

## HYBRID PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES IN AFRICA: HARNESSING COMPLEMENTARY PARALLELS

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### LEARNING FROM LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

*“All conflict situations are unique but have common cross-cutting factors relating to their emergence, dynamics, and end.”*

### FAST FACTS

- Combining indigenous political, judicial, and arbitration mechanisms with participatory and inclusive counterparts of modern peacebuilding could build and uphold democratic citizenship, gender equality, and respect for human rights.
- Balancing community-based security provisions with state-backed security apparatuses can improve accountability, enhance governance and oversight mechanisms, and reinforce relationships between civilian and security actors in the local context.
- Effectively implemented locally driven training and educational policies on peacebuilding should be harnessed by grassroots organizations and informal learning platforms.

### Context

Many of the most pressing conflicts across sub-Saharan Africa today—including violent extremism, sexual and gender-based violence, pastoralist/farmer conflicts, and criminal banditry—are shaped by local, community-level drivers. Despite these local drivers, however, international peacebuilding approaches often ignore or neglect bottom-up, grassroots strategies for addressing them. Often, international efforts that contribute to the prevention and management of local conflicts depend heavily on large-scale, expensive, and external interventions like peacekeepers, while under-investing in or bypassing traditional/customary mechanisms and resources that uphold locally defined values of peace, tolerance, solidarity, and respect. Recognizing that these traditional and customary practices themselves sometimes have their own legacies of violence and inequality, this policy note emphasizes the possibility of combining aspects of traditional peacebuilding mechanisms with international conflict management approaches to harness the benefits of both.

This policy note underlines complementarities between local/indigenous and contemporary peacebuilding approaches and calls on peacebuilders working in both traditions to prioritize identifying and building “hybrid” approaches that integrate local and indigenous knowledge and perspectives into existing best practices. The policy note fosters public discussion on these complementarities and identifies parallels between the approaches that could be harnessed, improved upon, and applied to present-day hybrid conflict resolution and transformation approaches in sub-Saharan Africa. The note highlights several innovative and adaptive strategies that integrate traditional and western peacebuilding practices into hybrid models that emphasize the interfaces, interchanges, and fluidity between different peacebuilding practices, structures, values, identities, and actors.<sup>1</sup>

By definition, local, grassroots peacebuilding knowledge and approaches are not a good basis for developing new, one-size-fits all “hybrid” peacebuilding models. The notion and orientation of peacebuilding as a stop-gap approach, mostly externally deployed once conflict—i.e., major, large-scale violence—has ended, can be adversarial to building on and supporting progressive indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution. Therefore, peacebuilding must be viewed as a continuous practice that indigenous approaches of social solidarity and relationship-building can integrate into.

## Relevance to policy and practice

The legacy and efficacy of liberal/contemporary peacebuilding continues to hang in the balance as criticisms abound regarding its success and legitimacy and its privileging the goals of international statebuilders and peacebuilders over the representation of local interests.<sup>2</sup> Liberal peace is derived through an emphasis on market-oriented policies, top-down reform, the exclusion of key local stakeholders, and the promotion of liberal democratization, but seemingly without a thorough understanding of the deep-seated causes of conflicts.<sup>3</sup> This assertion further draws on the argument that “liberal peace” is often built on external and short-term quick fixes deployed to restore sovereignty or normalcy<sup>4</sup> rather than a long-term, sustainable outcome capable of transforming local structures into liberal democracies. In Iraq and South Sudan, for example, internationally prescribed peacebuilding and state-building interventions have failed to maintain peace and security through liberal democracy decades after these countries plunged into civil wars. Instead of establishing effective democratic institutions and securing markets through a systematic overhaul of state-society relations, liberal peacebuilding efforts empowered widespread corruption and entrenched a small, illegitimate elite class, while further undermining

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1 Oliver P. Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty, “Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no. 2 (June 2015): 171–189, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836714545691>; Suthaharan Nadarajah and David Rampton, “The limits of hybridity and the crisis of liberal peace,” *Review of International Studies* 41, no. 1 (January 2015): 49-72, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210514000060>.

2 Richmond and Mac Ginty, “Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?”; Shahar Hameiri, “Reality Check: The Critique of the Liberal Peace Meets the Politics of State-Building,” in *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, eds. Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam (London: Zed Books, 2011), 191-208.

3 Christopher Zambakari, “Challenges of Liberal Peace and Statebuilding in Divided Societies,” *Accord*, Conflict Trends 2016/4, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/challenges-liberal-peace-statebuilding-divided-societies/>.

4 Patrick Tom, “In search for emancipatory hybridity: The case of post-war Sierra Leone,” *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 2 (June 2013): 240, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.783256>.

popular confidence in government and failing to empower local communities to rebuild trust and social cohesion.

Furthermore, advocates of liberal peace are perceived as foisting colonial and western dominance through imposition of counterproductive western values and social and political norms.<sup>5</sup> While some commentators commend the contingent success of liberal peacebuilding practice as a “realistic” alternative<sup>6</sup> in countries like East Timor, its interventions are still seen by critics as “ethically bankrupt...coercive...unfeeling...insensitive” and ignorant of the local or cultural context.<sup>7</sup>

Traditional practices, on the other hand, have been applauded for combining the use of certain non-conventional mediums such as psycho-social and spiritual healing to resolve and transform violent conflicts. For instance, in Laos, the Baci, Soukhouan, and Boumma ceremonies are unique post-conflict practices meant to repair harm, rebuild relationships, and restore harmony to conflict-affected communities.<sup>8</sup> Aside from celebrating the end of a conflict, the ceremonies demonstrate a community’s commitment to the resolution of a conflict. They involve days of preparation where a special flower arrangement is created to represent the beauty in life, reconciliation, and collective growth. Among Bedouin Arabs, the practice of Bisha also resolves disputes through rituals and reference to mystical beings.<sup>9</sup> The peaceful resolution of the Aguleri-Umuleri-Umuoba Annam war in Imo State of Nigeria involved oath-taking, the declaration the peace treaty of “no more war,” and the performance of a cleansing ritual called Ikomue.<sup>10</sup>

These spiritual and psycho-social practices are underestimated by Eurocentric perspectives that emphasize institutional over community-centered transformations. Conflict transformation and peacebuilding should be all-encompassing and focus on not only negotiations, Western political agreements, and material reconstruction, but also purification and reconciliation such as mental, spiritual, and traditional healing. These approaches deal with not only material issues, reason, and talk, but also the spiritual world, feelings and non-verbal communication.<sup>11</sup> Spirituality in Africa is intertwined and can be understood from beliefs, practices, ceremonies, and festivals, religious objects and places, values and norms as well as religious officials and traditional leaders.<sup>12</sup>

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5 David Chandler, “Peacebuilding and the politics of non-linearity: rethinking ‘hidden’ agency and ‘resistance,’” *Peacebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2013): 17-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.756256>; Roberto Belloni, “Hybrid Peace Governance: Its Emergence and Significance,” *Global Governance* 18, no. 1 (2012): 21-38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23104298?seq=1>; Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper, and Mandy Turner, “Conclusion: the political economy of peacebuilding. Whose peace? Where next?,” in *Whose peace? Critical perspectives on the political economy of peacebuilding*, eds. Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper, and Mandy Turner (London: Palgrave, 2008), 390-397.

6 Roland Paris, “Saving liberal peacebuilding,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 2 (2010): 337–365, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510000057>.

7 Richmond and Mac Ginty, “Where Now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?”

8 Stephanie Phetsamay Stobbe, “Traditional Conflict Resolution Processes: Mediation and Rituals to Address Conflicts in Multi-Ethnic Cultures of Laos” (PhD Thesis, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba Winnipeg, 2011).

9 Alean Al-Krenawi and John R. Graham, “Conflict Resolution through a Traditional Ritual among the Bedouin Arabs of the Negev,” *Ethnology* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 163-174, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773981>.

10 Adeyinka Theresa Ajayi and Lateef Oluwafemi Buhari, “Methods of Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Society,” *African Research Review* 8, no. 2 (April 2014): 138-157, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrev.v8i2.9>.

11 Volker Boege, “Traditional Approaches to Conflict Transformation: Potentials and Limits,” in *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*, eds. Martina Fischer, Hans J. Gießmann, and Beatrix Schmelzle (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2006).

12 John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1991); J.N. Amanze, “Contextuality: African spirituality as a catalyst for spiritual formation in theological education in Africa,” *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* 16,

Although the existence of traditional and local mechanisms and institutions have been threatened or partly replaced by liberal peacebuilding,<sup>13</sup> an outright return to traditional approaches to conflict resolution is impracticable given the complex characteristics of contemporary conflict environments: disrupted public institutions and services, sexual and gender-based violence, poverty, low literacy rates, and ethnic and religious pluralism of most communities in conflict. Some local restorative practices may create harm. The legitimacy derived from traditional practices, such as the Gacaca traditional justice system in post-genocide Rwanda, often attracted local support and acceptance on the basis of their traditional roots.<sup>14</sup> However, the system also generated criticism for empowering certain political perspectives and voices over others. In Burundi, international support for empowering a pre-colonial community conflict resolution mechanism, the Bashingantahe, was challenged by the ruling CNDD-FDD party, who argued that as a hold-over of the Tutsi-dominated regimes of the pre-war era, the Bashingantahe no longer represented “real” traditional authority or the needs of local communities.<sup>15</sup>

Support for certain cultural community practices and values, including those of traditional institutions and practices, can face challenges. Some cultural practices, such as forced or early marriages<sup>16</sup> or female genital cutting (FGC), contradict internationally recognized universal human rights. Gender inclusivity and women’s agency in traditional African communities have been deliberately eroded by certain cultural practices and the agelong custom of patriarchy and misogyny. This is in spite of women’s obvious cultural and socio-political roles and contributions to the overall well-being of society.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls are denied their rights to inherit from their husbands and fathers as a result of the indigenous common practice and law of male primogeniture, particularly if there is no male heir. This not only positions women with the legal status of minors but also prevents them from building generational wealth that could reduce poverty and enable them to contribute to the socio-economic and political development of their communities and to advocate for their political inclusion. The lack of inheritance also violates prohibitions on gender discrimination and other specific provisions of international human rights treaties that all African countries are signatories to. Countries such South Africa where the practice is common and where customary law possesses equal status with national law in the constitution not only engenders sexism and encourages inequality but stymies attempts to reconcile customary practices with gender rights.<sup>18</sup>

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no. 2 (2011): 13.

13 Ben K Fred-Mensah, *Nugormesese: An Indigenous Basis of Social Capital in a West African Community* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Notes, no. 86, 2005), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/10748>; I. William Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen, eds., *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

14 Timothy Longman, “An Assessment of Rwanda’s Gacaca Courts,” *Peace Review* 21, no. 3 (2009): 304-312, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650903099369>.

15 Léonce Ndikumana, “Towards a Solution to Violence in Burundi: A Case for Political and Economic Liberalisation,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 2000): 431-459, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x00003414>.

16 Naana Otoo-Oyortey and Sonita Pobi, “Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues,” *Gender & Development* 11, no. 2 (July 2003): 42-51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/741954315>.

17 Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

18 Jelili A. Omotola, “Primogeniture and Illegitimacy in African Customary Law: The Battle for Survival of Culture,” *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* 15, no. 1 (January 2004): 115-146, <https://doi.org/10.18060/17833>.

Another powerful critique of over-reliance on and romanticization of traditional institutions and authorities in post-conflict societies is that they have varying degrees of institutional capacity, legitimacy, and credibility and are not automatically an effective long-term state substitute. The example of the dwindling legitimacy and credibility of certain traditional rulers in Nembe town of the Niger Delta buttresses this point: recent survey data shows that traditional leaders and institutions benefit from widespread trust, but there is little appetite for them to become political actors.<sup>19</sup>

All conflict situations are unique but have common cross-cutting factors relating to their emergence, dynamics, and end. Therefore, identified innovative and adaptive strategies can be used in assessing risks, estimating conflict probabilities, and predicting future conflict dynamics using scientific models and trends.<sup>20</sup> Many times, these strategies are not present in traditional conflict resolution practices.

## Recommendations

While both approaches have mixed records of strengths and weaknesses, the commonalities between local and contemporary peacebuilding approaches offer opportunities and complementary prospects for enabling sustained peace processes. This includes the convergence and greater coherence of actors and institutions, hinged on communalism and unity, along with gleaning from international and contemporary best practices that uphold the rule of law, gender equality, and human rights. While these complementarities already exist, they lack capacity and potential. On this basis the following parallels and recommendations are for the whole of society (national, sub-national, external actors, local government, civil society, and community members):

### ***Harness structures of African conflict prevention to engender justice, inclusiveness, and women's rights.***

Serving as both classrooms and incubators, certain African conflict management mechanisms possess attributes and structures that are relevant for solving complex, localized, and contemporary conflicts. They possess good practices that can be identified and replicated if needed. One example is the work of the Obong of Calabar in the Efik enclave of South Nigeria. The Obong and their fellow traditional leaders utilize their positions as representatives of the society to either protect and dispense justice or perpetuate injustice and advance power interests through locally

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19 Carolyn Logan and Luyando Mutale Katenda, "African citizens' message to traditional leaders: Stay in development, stay out of politics," *Afrobarometer* Dispatch No. 443 (2021), [https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ad443-citizens\\_want\\_traditional\\_leaders\\_but\\_not\\_in\\_politics-afrobarometer\\_dispatch-21april21.pdf](https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ad443-citizens_want_traditional_leaders_but_not_in_politics-afrobarometer_dispatch-21april21.pdf).

20 This refers to measures to ensure that conflicts do not arise in the first place or are prevented from reoccurring. For instance, the AU and ECOWAS Early Warning Systems enable data sharing and coordinating in peacebuilding through technology. See: African Union, *Draft Roadmap for the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS)*, July 2, 2005, [https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/8319/DRA-ROA-CEW\\_E.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y](https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/8319/DRA-ROA-CEW_E.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y); African Union, *Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Follow-Up to the Peace and Security Council Communiqué of 27 October 2014 on Structural Conflict Prevention*, Peace and Security Council, April 29, 2015, <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-502-cews-rpt-29-4-2015.pdf>. Additionally, international development partners have developed systems and models to enhance development and peacebuilding impact evaluations as well as vulnerability assessments.

structured political, judicial and arbitration mechanisms. These kinds of institutions may not always effectively substitute for government legal and criminal justice systems, but they contribute to conflict resolution in communities where state institutions lack trust or are slow and inefficient.<sup>21</sup>

This recommendation requires consultations with local communities, particularly by national authorities and peacebuilders working in the area. There is also the need for empowered learning, development, design, and adaptation of community building initiatives that respect human and gender rights and the rule of law, while allowing for local interrogation of the notion and conditions of peace and rights. This integrative approach, if well advanced, can mesh present notions of gender equality and human rights with progressive indigenous norms and principles such as social solidarity to create awareness for all levels and actors while enshrining local ownership and adaptation. It also could spread broadly, creating local agency to replicate and scale-up best practices and experiences.

### *Provide capacity for a hybrid security governance architecture.*

Historically, traditional community-based armed groups concerned with minimizing and eliminating conflicts have existed across most African societies. However, in contemporary times, they have re-energized to supplement the efforts of inefficient, inept, malevolent, or absent state forces, all within the context of pervasive insecurity.<sup>22</sup> For instance, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Northeast Nigeria and Amotekun in Southwest Nigeria are both examples of traditional combatant groups operating within a broader federal security framework. Both regions are theatres of modern-day conflicts involving insurgency, violent extremism, banditry, and ethnic and cattle-herder crises. Ultimately, the CJTF was institutionalized by the Federal Government, while the Ondo State government argued that Amotekun is a component of the state's police infrastructure, and both have received government funding.

Given the advantage of these community-based armed groups in their embeddedness within the society, knowledge of local norms and culture, and legitimization by the state, they are well equipped to protect their communities and mobilize against terror or rebel groups. While their adaptation and utilization in combating insecurity makes the case for a hybrid security architecture, one cannot discount civilians' changing perceptions of the CJTF due to their role in derailing DDR process in the region, affiliation with politicians, human rights abuses, and sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>23</sup> The activities of Amotekun in recent times also present a distinct challenge for citizens with concerns over its increased politicization and mobilization by state governments against the federal government.

Concerns around the institutional character, legality-legitimacy, operationalization, and excessive powers of community-based armed groups remain valid, centered around the privatization of

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21 Keith Nicklin, "A Calabar Chief," *Journal of Museum Ethnography* no. 1 (March 1989): 79-84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40793480>.

22 Jennifer Obado-Joel, *The Challenge of State-Backed Internal Security in Nigeria: Considerations for Amotekun* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2020.9.ssa>; Daniel Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

23 Chitra Nagarajan, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria* (Centre for Civilians in Conflict, 2018), [https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018.06.CJTF-Report.Africa-Program.Web\\_.pdf](https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018.06.CJTF-Report.Africa-Program.Web_.pdf).

the group by political elites, violence against citizens, extortion, crime, and the abuse of human rights, which are already frequently experienced in the localities where the above-mentioned groups operate. Nonetheless, plural security provision, if well-postulated through transparent social accountability mechanisms and traditional security capacities, presents governments the opportunity to lay the foundation to transform community provisions while responding to changing threats.<sup>24</sup>

### *Develop peace pedagogy through educational policies.*

Peace and civic education programs with curricula designed by outsiders rarely take advantage of locally rooted and informal educational practices that already reflect local socio-political realities of conflict, instability, and poverty. Education policy stakeholders must ensure that peace and civic education curricula are reflective of deep, informed, and systematic theories that address structural violence and militarism and are driven by participatory learning and reflection. These socializations and positive inculcations are crucial for both contemporary and community-based peacebuilding initiatives to connect and contribute to broader socio-economic, political, and attitudinal change, such as respect for human rights, dialogue, and non-violent action. Reorientation towards locally rooted cultures of peace can foster individual, interpersonal, and intergroup transformation. This recommendation therefore calls for the conscientious development of locally driven training and educational policies on peacebuilding, designed in consultation with local stakeholders and education regulators for local grassroots organizations and informal learning platforms.

## Conclusion

Significant pitfalls have undermined the credibility of the contemporary peacebuilding enterprise, driven and mandated by international donors and former colonial governments. Meanwhile, traditional peacebuilding structures and actors have been sidelined and ill-equipped to manage present day conflict threats and challenges. With these challenges in view, it is apparent that neither structure is capable of achieving their mandates alone. Certain commonalities across the two phenomena are engaged as counterparts and their capacities contribute to the same long-term goals of socio-economic development through enhanced peacebuilding efforts.

International and local peacebuilding actors should pursue hybrid peacebuilding processes that are pragmatic and present an escape from a fixed hegemonic category of the local and international peacebuilding processes. When emphasizing local peacebuilding approaches as a means of resolving conflicts in Africa, there is need for caution in order not to glamorize all aspects of indigenous culture in peacebuilding. Indigenous peacebuilding approaches are gender-exclusive in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa—often, African women are not included in the structures of traditional peacebuilding and decision-making processes. Hence, the need is pressing to combine notions of gender equality to show a peacebuilding process that is uniquely African, yet liberal.

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24 Jennifer Obado-Joel, *The Challenge of State-Backed Internal Security in Nigeria*.

# Suggested further reading

## On liberal peacebuilding

Debiel, Tobias, Thomas Held, and Ulrich Schneckener. *Peacebuilding in Crisis: Rethinking Paradigms and Practices of Transnational Cooperation*. UK: Taylor & Francis, 2016.

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## About the Note

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