are ineffective, proactively seek to change them—or at the very least commit to regular review of policies to ensure they are as effective as intended.

- Expand internal resources that enables policymakers to support peacebuilding initiatives without external donor support. Additionally, encourage national governments to take over projects after initial funding from outside donors.

Peacebuilding Intermediaries

- Intermediary organizations can help catalyze action as they have access to both local-level actors, donors, and policymakers. To best fulfill their role, they should let local and national organizations create their own narratives rather than usurp their role or their voice.

- Reorganize their board so that local partners can become members and join the ranks of those providing organizational oversight.

- Ensure that local actors are in the driver's seat, especially in the creation of protection programs from human rights defenders.

Conclusion

Amid a myriad of challenges and changes facing the current peacebuilding field, there is an unprecedented opportunity to reshape longstanding dynamics and institutional structures. This report underscores the importance of fully embracing justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as the pillars of peacebuilding. Since injustice and exclusion are at the root of conflict, diversity and inclusion must be understood as essential to legitimizing peace processes and building lasting peace. Additionally, it is imperative for practitioners to question existing norms and paradigms.

The recommendations put forth by the expert study group present a path forward, one that calls for a profound shift in systems to yield long-term transformation. Peacebuilding donors, policymakers, and practitioners must address the power hierarchies, values, and assumptions that have shaped both organizational cultures and formal structures. The voices of those most affected by conflict must be centered, definitions of expertise must be broadened, and coalitions must be strengthened to truly catalyze systemic transformation across the field.