Strengthening the capacity of local actors in the prevention and management of conflict.

ACCORD

THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

Policy & Practice Brief

K n o w l e d g e   f o r   d u r a b l e   p e a c e

Strengthening local and national infrastructures for peace in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho and South Sudan

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Executive summary

In 2016, ACCORD outlined its 2017–2021 Six-Pillar Strategy, which seeks to contribute to sustainable peace, security and development in Africa by mitigating conflict. One of the critical pillars of the Strategy is Pillar 2, which focuses on strengthening local and national infrastructures for peace. This Policy and Practice Brief aims to reflect on the practical experiences, challenges and lessons of ACCORD in advancing the concept of local and national capacity for peace, in the period 2018 to 2019. The preliminary reflections are drawn from ACCORD's work in four countries, namely, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lesotho and South Sudan.

Background

Peacebuilding interventions seek to transform the drivers, causes and structural conditions that generate violent conflict.[2] Peacebuilding interventions that follow a top-down approach, i.e. that impose a pre-conceived model, have not been effective, as they have failed to recognise the importance of local actors in the peacebuilding process.[3] One of the ways in which peacebuilding can empower local actors is by strengthening local and national infrastructure for peace. This is an approach to peacebuilding that recognises that national level strategies and policies cannot afford to disregard local drivers of insecurity.[4] This means that the emphasis should be placed on community-based peace work, as it is vital to building lasting peace.[5] Therefore, states should increasingly adopt more systematic and institutionalised ways to mitigate conflict and build peace.[6]

Experiences from Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan demonstrate that high-level political deals or agreements do not necessarily deliver long-term peaceful solutions nor build resilient societies. Efforts to bring about stability on the continent are reliant, not only on functional states, but also on resilient local and regional communities that are able to manage and resolve conflict peacefully.[7] This can be achieved by bridging the gap and overcoming the challenges between state and non-state actors, through strengthening their capacity, skills and knowledge to respond effectively to conflict. Furthermore, this can be achieved through enhancing coordination between state and non-state actors for greater inclusion and participation.

According to Cedric de Coning[8], peacebuilding is an instrument through which we attempt to influence complex social systems. Such systems are continuously evolving through self-organising processes and in response to changes in the environment. That is why peacebuilding needs to employ adaptive approaches, i.e. so that peace-building interventions can continuously co-evolve along with the social institutions it is attempting to influence.[9] Infrastructure that is put in place to help ensure peace, will benefit from an Adaptive Peacebuilding approach, as it encourages locally-led, participatory and adaptive approaches to peacebuilding. It underpins the ideas of conflict transformation and stresses the undergirding of politically negotiated settlements at the highest level by peacebuilding efforts at the grassroots level.[10] Furthermore, the infrastructures for peace philosophy prioritises building effective capability and institutions for peacebuilding and the prevention of violence within local communities, national governments, and regional and global structures.[11]

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The international community has invested a significant amount of time and resources in peacebuilding and conflict prevention in Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan - yet their efforts are not bearing enough fruit.[12] *As such,* capturing the complex dynamics between the external and local actors, in order to better understand local peacebuilding in practice, is a challenging task that requires coherence and coordination among all parties. Such an effort would help show the diverse understanding and views that are held and employed by various local actors, and increase the

understanding of how external actors are operating in a complex political sphere cognisant of local infrastructure and the capacity for peace.[13]

It has become apparent to ACCORD that building (where it does not exist) and strengthening (where it does exist) infrastructure for peace is key to achieving sustainable peace

While there are numerous efforts underway to transform the conflict in the four countries, existing capacity and infrastructure do not seem to match the scale and magnitude of the effort required, in light of the challenges that need to be addressed.[14] It has become apparent to ACCORD that building (where it does not exist) and strengthening (where it does exist) infrastructures for peace is key to achieving sustainable peace. This requires local and national actors to play a leading role. In essence, it is about putting in place effective capacities for peacebuilding and conflict prevention that impacts at every level (locally, nationally, regionally and internationally).

This is why ACCORD has decided to focus on infrastructure for peace and an adaptive approach to peacebuilding. ACCORD's definition of infrastructures for peace focuses on the local mechanisms through which the countries confronted by difficult local conflict situations are provided with the space and opportunities for stakeholders to engage with each other, in order for them to seek ways and means to avert an escalation of these situations into full-scale war.[15]

Intervention:

After recognising that there is a gap and a need to strengthen local and national infrastructures for peace, ACCORD is implementing a project themed *Strengthening Local and National Capacities for Mediation and Peacebuilding* in Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan. The project started in May 2018 and ends in August 2019. Why these countries?

ACCORD has a history of working in the DRC, which included:

1. Providing research capacity to the mediation team of late President Ketumile Masire on the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) in terms of contextual analysis of the country.

2. Serving as technical advisors to the facilitation team of the ICD.

3. Convening several briefing sessions with non-state actors from the DRC, with the aim of facilitating their input into the talks and to provide updates.

4. Implementing various training sessions under the Training for Peace programme, and the African Civil-Military Co-ordination Programme.

In Burundi and South Sudan, ACCORD has made direct and indirect contributions towards peace, as indicated below.

Burundi:

1. Conducted strategy design and negotiation preparation training sessions for the three main former rebel groups, which subsequently signed the cease-fire agreement.

2. Facilitated dialogue between representatives of non-state actors and the Burundi Peace Process Facilitator, the late President Nelson Mandela.

3. Built the capacity of non-state actors, government and political actors through peacebuilding training courses.

South Sudan:

1. Worked with South Sudanese stakeholders over the past 12 years, with ACCORD signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the South Sudanese government's Ministry of Peace and CPA Implementation (now reconfigured as the South Sudan Peace Commission).

2. Continued commitment through the development of long-term relationships with key stakeholders, including non-governmental partners, and civil society organisations that represent women, youth, media, trade unions, traditional leaders, business associations and academic institutions.

3. Implemented various training sessions and capacity building workshops under the African Peacebuilding Coordination Programme and the South Sudan Initiative, working at the national, regional and grassroots levels throughout the country to promote peace, reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives.

ACCORD has developed long–term relations with key actors across Africa, but particularly in these four countries, and has a deep understanding and knowledge of the underlying tensions and manifestations of conflict in each country. The project therefore aimed : to strengthen the capacity and skills of state and non-state actors to respond effectively to conflict; and to enhance coordination between state and non-state actors for greater inclusion and participation.[16] The intention was that this would be achieved through providing capacity building training sessions, information gathering and sharing best practices between and among state and non-state actors. In the four countries, ACCORD has been working with civil society (including youth groups and women), government and academia – hereafter referred to as the nodal points.[17]

Project Implementation:

It is important to highlight that each country is unique in terms of its conflict dynamics, but strengthening the capacity and infrastructures for the nodal points could have far-reaching results. The projects', long-term result is an investment in building resilient local and national institutions to prevent, cope with and recover from conflict.

In order to understand the gap at the local and national level for effective conflict prevention and peacebuild, the project conducted a baseline assessment through consultative meetings as follows: in Burundi on 16 August 2018; in the DRC on 13 August 2018; in Lesotho on 28 August; and in South Sudan on 13 and 14 August 2018. The nodal points, in each of the four countries were invited to participate in the consultative meetings, with the meeting aims being to:

1. Assess capacity gaps in conflict management and mediation.
2. Identify key actors in the field of peace and security.
3. Gain a deeper and current understanding of the context, challenges and opportunities.
4. Introduce the ACCORD project to key actors in the field of peace and security.

Some of the key points raised during the consultative meetings are detailed below.

Burundi:

The discussions in Burundi reflected on the Arusha Process. The nodal points indicated that while the Arusha Accords were central to ending the 12 years of the civil war, they have not yet seen the dividends of the peace process. While there are people from outside Burundi and continent, that have committed to solving issues or problems in the country and on the continent, the nodal points felt that these outsiders are contributors to the conflict. The nodal points further raised concerns that there are calls being made to the international community to solve the current problems in Burundi. However, they are not aware of what these problems are and why such a call is being made by external actors. The nodal points pointed out that we are in an era in which people can use technology to communicate more easily and therefore, false reporting must also be considered for how it can further exacerbate already volatile environments. They did emphasize however that it is high time for Africans to take responsibility for what is happening in Africa and to build a sustainable future for generations to come.

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The DRC:

The stakeholders indicated that the National Framework Strategy exists, but it has not been translated into local languages nor been implemented. Non-state actors challenged state actors to designate and delegate the responsibilities set out by the National Framework. Furthermore, non-state actors emphasised that the state needs to improve its communication and dissemination of information to local communities.

The consultation highlighted that there are other dimensions to the conflict that is taking place in the DRC, such as conflict over the access to, and the distribution of, natural resources, conflict over land, access to basic services and access to power. This reinforces the view that the conflict in the country is not just of a political nature.

While the ACCORD project was well received by the nodal points that attended the consultative meetings, it was brought to ACCORD's attention that there is a lack of synergy between the bottom-up and top-down approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the country. The consultations further reflected on the role of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), where there is a tendency to implement projects in the country over a short period of time and then leave. The question of sustainability was an important reflection point during the consultation for ACCORD's project scope and timeframe.

Lesotho:

While there is an existing network of CSOs in Maseru that work across different regions in Lesotho, there is very little coherence and coordination amongst the local CSOs and with the government in Lesotho. The relations between the government and CSOs need to be improved. The lack of coordination has created a competitive space amongst CSOs that promotes a culture of repetitive projects that have very little or no impact and which do not address existing conflicts. The nodal points highlighted the need to facilitate dialogue between local institutions in Lesotho.

South Sudan:

The nodal points indicated that there is an existing thriving network of local CSOs and community-based institutions that focus on community dialogue, mediation, peacebuilding and conflict mitigation. The nodal points suggested that local CSOs and institutions need assistance with resource mobilisation and setting up of organisational structures, in order to respond to the requirements of the international community. Furthermore, there is a need for better coordination between local actors and INGOs.

Post-Assessment Intervention:

The consultation sessions, were an important intervention as it informed the training on Conflict Management and Mediation in Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan as a follow-up phase of the project. The training was prescribed by the project proposal as one of the outcomes, but, more importantly, the baseline assessment reaffirmed the existing gap in terms of actors who are trained in conflict management. As such, the training sessions aimed to contribute towards the national peacebuilding effort by strengthening the pre-existing knowledge and the skill-set on conflict mitigation. To a large extent, the training increased participants' knowledge and skills on conflict mitigation and related aspects. The training methodology used was participatory and interactive, and allowed participants to make contributions based on their own experiences.

The consultative meetings and training played a central role in achieving the following:

- In Lesotho, the nodal points created a platform to strengthen local and national capacity, which would allow local institutions (including government institutions) to communicate with one another regarding information and experience sharing and lessons learnt.

- In South Sudan, the project was well received by local CSOs, academia and government institutions and they subsequently created the Peace & Development Consortium for better collaboration and coordination.

- In Burundi and the DRC, an online group was set up to provide a platform for information sharing and engagement.

The approach of strengthening infrastructure for peace is centred on bringing state and non-state actors together to create space for joint problem-solving, consolidating and maintaining a network of transformative actors

Preliminary Lessons

A notable trend is that the international community usually takes the lead in responding to conflict. The shortfall of this approach is that the responses are reactive, short-term, lack sustainability and local ownership and are unable to feed into local programmes. Therefore, the nodal points require

the necessary skills to better understand the changing context on the ground, in order to formulate an effective response to conflict and to provide training to local communities and institutions in the long-term.

In reflecting on the experiences from Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan, the following points are noted:

- State actors should be the immediate respondents to state emergencies.

- The international community should be guided through existing structures and policy frameworks by the host government.

- The approach of strengthening infrastructures for peace is centred on bringing state and non-state actors together to create space for joint problem-solving, consolidating and maintaining a network of transformative actors.

- Local and national infrastructure for peace promotes a culture of exchanging information and building capacity.

- The state and non-state actors place emphasis on building resilient societies.

The consultation sessions and training sessions provided space for ACCORD to reflect on the project approach and sustainability of the project. In this regard, the following observations can be made:

- Implementing this project has not been easy. This has required the team to continually adapt its project implementation plan to ensure that it is sensitive to the context and responds to the needs/gaps identified.

- While the project may have a defined beginning and end date, as well as budget implications, it is important to emphasise that the issues it seeks to address are long-term and it is the responsibility of the trained nodal points to mainstream a culture of conflict mitigation and building peace.

- While the emphasis is on strengthening local and national infrastructures for peace driven by locals, this is not attainable without a consistent flow of financial support - mostly from INGOs and donor community. Hence, there needs to be better coordination from all actors who are invested in building and sustaining peace.

- Setting up nodal points in each country, providing training sessions/ training of trainers, course material and networks are some ways of ensuring the sustainability of the project beyond the defined project timeframes. It must be emphasised that the point about strengthening the capacity of the nodal points relates to building confidence in local institutions, such that they can take charge of peacebuilding processes and mitigate conflict at the local and national level.

The next step for the project is to:

- Implement in-country training of trainers, with the aim of consolidating the capacity of previously trained stakeholders.

- Launch an Online Portal, so that the nodal points can interact and share information on peace and security.

- Publish a training facilitator's guide, which will be used by the nodal points to deliver training in their communities and workspaces.

In order to ensure sustainability of the project, the nodal points will be given course materials and ACCORD publications to further support their work and the provision of conflict management training to others in their respective communities and organisations.

Conclusion:

The PPB aimed to reflect on ACCORD's practical approach to advancing the concept of local and national infrastructure for peace in Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan. Approaches to peacebuilding continue to evolve through self-organising processes and in response to changes in the environment, hence the re-adaptation to infrastructures for peace. Burundi, the DRC, Lesotho and South Sudan are examples of countries that are experiencing some form of instability or conflict where the top-down negotiated political agreements did not translate into peace at the local level, and where the existing infrastructure for peace had to be strengthened (and regularly enhanced through capacity building and setting up networks).

The key concluding points were:

- Better coordination between state and non-state actors is necessary, so as to ensure stability in each country.

- The process of strengthening local and national infrastructure for peace has to be led locally and must be participatory, in order for it to achieve long-term peace and stability.

- For ACCORD, infrastructure for peace is about strengthening the capacity and enhancing coordination between local and national institutions, in order to respond better to conflict.

- When implementing this project, it was important for ACCORD to not impose preconceived ideas; hence it was important to undertake consultative meetings to better understand the context of each country, the gaps and the entry points.

- An important lesson learnt from the consultative meetings was that each country is unique and that the drivers of conflict are different in each.

- Across the four countries, local institutions that are committed to mitigating conflict exist, but these need better coordination in order for them to be effective in terms of conflict prevention and mitigation.

- Strengthened and capable local and national infrastructure for peace is the future for a peaceful and stable Africa.

Endnotes:

1   The authors would like to acknowledge Cedric de Coning and Senzo Ngubane from ACCORD for their inputs, comments and reviews of the initial draft of this PPB.

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