



# Finance Local Peacebuilding?

> Why and how

A paper submitted by Peace Direct to DPPA/PBSO for the High-Level Meeting on Financing for Peacebuilding during the 76th session of the General Assembly.

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## Introduction

Peacebuilders working on local level peace initiatives make striking, sustainable contributions both to reducing violence in the short term and to strengthening the capacity of their societies to minimize and manage conflicts in the longer term. Peace Direct's (PD) nearly 20 years of experience demonstrates that relatively small, strategic financing that is delivered directly to local actors has an impact and effectiveness beyond its size and well beyond what is recognized by international actors.

This paper details the methodology developed by PD's Local Action Fund as a model of effective, participatory small grantmaking built on inclusive participation, respectful partnerships, and holistic support.<sup>1</sup> It recommends adoption of such a model by other donor mechanisms because of its value for money sustainability and effectiveness which is grounded in local needs and realities. Local stakeholders that work to build peace bring deep understanding and connectedness that have traction with their local communities. They use relatively low-cost, technically appropriate approaches and employ techniques based on local knowledge that are trusted and accepted by their communities. This combination of trusted, credible actors using homegrown methods is critical for engendering social cohesion and ensuring sustainable peace.

## Background

Peace Direct's Local Action Fund (LAF) is a flexible and innovative funding mechanism that since 2019 has supported frontline peacebuilding efforts in some of the most complex and volatile conflicts worldwide, such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria and Sudan. LAF supports locally-led peacebuilding initiatives with rapid turnaround micro-grants (below \$5,000) and small grants (below \$15,000) to help local actors prevent violence, respond rapidly to community needs, and build resilience. Funding is coupled with training, information sharing, and opportunities for wider collaboration and advocacy, allowing smaller peacebuilding groups to overcome the frequent obstacles they face and to increase their impact. To date, 352 initiatives have been supported so far across seven contexts amounting to more than \$1 million in funds directly sent to local civil society groups.

More than just a grant-making programme, LAF offers multi-dimensional support to local groups (both formal and informal) building peace who operate below the field of vision of most donors and are usually not able to access funding. These actors are often embedded in the communities they seek to serve and for that reason are highly effective working in remote and hard-to-reach areas to strengthen social cohesion within their communities and ensure that community perspectives are included in decision-making at local, national, and international levels.

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1. Peace Direct website: <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/localactionfund/>; <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/publications/whatworks/>; and GPPAC website: <https://gppac.net/resources/youth-and-youth-re-imagining-financing-peacebuilding>

With available funding and accompaniment from local hub organizations (i.e. a well-established local organization), local groups are able to harness peacebuilding at the micro-level to:

- Gain a common understanding of, and then design and address the root causes of violent conflict in their communities
- Build trust through dialogue for conflict resolution and reconciliation
- Employ community, self-protection strategies
- Adopt practices and strategies to deescalate tensions, preempt violence, and/or avoid escalation
- Address issues of socio-economic inequality that are drivers of conflict
- Promote genuine local ownership
- Empower people with the means and space to develop their own solutions to conflict
- Establish grassroots early warning and response systems that link to local powerholders
- Use traditional/indigenous approaches to heal communities in the aftermath of violence
- Raise awareness and establish the underpinning of a culture of peace
- Address human security needs in multiple ways from humanitarian needs to physical security

The types of projects funded have included but are not limited to: peace education and awareness-raising initiatives, nonviolence training, dialogue fora for youth, and intercommunity livelihood training centers for ex-combatants, former child soldiers, and women and girls subjected to sexual violence. These impactful initiatives have averaged about \$3,000 used by local groups over three months to one year. Peace Direct also connects partners with other resources, outside of financial support, by leveraging our network and relationships to help them accomplish their goals.



## Why the urgent need for such funding?

Peace Direct's research and mapping of local peacebuilding capacity in over 20 countries indicates that local civil society peacebuilding capacity represents one of the largest untapped sources of peacebuilding potential.

Yet, the people, communities, and organizations best placed to prevent violence and sustain peace are not receiving the recognition, respect, or resources they deserve from the international community or local authorities. The State of Global Giving reported that of \$4 billion of US foundation funding overseas, only 12% went directly to local organizations and even less to women and youth-led groups.

USAID's new administrator Samantha Powers recently admitted that in 2020, USAID obligated only 5.6% of its budget to local partners and pledged that at least one quarter of USAID funding will go to local partners within the next five years, acknowledging that: "To engage authentically with local partners and to move toward a more locally led development approach is staff-, time-, and resource-intensive – but it is also vital to our long-term success."<sup>2</sup>

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2. Michael Igoe, DEVEX Newsletter, 13 August 2021  
<https://www.devex.com/news/is-samantha-power-taking-on-the-aid-establishment-100481>



For the president of a Provincial Youth Council in eastern DRC, peace is really possible because young people have decided to get involved and design initiatives that offer solutions to problems.



**LOCAL  
ACTION  
FUND**

“After having participated in a Peace Exchange workshop, not only the exchange of experiences but also the sharing of results achieved by different groups that benefited from small grants, I think that anyone who is committed to peace can allow themselves to feel hopeful. While many people wanted to sell a mediocre and violent image of the province of North Kivu or of the youth, today it is the opposite. I have been with the youth of North Kivu who, instead of focusing on violence and armed groups, have thought about the deep aspirations of the population, transforming them into concrete actions, which they have presented to NPCYP, which in turn has given grants, and has allowed the youth to start thinking about the development of their respective areas, with an emphasis on the search for and consolidation of peace in the areas concerned, specifically Masisi, Rutshuru, Nyiragongo and Goma.”

## Key characteristics of impactful local peacebuilding financing

The Local Action Fund model has the potential to usher in a new era of more effective, participatory, flexible, locally-led and owned peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The Fund is designed to tackle problems of power imbalances and lack of autonomy that often hold back local peacebuilding efforts. New mechanisms to consciously shift power to local peacebuilders allows conflict-affected communities to lead their own processes for change and establishes greater levels of ownership, stability, and sustainability in fragile contexts.

In order to provide flexible and rapid support that has buy-in, trust and acceptance in local communities, such funding must be:

- Flexible. It aims to enable different types of action and does not constrain the types of initiatives or processes which take place. These are never designed or decided by external actors.
- Rapid. It aims to respond to prospective grantees in a matter of days or weeks, not months like many donors.
- Locally owned. When funds are genuinely felt to belong to the community, people are responsible for them in a way they are not with funds perceived to be owned by donors. The LAF aims to truly hand over control and resources to local groups.
- Responsive to local needs. The fund is community focused and enables community groups themselves to define relevant needs and responsive actions.
- Locally accountable. The focus is on local accountability first and foremost. Where external funding tends to push accountability away from local communities and outwards toward donors, the Local Action Fund places the emphasis where it should be: on conflict affected communities themselves. This means that context-specific mechanisms are put in place to ensure that the communities are aware of and can shape.
- Transparent. Transparency in decision-making is a fundamental part of the LAF process.
- Inclusive. It aims to support different groups within communities and cater to different needs, integrating a gender transformative approach whenever possible.
- Sustainable. Because of the focus on voluntary community action and supporting small community-based organizations, the approach is locally grounded and sustainability is considered throughout.

# Operational components of Local Action Fund grant-making

While certain criteria and modalities change with the thematic focus, situational context, and objective of each stream, the basic Local Action Fund approach shares the methodology below which prioritise flexibility, local relevance, efficiency, and collective action. Since 2019, Peace Direct has employed this model to fund 352 initiatives in: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, and starting in 2022 in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

The steps include:

## Conflict assessment and mapping:

The first crucial step is a jointly conducted gender/youth sensitive analysis working closely with local actors. This participatory analysis is done by and with communities and youth to identify key issues that they are facing, map out what is already being done in the communities, by whom and potential solutions. The joint analysis feeds into a mapping of local groups and actors which informs the micro-grants and small grants funding process by giving an overview of current community capacities and the sub-national peacebuilding landscape. The mapping, where relevant, can be presented in an interactive map and displayed publicly where appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

## Identification of hub organizations:

The mapping contributes to the identification of well-established, respected local organizations that act as 'hub organizations' which will convene and support local civil society. They will play the role of conveners/network leaders with capacities to support and strengthen smaller, local groups and manage the administration of grants. Criteria for selection include: thematic focus, e.g. youth- and/or women-led civil society organizations or networks (governance and organization staff/leadership); scope and relevance of activities; geographical reach; organizational values; credibility among peers and NGOs in-country; and existing and potential financial/programmatic capacity to manage a participatory grant-making system. Once selected, hub organizations undergo a due diligence process, a capacity assessment, and receive tailored support to enhance any skills, processes or systems needed to effectively administer and manage the grant-making system.

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3. For more information, see: "[Peace Direct launches solidarity fund to keep hope alive in Afghanistan](#)".

4. Peace Insight's global mapping shares information on peacebuilding in multiple areas of conflict and features 1,800+ peacebuilding organizations around the world. See global mapping at: <https://www.peaceinsight.org/organisations/> and <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/mapping-us-peacebuilding/?location=usa&theme=>



### Co-design workshops:

Hub organizations and Peace Direct conduct a co-design workshop using participatory methods to co-develop joint ownership, agreed priorities and a shared vision on mechanisms for grant-making, including how information about the grants is disseminated, how grant-making decisions are made, and how monitoring and accompaniment will be carried out. The main output of this is a jointly created manual that will guide the hubs throughout the project implementation.

### Mobilization and appreciative inquiry:

The hub organizations facilitate a process of mobilization and appreciative inquiry with selected local communities. Hub organizations consult with these communities to identify needs and brainstorm possible solutions within their local/regional context. The support options (small and micro-grants, connections and lesson sharing, and needs-based capacity strengthening) are discussed and agreed upon. Hub organizations, with community members, define the composition of a transparent, independent selection committee to make final selections.

### Micro-grants and small grants:

Information is disseminated widely in these communities and groups as a call for applications open to formal and informal groups that are engaged in peacebuilding activities. These are groups who would otherwise not be able to access international or national funding, because their lack of a track record, not being registered, or because they are too small. After the selection is made by a committee, a preparatory phase commences during which hub organizations will coach the selected groups to design an inclusive and impactful initiative, and to fulfil any funding requirements (e.g. training on financial reporting).

Micro-grants (\$50 - \$5,000) are disbursed to local initiatives for self-help, crisis response and local peacebuilding opportunities. These are initiatives for which a small injection of funding can enable a catalytic effect and result in significant impact. Grants can go to individuals and informal groups. The programme stresses robust local accountability to ensure that grants go to legitimate and credible individuals and groups and are used for initiatives which benefit communities inclusively.

Small grants (\$5,000 - \$15,000) are given to local organizations for more substantial initiatives. Like the micro-grants, the focus remains on robust local accountability to ensure grant disbursements are monitored and funding goes to initiatives which benefit communities.

While keeping a nonpartisan, community-focused approach, and depending on the conflict drivers in question, hub organizations may put emphasis on funds going to certain under-represented groups or sub-groups who have been marginalized (e.g. women-led or youth-led) according to the needs, making this a very flexible and adaptive tool for more inclusive, gender and conflict sensitive approaches. For example, in some instances hub organizations have focused on grants to women-led groups after noticing a lack of applications from this specific group and a different approach was devised to specifically increase their participation in the programme.

### Accompaniment and support:

Hub organizations provide on-going support and mentoring to local organizations and groups receiving funds. Training and support are provided based on the needs identified by local grant recipients and can include: skill-building in project management, participatory design, report writing, monitoring and evaluation, team building, financial management, social media advocacy, community leadership, communication skills, public speaking, conflict resolution and management, photography, advocacy, campaigning, and sustainability. Spaces are created to enable peer-to-peer learning between these groups where possible.

### Participatory Action Learning:

All local grant recipients are accompanied throughout the design and implementation of their initiatives to help communities lead their own crisis, development and/or conflict transformation responses. Hub organizations work with local grant recipients throughout the process to 'do no harm', use transparent and inclusive approaches, and ensure they have considered factors such as local accountability, sustainability, gender, and conflict sensitivity. The process also supports advocacy for changes in institutional relationships, roles and systems that will improve local ownership and decision-making and strengthen the link between short term response and addressing root causes.

### Exchanges and collaborations:

The hub organizations facilitate local citizen-led initiatives and civil society groups coming together to network, collaborate, and jointly learn. Such exchanges also offer incubator sessions to co-create new projects to be funded, share new models, provide training and seminars, and offer access to peer and expert advice. In this way, the Local Action Fund aims to strengthen the eco-system of local peacebuilding actors in ways that will have wider impact beyond the specifics of the grant funding offered to individual organizations.

### Advocacy and influencing:

Advocacy efforts, conducted by the hub organizations and Peace Direct, enable insights drawn from these local initiatives to inform policy and practice at local, regional, and international levels, bringing local groups that are usually not included to engage directly with policymakers. Tailored to each situation, this may focus on the process and lessons drawn from the LAF as an alternative financing mechanism for locally-led peacebuilding, or could be focused on specific thematic issues as identified by the groups who have been supported through the fund (such as gender issues, youth action, climate, etc.).



## Results & Next steps

The LAF can be adapted to different thematic foci. In Myanmar, Nigeria, and Sudan the fund currently focuses specifically on atrocity prevention, tackling root causes of violence, and supporting rapid response initiatives given the atrocity risk factors in those contexts. As of December 2021, 150 initiatives had been supported in these countries. In Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, and Pakistan the fund has a specific focus on youth-led peacebuilding initiatives (with 202 initiatives supported as of December 2021). Current donors contributing to the LAF include Robert Bosch Stiftung, the Swedish International Development Agency and other large private foundations.

Since late 2021, Peace Direct has been focusing on accompanying hub organizations who have been running the Local Action Fund model to reflect and draw lessons from their experience of the model and assessing its contribution to strengthening local peacebuilding efforts. Our collective aim is to build a stronger evidence base for the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of locally-led peacebuilding, and in turn promote more flexible funding models to support local peacebuilders.

Peace Direct is working with hub organizations to identify adaptations and opportunities to scale up in contexts where this model has been running for two or more years. We are also working with a new hub organization to launch a Local Action Fund in solidarity with Afghan civil society at a time when they are facing a critical political and economic crisis. This Afghan Solidarity Fund, starting in early 2022,<sup>5</sup> will provide essential flexible funding to support civil society organizations to survive this crisis – emphasizing women-led groups – and enable them to continue to engage with communities on peacebuilding and social cohesion activities. Peace Direct is actively seeking financial partners to accompany this programme of work that is expected to roll out for at least three years from January 2022.

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5. For more information, see: ["Peace Direct launches solidarity fund to keep hope alive in Afghanistan"](#).

Zaman Lafiya, a woman's community group in Agatu, Benue State Nigeria, secured a small grant (\$5,000) to address the exclusion of women in peacebuilding processes. Community-level violence stemmed from the contested use of land by the herder community and farmers. Farms in Agatu have allegedly been built on ancient routes of the semi-nomadic Fulani herder community. Farmers accused herdsman of destroying their crops. For some, this is land that was once unclaimed and available for grazing in the herder community. In response to the ensuing violence, Zaman Lafiya planned an intervention by women, particularly, wives of famers and herder women to resolve differences and prevent further violence. Workshops and gatherings were held for wives of herders and farmers to map out strategies.

As a result of these activities, a responsive Early Warning System was established by farmers' wives and female herdswomen through WhatsApp. There were no reported incidents of violence in Agatu since the establishment of the system, in comparison with hundreds of deaths in previous years. Neighbouring villages have suffered from recent herder/farmer violence, yet this has not spread to Agatu. Crucially, women involved in the initiative obtained their husband's consent to be involved in local peace processes, marking a significant cultural shift. Women have been allocated two spaces on the Agatu Peace Council – the first time that women have held such a position. Following a trainer of trainers workshop, women are planning to expand their network to other villages and replicate the Early Warning Early Response system in their own languages.

## Concluding Insights and Recommendations

Local peacebuilders have substantial impact in their communities but need more support to expand and further their efforts. The following recommendations, aimed primarily at international donors, multilaterals, and international NGOs, offer guidance on how to enhance local peacebuilding efforts.

1) Increase the levels of direct, sustained funding to local actors and community groups and initiatives at all stages of the conflict cycle in ways that respect their leadership and autonomy.<sup>6</sup>

- Support local peacebuilders to devise, lead and implement their own initiatives; be adaptable, independent and responsive to local stakeholders.
- Use flexible funding models with longer funding cycles.
- Audit the volume of funding currently applied to local peacebuilding initiatives and increase this to at least 25% of all peacebuilding funds.<sup>7</sup>

2) Engage local peacebuilders directly in decision and grant-making<sup>8</sup> through respectful collaboration as set forth in the UN system-wide Community Engagement Guidelines on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (UNCEG).<sup>9</sup>

- Elevate the voices of local CSOs to higher levels of policy-making arenas including national level and at international and inter-governmental policy spaces.
- Strengthen networks and facilitate opportunities for peacebuilders to connect, collaborate and conduct joint advocacy on issues of local concern.
- Engage in respectful partnerships based on principles of inclusion, participation and equality.
- Respect the primacy of local actors, knowledge, and agency so as to shift agency and decision-making to the most local level possible.

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6. Independent Eminent Persons letter to the Secretary-General, A/74/944\*-S/2020/678\*, 13 July 2020

[https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/2009354e-2\\_1.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/2009354e-2_1.pdf); Annex II, p. 9/12

7. 'Local Peacebuilding: What works and why' <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/publications/whatworks/>, July 2019

8. CSO Statement to the PBC Annual Meeting, Dec 2021

9. UN Community Engagement Guidelines, UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)

[https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/un\\_community-engagement\\_guidelines.august\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/un_community-engagement_guidelines.august_2020.pdf), August 2020

### 3) Change the way donor agencies work to make it easier to collaborate with and support local peacebuilders and for local peacebuilders to access support.

- Design country strategies and programmes to be more inclusive of local voices and reflective of their priorities.
- Develop new partnership models to blend local and international knowledge, capacity and interests to ensure local voices are not drowned out in planning and reporting.
- Simplify grant allocation, lighten the compliance burden by adopting greater risk tolerance, and tailor grant application processes so that local initiatives are welcome.
- Recognize that participatory micro-granting is highly context-specific and labor-intensive and therefore allow budgetary allocations for sufficient administrative support.
- Provide training in conflict-sensitivity and incentivize staff to spend more time with local civil society actors and provide more support to local initiatives.<sup>10</sup>

The potential of local actors to contribute to peacebuilding in their own environments is often overlooked and untapped. Flexible, small-grant initiatives that impart power and agency to local actors can powerfully fill this gap. When these kinds of community-based peace initiatives are supported as a complement to national and international peacebuilding efforts, they are an indispensable ingredient in achieving peace. Peace is only likely to be sustained when local people are fully involved and supported to take a leading role.

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10. Local Peacebuilding: What works and why' <https://www.peacedirect.org/us/publications/whatworks/>, July 2019



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