

CHOOSING PEACE: LOCAL PEACEBUILDER PERSPECTIVES ON AGENCY, RELATIONAL  
RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL PEACEBUILDING

by

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty  
of  
George Mason University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Fall Semester 2016  
George Mason University  
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Choosing Peace: Local Peacebuilder Perspectives on Agency, Relational Responsibility,  
and the Future of International Peacebuilding

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Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

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## **DEDICATION**

This inquiry is inspired by and dedicated to the many people that I have had the privilege to know who are actively and intentionally choosing peace amid violence. I am awed, inspired, and deeply grateful to all of you.

It is also dedicated to my two boys, Pablo and Santiago, who challenge and encourage me to choose peace every day.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot begin to acknowledge all the people who have contributed in some way to this study. I would like to thank, first and foremost, all the individual peacebuilders who gave of their time, wisdom, and encouragement, whether through individual interviews, written responses, or ongoing partnership. Without you, this study would truly have been impossible and I have most surely gained more from you than you from me.

My Dissertation Committee, Susan Allen, Jessica Srikantia, and Andrea Bartoli provided steady encouragement and invaluable feedback on all aspects of this study.

My Advisory Group, Ruairi Nolan, Rosie Pinnington, and Nathaniel Walker, offered their time and insights through the process, helping me stay true to purpose and people.

My faith community, the Religious Society of Friends, was a constant source of spiritual centering and support, and the Friends Meeting of Washington provided financial backing for research into the Boulding archives.

Colleague students and faculty at S-CAR offered their wisdom, experience, and helpful critiques through countless conversations inside and outside the classroom.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family, without whom I would never have had the grounding, strength of spirit, time, energy, perseverance, or comic relief to undertake this study.

My father, Martin B. Moix, taught me to follow my leadings, speak my truth, and believe in myself. My mother, Carolyn S. Tyler, exemplified a life of service, compassion for all, and generous mothering. My sisters, Andrea, Jennifer, and Rebecca have never stopped supporting and loving me no matter what.

Co-parent and dear friend, Alberto Fernandez Oviedo, gifted me with love, encouragement, and countless childcare hours, without which I could not have begun, persisted, or completed this degree.

My children, Pablo and Santiago, kept me laughing and focused on the most important things in life, accepting babysitters and delivery pizzas so Mama could go to school.

And Michael George Kent infused my final months of procrastination with unexpected joy and beauty, reminding me that love is indeed the first, and final, motion.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **CHOOSING PEACE: LOCAL PEACEBUILDER PERSPECTIVES ON AGENCY, RELATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL PEACEBUILDING**

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George Mason University, 2016

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Even in the midst of the most horrific violent conflicts, there are always people building peace. What motivates such individuals to act for peace when many others do not, and how do they understand their own motivations? What do they feel sustains and supports them against the risks they face? How do they think the international community can better support them and others like them to make the courageous choice for peace?

This collaborative action research explores the perspectives of local peacebuilders from a range of countries around the world on these questions. Through in-depth interviews, written content analysis, and reflective practice, the study reveals considerable challenges to the current paradigms and practice of international peacebuilding and urges us to reorient the field toward new relationships and

responsibilities. This study was undertaken in collaboration with the international non-governmental organization Peace Direct.

*Suppose there were a place we could go to learn the art of peace, a sort of boot camp for spiritual warriors. Instead of spending hours and hours disciplining ourselves to defeat the enemy, we could spend hours and hours dissolving the causes of war.*

*...The boot camp might be run by Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. More likely, it would be run by people we've never seen or heard of, just ordinary men and women from all over the world who devote their lives to helping others be free of pain.*

(Chodron 2007, p. 98)

## PART I. BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

- *Why did you do it?*

- *I'm not sure really. I just thought someone had to say something. I didn't want the war to consume our community. I just didn't believe it had to be that way.*

*As war in the former Yugoslavia threatened to engulf her community, a young girl of 15 makes an impassioned plea for peace at the funeral of a teenage friend killed because of his ethnicity. She is not sure of her own motivations behind taking a stand when others were not. Years later, she recalls feelings of anger, grief and determination, as well as experiences of joy and laughter with her family as they survived together through the war. She is a woman of deep values and conscience - gracious, humble, thoughtful. She brushes away suggestions that her actions made any difference or that what she did was exceptional. Her plea for peace does not stop the war. She does not know if it had any effect at all.*

*Yet, somehow her town does pull back from the brink and avoid a collapse into the kind of ethnic killing that embroiled much of her country. It reknits itself together after the war. The girl grows up, graduates, and earns her PhD in peace and conflict studies. She focuses her life on supporting her own society and others recovering from mass violence. She chooses to continue acting for peace.*

This simple yet extraordinary story sparks important questions. What motivated the girl to take a stand, to speak out against the violence rising in her community when others were not and when doing so might place her at risk? How did she make that

choice? What internal or external resources did she draw on in moving herself from feeling afraid and frustrated at the situation around her to being motivated to act for peace, to then actually engaging in a particular action, and to sustaining her commitment years later? Why and how did this young woman become a peace agent? Why and how do others like her – or different from her – make similar choices? What can we learn from them? And, how can we as a global community improve our understanding and abilities to support people choosing peace more often in more places?

Remarkably, these questions remain sorely understudied within the field of peace and conflict studies. In his presidential address to the Peace Research Society in 2013, Pat Regan of Notre Dame urged greater research into the causes of peace, explaining that “unless we study the pathways to peace as vigorously as we study those to war, we might miss the forest because the trees are in our way”, and reminding us that “the methods of achieving peace are probably not simply the negative of the pathways to war” (Regan 2014, p. 345). While the evidence of groups and individuals opting for peace in the midst of violence is growing, we do not yet have well-developed theory to explain why and how they do so.

This is the story of a study. And every study begins with a question, or multiple questions. The questions driving this study were many, some academic, some practical, and some personal.

- *How do some people who experience the horrors of war and violence also discover the courage and will to act for peace?*
- *What motivates and sustains them in the face of ridicule, rejection, and risk?*
- *What can we learn from them, and why are they not at the visible forefront of the peacebuilding field?*
- *Do we as a field, or I as an individual, really understand what it takes to strive for peace in the midst of violence?*
- *Do we really know what works and what doesn't, and if we do, why do we still fail so often?*
- *Can the peacebuilding field open greater space for those most affected by violent conflict to help lead the way toward improved theory, practice, and research?*

To explore these questions more deeply, this research study posed the overarching question: ***Why and how do people choose peace in the midst of violence?***

It gathered first-hand perspectives of peacebuilders themselves on three more specific research questions that explore: 1) their own motivations in choosing to act for peace, 2) their understanding of what sustains and supports them in those choices, and 3) their ideas on how the international community can best support them in these choices. The project was organized as collaborative action research with the non-governmental organization Peace Direct and its network of local peacebuilders around the world.

Through a mixed methodology of content coding and grounded theory analysis, it sought to outline an initial *theory of peace agency*.

#### **A. Why Study Peace Agency?**

I was drawn toward this exploration by two fundamental lessons that mentors have taught me over the past twenty years. The first, an insight offered by Andrea Bartoli, is the simple but powerful recognition that in every situation of violence, war, and human suffering, no matter how devastating and seemingly hopeless, there are always some people acting for peace. This is a simple statement, but a powerful one. It reminds us that despite the horrors we are capable of inflicting upon one another, peace is a possibility. It is, in fact, already a reality. Empirical evidence is increasingly demonstrating the persistent presence of peace agents within conflict systems. This does not negate or overcome the dual, simultaneous, and sometimes more immediately powerful reality that many people are engaged in active violence; but it does affirm that life-affirming systems of peace live along side and in the midst of destructive systems.

The second lesson that guided me toward this study is from Elise and Kenneth Boulding, Quaker scholar-practitioners who helped found the modern field of peace studies and were influential within my own faith tradition. As Elise explained in an interview in 2003:

*My husband, Kenneth Boulding, always used to say, "What exists is possible."*

*Now that is a very profound statement. What it means is that any peaceful segment or any group that has dealt with and gotten through really difficult*

*conflicts and done it successfully, like a family or a community or a country — if it happened, then it is possible. In a way, it is a basic statement of fact. (Portilla 2006)*

In other words, what happens, no matter how rarely it happens, even if it exists just once in time and space, represents a wider possibility of reality. People choosing peace in the midst of violence does happen. Many of us have our own experiences of it, and we have a growing body of scholarly and practitioner evidence documenting it. If the Bouldings are right, then choosing peace represents not just a reality in some situations, but also a hidden possibility in every situation, even where it does not appear to be happening or we do not yet have the evidence of its existence. It is a possibility, perhaps, even within ourselves.

Finally, I was drawn to study why and how people choose peace because it represents a still under-explored area of import for our field. While relevant literature and established conflict resolution theories help explain some of the cognitive, group, and behavioral processes that can lead toward destructive human relations, much less dedicated attention has been given to what Steven Pinker has called the “better angels of our nature” (Pinker 2011). Growing research demonstrating that peace agency does indeed exist in a wide range of conflict situations does not yet explain what leads to its emergence and active expression by certain individuals (but not others), or help us understand the best methods for encouraging and supporting it. What literature does

exist does not explicitly gather and lift up the voices of peacebuilders themselves in explaining their own answers to these questions.

I also came to this study carrying all the baggage and bounties of my own personal experience as a Quaker, an activist, a scholar, and a mother trying to opt for peace within a national and international context that seems increasingly marked by entrenched violence and militarism, despite larger historical trends that do point toward a more peaceful and just world. After more than a decade of data showing a decline in armed conflicts and a growing trend in the resolution of wars, we are now facing the largest number of casualties from armed conflict in more than twenty years and the most massive global refugee crisis recorded since World War II, driven in large part by war and its impacts.<sup>1</sup> The wars in Syria and Iraq; the rise of the Islamic State; mass violence against civilians in places like South Sudan, Myanmar, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi; and mass shootings, racial tensions, and a foreign policy defined by unending war in my own country, the United States: All these trends are challenging policymakers, scholars, students, and practitioners to better understand the escalation and entrenchment of violent conflict in our world today and to foster approaches that nurture the existing possibilities of peace toward greater realization.

These trends have certainly challenged me. In 2011, after nearly 20 years working at the policy and community levels of US and international peace advocacy, most deeply with the Quaker community, I had begun to doubt whether we really knew

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<sup>1</sup> See Armed Conflict Survey 2015 by the International Institute for Security Studies, London, UK. <https://www.iiss.org/en/Topics/armed-conflict-survey/armed-conflict-survey-2015-46e5>

what we thought we knew. As the war in Syria was just beginning to escalate into the horrific turmoil it has become, I recognized in myself a growing inability to fully believe the words I had become so accustomed to saying to others. War prevention does work. Nonviolent alternatives are available. Peace is possible. How could this be true, I asked, when such devastating violence was spiraling out of control, when so many people were suffering?

I stepped back from a career of lobbying the US government on peace issues as Syria was unraveling and returned to school because I needed to find perspective again on what I wanted to believe was true, but feared I had begun to doubt. Or, perhaps, I felt unable to face the failure of preventing another devastating war after we had seemed so close to preventing the war in Iraq, only to have the largest global mobilizations for peace in history collapse so quickly under the shock and awe of US bombs. Whatever the reason, I needed to think, to study, to query, and to test my own faith in the power of love and nonviolence to overcome war and fear. I needed to learn from others who seemed to have more faith than me, more skill and fortitude, more courage and compassion.

I did not come to this study as a strictly neutral academic. I must confess a deep longing for affirmation and confirmation, a desire to demonstrate, through rigorous research, that the years I have spent encouraging myself and others to work for peace were not for naught, that the vision of a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world is indeed still attainable, despite the horrors crossing our screens every day. I will not

pretend to be unbiased or detached from the findings of this study, though I remain committed to the integrity and honesty of good research. In the end, I do want to believe we have a chance as a species, as a human family, as a collection of flawed yet hopeful individuals to demonstrate that a better world is possible, if we are willing to help bring it into being.

I also confess a growing dissatisfaction with the persistent dominance of the global North, and particularly the United States, on the field of peacebuilding as it has developed, alongside the persistent marginalization of communities who are most directly impacted by war and, more often than not, most directly working every day to prevent, respond, and recover from the impacts. I fear that if we are not actively investing our minds, resources, institutions, and hearts to correcting this course, we will find ourselves as a field where the broader international development field has found itself after decades of allowing the global and cultural structures of power to drive its development: so entwined in a bureaucratic morass and institutional system of externally driven interventions that even the best intentioned individuals and organizations struggle to ensure that development is a process of self-determination for communities, not an imposed and ultimately ineffective enterprise that breeds unhealthy dependencies.<sup>2</sup> I am certainly not the first student of peace and conflict studies to voice these dissatisfactions. Indeed, as Part I of this study lays out, a growing body of scholarly and practitioner-based literature points to similar frustrations among a

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<sup>2</sup> For more see on how the aid system is failing see Anderson, Brown, and Jean. *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*. Boston: CDA Collaborative Development Project, 2012.

growing number of scholars, practitioners, and local communities and activists, as well as an encouraging search for course correction.

The good news is that we do still remain a young field, a diverse and relatively open one that espouses principles of inclusion, respect for other, and a commitment to social justice. The peacebuilding field is just beginning to mature, and part of that process is a recent trend of self-reflection and self-critique that is both challenging and benefitting us all. This study hopes to contribute a bit more to that trend of critical peacebuilding studies, with a particular focus on exploring the concept of “peace agency” and an aspiration to listen and create space for others to hear the voices of local peacebuilders – that is, those who are directly impacted by violent conflict and intentionally responding through creative efforts for peace.

Why study peace agency? Beyond my personal search for new answers to the persistent question of how can we live together with less violence and more justice, I do believe the peacebuilding field can benefit from the experience, insights, and voices of those individuals who take up the cause of working for peace in the midst of ongoing violence. The past decade has seen a significant focus in our field of studying the institutions, structures, and systems that drive or undermine peace. This continues to be a critical development in our field that is helping us improve both theory and practice. However, I continue to be intrigued and inspired by the power of the individual to shape, influence, and shake up these institutions, structures, and systems. And I am intrigued, in particular, by how the interplay between individuals and systems

– that space where individuals confront and engage with, or perhaps reject, systems in which they are deeply embedded - leads to change.

Studying peace agency is an attempt to understand that interplay between individual and system a bit better. It is an attempt to listen to those who live within systems of war and violence but have opted to strive for peace and to try to understand why they make that choice and what it could mean for improving our field. During my PhD coursework, a professor advised us one day that when we chose our topic for our dissertation, we should remember that we will not only need to love our question for many years, but we will also need to love our data. That advice was the final piece of wisdom that decided the direction of my study, and I have indeed not been disappointed. The “data” of this study is the stories of peacebuilders. I have had the privilege and joy of being immersed in those stories for the past two years, and it has been truly inspiring and insightful.

My hope is that this study can add a small contribution to improving our understanding of the sources and nature of peace, not as an idealistic vision to which we aspire, but rather as an intentional and practical choice that is made by people quite often and even within the most difficult of situations. This study examined how individuals working for peace in the midst of conflict understand their own motivations and the factors that help sustain them in their efforts, as well as how they think outsiders can best support them. Seeking to listen carefully and discern rigorously the insights and perspectives of peacebuilders themselves, I sought to uncover and

understand some of the peace that already exists in the world, in order to reveal a bit more of what is possible. As someone who has spent her career trying to improve U.S. and international policies and practices related to peace, my hope is that this research can contribute in some small way to putting the perspectives of local peacebuilders more at the forefront of the field. With more ambition, I hope it might strengthen our collective ability as individuals, institutions, and communities committed to a more peaceful world, to support more people in more places who are taking the courageous, everyday risks of choosing peace in the midst of violence. I have not answered all the questions that began this study, but I have learned enormously from it, and I hope others will find insights and inspiration in it as well.

Before explaining the methodology and findings of this study, I first reflect on my own choices to work for peace, placing myself into the role of subject in this study alongside those I interviewed. I then consider how the question of why and how people choose peace fits within the current field of conflict resolution, and the strengths and weaknesses of current literature related to it. In particular, I examine three areas of literature I consider most relevant to my study: 1) post-liberal peacebuilding critique, 2) locally-led peacebuilding, and 3) social agency. I consider what this literature and related practice offers in relation to the question, and, more specifically, how it speaks to the specific lines of inquiry regarding *motivations, means, and avenues for support* to local peacebuilders that my research will explore. I do not seek to cover all possible literature and practice related to these questions, but rather focus within those areas

that I believe offer the most promise for enlightening our understanding from my own admittedly biased perspective. A much broader study into psycho-social, sociological, and anthropological literature that touches on different aspects of this inquiry would surely shed more and perhaps different light on the questions posed, but is beyond the scope of this project.

For the purpose of this paper, I use my own working definition of ***peace agency*** as the ability of individuals or communities to act in intentional ways that seek to positively and nonviolently transform conflict situations toward more peaceful and just realities.

## **B. Why I Choose Peace**

It is only appropriate that I begin the story of a study that asked others why they choose to act for peace by revealing my own motivations to do so, as best I can understand and articulate them. As a privileged white woman from the United States, I have not had to make the kinds of difficult choices between life and death, peace and war, fear and hope that many people who were part of this study have had to make. My own work for peace has not placed myself or my family at major risk of physical or other harm. Indeed, I have been remarkably fortunate to have a career and personal journey in peace work that has paid enough for a relatively comfortable life, rewarded me with recognition and support from others, and allowed me to live my passion and my faith. As a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), I am surrounded by an affirming community with a long history of peace work and a spiritual conviction that

good does overcome evil, that love endures all, and that we can each contribute in our own small ways to making the world a better place. The process of undertaking this study has reminded me what a gift the search for peace has been to my own life. Still, this path has required me to make particular choices at particular times, to give up certain opportunities in exchange for others, and to listen carefully to where my conscience leads.

Growing up in a middle class, white, mainstream Ohio community, I had little direct exposure to the world of peace and justice work in my youth. I credit my mother, a minister of multiple faiths throughout her life, for instilling in me a strong social conscience and setting an example of service to others and belief in the power of love to overcome evil. My father, who served in the Air Force and then as a civilian working in military intelligence throughout my childhood, insisted we analyze problems rationally, always think for ourselves, and never allow our desire to go along with the crowd be an excuse for doing something we knew was not right. This combination of parental influences no doubt planted the early seeds of my indignation at the world's ills, my desire to put myself to the service of doing something about them, and my approach of logical analysis and practical small steps toward addressing complex problems.

Many years later, when visiting the Rwandan genocide memorial with some of those whom I interviewed for this study, my parents' influence became clearer to me. Aegis Trust, an organization that has done extensive research on what leads people to engage in acts of genocide, and how to prevent that trajectory in individuals, proposes

the key formula to genocide prevention is (Empathy + Critical Thinking) - two of the most fundamental values my parents sought to instill in me, and which I attempt to instill in my own children now. My own experience of becoming a mother further deepened my commitment to seeking peace in the world. After having my first son I recall thinking quite clearly that of everything I could do to contribute to peacebuilding in the world, the most important and most impactful would be helping to nurture my children to become good stewards of their communities and world. The unexpected focus on the role of family that emerged through this study is, in fact, quite familiar in my own experience as well.

It was not actually until high school, that I began to feel a sense of calling specifically toward peace work. Late in my senior year, my favorite English teacher asked us to write a letter to ourselves, which he would keep and mail back to us five years later, pondering where we might be and what we might be doing by then. I wrote that I supposed I would have volunteered with the Peace Corps, as it was the only opportunity I knew of at the time with the word “peace” in it. How that initial motivation to actively dedicate my working life to peace sprouted, I am still not sure. But I do know that unexpected openings through my discovery of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and their long tradition and extensive networks of peacemaking work would become the driving force behind my professional and spiritual path in the years ahead.

The Quaker community, known for its historic peace testimony and practical efforts for peace, equality, and, more recently, environmental stewardship, is an easy place to practice peace agency. I was first “found by Friends”, during a college internship in Philadelphia at the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker peacebuilding and humanitarian organization that began in 1917 to provide alternative service opportunities for conscientious objectors during World War I. My college internship with the Middle East and East-West programs, which sought to build bridges and promote peace and understanding across lines of conflict, was my first introduction to a world of people and institutions devoted to overcoming hatred, fear and violence, and promoting instead cooperation, tolerance, and constructive conflict transformation. The activists, strategies, approaches, and possibilities that the internship with AFSC introduced me to had been completely hidden from my white-bred, middle class Ohio childhood. It was also my first experience working directly with – and in a subordinate position of power to – people of color, gays and lesbians, people of multiple faiths, and communities impacted by war and violence. And, it was my introduction to the Quaker faith and to Quaker Meeting for Worship. While I was not an immediate convert to either Quakerism or a career with Quaker organizations, my world was opened to radical new possibilities, and the trajectory of my path was set.

Following graduation from college, and still thinking I would go into social work later, I sought out a one-year internship in peace and justice work to gain some practical experience before my plans of graduate school in social work. Discovering that the only

peace organizations that seemed to offer paying internships were Quaker, I applied to three and landed one with the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) in Washington, DC, a Quaker lobby established in the 1945 to be a voice for peace on Capitol Hill. That internship proved formative both professionally and spiritually for me. The director, Joe Volk, was my supervisor and became an important influence in my life. He taught me about the rich history of Quaker peacemaking; trained me through example in Quaker approaches to social change, nonviolent action, and peace advocacy; and nurtured a growing curiosity in the Quaker faith as a spiritual home. He remains today a trusted Quaker mentor who continues to encourage, motivate, and advise me at key moments of decision in my life.

Since those initial experiences with peace work, I found myself steadily, though often unexpectedly, led to continue working with Quaker organizations in a variety of contexts, and to continue a faith journey among Friends. I stayed on an extra year lobbying with FCNL, later found myself interning in South Africa with the Quaker Peace Center during graduate school, and was eventually invited into more volunteer committee work with both AFSC and FCNL. Following graduate school, I was serving with the Quaker United Nations Office in New York, supporting the emerging agenda at the United Nations on the prevention of violent conflict, during the attacks of 9/11. I very quickly felt called back to FCNL to work against the rising tide of war that would come to consume US foreign policy, responding to my own sense of responsibility as a US citizen to do what I could to hold back the hounds of war being released by my own

elected officials, or at least to limit their damage however I could. This sense of responsibility to work for peace in even the most uncomfortable places I recognize now as quite relevant to the story of this study as well. While I made the choices I did along my path, it was often from a sense of feeling called by my conscience and by others to do what I could to contribute to a more peaceful world – my own experience of relational responsibility.

After more years lobbying for peace in Washington, family took me to Mexico in 2005, where I was asked to direct the Casa de los Amigos, a Quaker center for peace and international understanding with a long history of workcamps and support to migrants, as well as a 45-bed guesthouse that continues to provide a hub of hospitality, community, and exchange among travelers, social justice activists, and the local neighborhood in Mexico City. At the Casa, I learned the limits and rewards of working in a country and culture that is not your own, of struggling to match good intentions with truly good outcomes, and of seeking to provide a space for listening, friendship, and community-building. I also had the privilege to learn from local peacebuilders in Mexico through participation in an Escuela de Paz, one of the best conflict transformation trainings I have seen, run by the Mexican peacebuilding organization SERAPAZ. As one of only two foreign participants in the program, I learned important lessons of humility, listening, and self-reflection, while also gaining a much deeper understanding of the conflict realities in Mexico that local peacebuilders faced and how they were working to overcome them. My experience in Mexico challenged me to confront more directly and

creatively the tensions between peace and justice that exist in so many conflict situations, and that usually require deep contextual knowledge and local leadership to navigate effectively.

Through each of these experiences my Quaker faith deepened and I became an increasingly convinced Friend. Membership within the Religious Society of Friends is locally grounded within a Monthly Meeting or Friends church, and I formally joined my first Quaker Meeting during graduate school in New York in 1999, prompted by an invitation to serve on the Executive Committee of the Friends Committee on National Legislation and a subsequent clearness committee with the Meeting which I had been attending.<sup>3</sup> Quakerism leaves significant room for individual faith journeys, without strict rules, sacraments, or doctrine that must be followed, and Friends often speak of the varied ways in which people come to the Society. Some Friends (though only a small percentage) are birthright Quakers, with a long family heritage in the Society. Others find their way as they might to any religious community, through seeking the right “fit” in a faith and spiritual community experience. Many are drawn to Quaker Meeting through experiences with Friends’ schools or other organizations, and historically

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<sup>3</sup> The Society of Friends is organized locally by Monthly Meetings, which then participate in regional Quarterly Meetings, and a larger Yearly Meeting. Each body is named for the frequency of what Friends call Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, or just Business Meeting for short. Organizational decision-making for the bodies is conducted through Business Meetings. A clearness committee is a Quaker process to support individual Friends in seeking clarity on a decision or issue in their lives. A clearness committee usually meets with the individual and asks questions to prompt further reflection and discernment. It does not offer advice or instruction, but rather through careful listening, posing of queries, and worship together, helps the individual discern what direction the Spirit is calling them.

Friends' Meetings get a boost in membership during times of war due to their reputation as pacifists and anti-war activists.

My own process of becoming a convinced Friend<sup>4</sup> was intimately linked to my professional development and work with Quaker organizations. From my first encounter with Friends during my internship with AFSC, I was excited by the commitment of Quakers to living their faith through every aspect of their lives, a strong emphasis on integrity and speaking truth, an outlook of hope and pragmatism on the problems of the world, and an encouragement, as George Fox wrote, to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.”<sup>5</sup> Quakerism also engrains a sense of responsibility for others and our relationships with others – for what Friends sometimes call “right relationship” – that echoes the findings of this study in many ways.

I have also found it important at times to step out of the comfort of Friends' organizations and test my abilities elsewhere. I have occasionally feared I will become too comfortable acting for peace within a community that cherishes and supports those efforts already, and that I might fall flat, or find myself unable to sustain my own hope and passion, outside the Quaker environment. In 2005, during a short-term position

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<sup>4</sup> Quakers use the terms birthright and convinced to describe how individuals became Friends. Birthright Friends are those born to Quaker families, while convinced Friends are individuals from other backgrounds who discover Quakerism. In either case, individuals must intentionally request membership with a Quaker Meeting to become formal members. Birthright Friends often do this as young adults, while convinced Friends do so when they want to formally join a Monthly Meeting. In general, Friends welcome full participation of members and non-members, young and old, in the life of the Meeting, although there are some positions such as Clerk of the Meeting that require formal membership.

<sup>5</sup> George Fox, Statement of 1656

with Oxfam America on the crisis in Sudan, I learned the pros and cons of working with a large international development organization and engaging in advocacy on specific conflict areas where I had little real relationship. While the work of Oxfam and other organizations seeking to prevent more suffering in Sudan has been commendable, the realities of the violence in Darfur have persisted nearly unabated for over 10 years now, while the international attention to the crisis has nearly disappeared.

In 2013, I ventured farthest beyond my comfort zone by accepting a fellowship position within US government, serving as an Atrocity Prevention Fellow for two years with the US Agency for International Development's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation. That experience, perhaps more than any, stretched me to apply the skills and values I had learned through a career in Quaker peacemaking within situations that challenged my own personal integrity and conscience in uncomfortable ways. I was faced with the immediacy of having to respond to crises of human suffering within the confines of national interests and the limits of what individuals and governments, even the strongest governments in the world, can effectively do in response to unfolding violent conflict in far off places. I was also subjected to the grueling process of personal scrutiny involved in the US government security clearance process. Ultimately, I could not reconcile my Quaker commitment to truth-telling and equality with that process, which depends fundamentally on secrecy and unequal access to information. I also discovered that working within the confines of a national security frame that tends to derive from fear and American supremacy did not sit well with me. I believed in and

was motivated by a desire to work from a source of hope, trust, and the idea of Ubuntu from South Africa, that “I am because you are.”

Through my time with USAID, though, I did develop a great admiration for those individuals who persistently stand on principle and choose peace within the confines of a bureaucratic hierarchy dedicated to the pursuit of narrowly defined national interests. I also learned the limits of my own ability to work within a system that, fundamentally, does not represent my own ethics and spiritual values, and my need to work with a community that shares these values as a key source of sustaining me against the risks and costs of peacebuilding.

Most recently, I find myself choosing to work with an organization that was founded by Quakers and maintains a sense of its Quaker roots, but operates as a secular peacebuilding group. Peace Direct is dedicated to supporting local peacebuilders within situations of conflict to lead the pursuit for peace in their own societies, while also working to shift the international community’s policies and practices toward greater support for local peacebuilders as well. The honor of collaborating with, learning from, and supporting as best I can a truly inspiring group of peace leaders from around the world has reaffirmed my own belief in the living reality of alternatives to violence and the possibility for expanding that reality to help heal a damaged and despairing world.

### **C. The Search for Peace and the Loss of Agency: A Literature Review**

Despite the many tragedies of war and violence across the globe, the majority of the world’s people, the majority of the time, in the majority of places, are interacting

without resort to direct violence. Do we understand why and how this happens? The field of conflict analysis and resolution has made significant progress in understanding the causes and consequences of human violence and war. It has dedicated less attention to understanding the drivers and processes of peace. Significant literature and well-developed theories exist on the psychological, psycho-social, group processes, and structural dynamics that drive people to take up arms and kill one another. Thanks to over four decades of conflict resolution and peace studies theory and practice, we are beginning to better recognize and understand the darker side of who we are, Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" (Arendt 1963). We still wonder about our inherent goodness.

Core conflict resolution and peace studies theories can suggest explanations for why people cooperate without violence and choose more peaceful paths. For instance, a Burtonian approach might suggest that individuals and groups who feel their needs for security, physical well-being, and belonging are being met will be more likely to engage in constructive problem-solving and positive behavior toward others. Theories of negotiation, contact, and cooperation propose dialogue, human interaction, and practical collaboration to reduce negative conflict and stimulate more peaceful engagement. A more inclusive understanding and narrative of social identity could help prevent the dehumanization of others and reduce the likelihood of hatred toward a perceived "out" group. Such approaches to what I term peace agency, however, tend to begin with the assumption that negative conflict is the inherent reality and needs to be reduced or mitigated. As such, they would seek to explain peace agency by inverting

theories that developed to explain violent behavior, rather than innovating and testing theories related to individuals and groups intentionally opting to engage in peaceful interactions within violent situations. The smaller field of peace research – pioneered by the Bouldings, Adam Curle, Johan Galtung, John Paul Lederach, and others – has focused more on understanding dynamics of peaceful societies, but has not established many well-recognized theories toward this end. New efforts such as the Global Peace Index are seeking to more rigorously measure peacefulness within societies, but in general, much less work has been done to research and understand the motivations and means employed by individuals who choose peace instead of violence. Why is this?

As a field, we have come to recognize and affirm that conflict is an inherent part of human society. We find it more difficult to examine peace with the same assumption. Conflict has become the norm, peace the exception. Conflict the focus of study and analysis, though peace the ultimate goal. In large part, our theories and strategies begin from the recognition that violent conflict exists and so we seek to move toward peace. That the opposite is also true – peace exists alongside and even in the midst of violence – somehow is less apparent to us, or at least less thoroughly examined. The same linear thinking from negative to positive also tends to dominate the practices and policies of the peacebuilding community, including governmental and non-governmental actors, which generally focus on the negative drivers of conflict and much less so on positive instigators of peace. Important efforts to lift up “bright spots” in conflict and support peacemaking communities are growing, but we have yet to develop

a strong theoretical foundation or build a strong body of evidence to support these efforts. We cannot yet explain why and how individuals and communities are motivated to opt for peace over violence, and, notably, why they do so even in the midst of war and violent conflict.

This focus on understanding the conflict side of our world has informed policy and programmatic efforts to prevent, mitigate, and resolve human violence. Projects working at the community, national, and international level to avert, respond to, and rebuild after wars have mushroomed over the past two decades, while academic programs dedicated to conflict resolution have multiplied along with growing demand from students. This is encouraging. However, the conflict side of our study and practice has far outstripped the pace of peace research and, in some ways, sidelined traditional peace movements. Policymakers are also investing more dollars in conflict analysis, early warning and response, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction than ever before in history, though often with a self-interested national security focus. Most of these investments, unfortunately, still come after wars, when lives and societies have been torn apart and must be rewoven again. They also still tend to focus heavily on managing the actors engaged in conflict and on institutional reforms, with less attention and resources for supporting local peacebuilders. A lack of well-developed theory and practice to explain motivations and means behind the inherent peace agency that exists within conflict systems perpetuates this imbalance.

While examining questions of why and how people choose peace amid violence could begin by simply flipping theories of why people choose violence on their heads, this approach would do little to clearly illuminate the positive means and motivations that help people choose peace within situations of ongoing violence when many others around them are engaging in violence. It could shed important light on the micro or macro processes and dynamics peace agents, whether individuals or communities, would need to overcome, but it would not provide a strong positivist explanation for attitudes and behavior behind peace agency. Instead, a more critical approach is needed that examines why current theory and practice tends to deny or obscure the reality of people choosing peace amid violence, and considers new avenues for understanding why and how those choices happen. To begin such an approach, we turn now to a review of some critiques of the peacebuilding field, growing research and practice focused on local peacebuilding, and theories of social agency.

### ***Post-Liberal Peacebuilding Critique and the Loss of Agency***

Peacebuilding, as a field, is at a critical juncture of self-reflection. Earlier this year, the director of United Nations humanitarian operations declared publicly that the international community had “failed” the people of the Central African Republic. His statement came after waves of retaliatory killing had racked the country for months. Similar declarations have been made post-facto by high-level international officials in relation to wars and mass atrocities in Rwanda, Syria, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and most of the world’s trouble spots, usually after thousands if

not hundreds of thousands are already dead. Despite decades of active interventions by the UN, many national governments, civil society, and the growing field of peace and conflict resolution practitioners to help prevent, halt, and recover after violent conflicts, the record of success is disturbingly limited. A growing body of research is demonstrating that despite the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in post-conflict efforts, violent conflicts often re-emerge within just a few years after a peace agreement and root problems facing societies remain (Collier 2003; Funk 2012). For 2014, the UN peacekeeping budget stands at \$7.83 billion, a cost that has been growing over the past two decades as the international community expands the number and size of its interventions to restore and rebuild peace in war-torn societies. Yet, these peace operations, while vitally important, are often more a costly band-aid than a lasting solution to the problems societies face, and may in fact replicate systems of injustice and violence that underlie the conflicts they purport to address. Peacebuilding programs, whether part of UN or other international interventions, struggle to demonstrate impact and sustainability. Growing concern over the poor cost-benefit ratio and measurable impacts of these international interventions is raising serious questions.

That is not to say the international community's efforts to halt violence and advance peace are not making notable contributions and improving in their own right. Indeed, the mere growth in number, scale, and variety of peacekeeping and peacebuilding interventions undertaken by the international community signals

concerted effort aimed at strengthening the world's commitment, approaches, and tools to reduce human violence and war. Research over recent years indicates that the international community is improving its ability to end wars through mediation and negotiated settlement, even if its ability to prevent new wars still lags behind (Woocher 2009). "Peacebuilding" as a field has seen significant expansion in its development of strong theory, research, and practice, and it continues to innovate at a rapid pace. The UN Peacebuilding Commission has improved the way it operates and demonstrated important contributions in Liberia and Burundi. The non-governmental peacebuilding community has grown exponentially and now operates in conflict situations around the world providing analysis, training, mediation, facilitation, capacity-building and other direct and indirect support to peace processes. No doubt many lives have been saved and improved by the growing panoply of actors engaged and efforts underway. However, this progress is contrasted by serious shortcomings and problematic trends in the field as well.

Among current critiques of the peacebuilding field, one emerging area of significant debate revolves around how the international community engages with local actors. Important flaws in current approaches are being revealed through case studies and evaluations of peacebuilding efforts (Autesserre 2006; Peace Direct 2012), while scholars of peace and conflict studies are debating the very nature of peacebuilding approaches (Jabri 2013; Funk 2012; Richmond 2013). Critics point to a liberal interventionist bias that dominates the field and assumes solutions to conflict need to

be driven from the outside, represented largely by Western ideology and undertaken by actors and resources from the global North directed into the global South (Jabri 2013; Liden 2013). Interventions designed and directed by external actors are, according to these critics, too often superimposed upon local contexts for which they may not be appropriate, leading to failure to improve the peace, or worse, actually increased harm (Funk 2012, Donais 2011, MacGinty and Richmond 2013). As Nathan Funk points out, “Activities undertaken in the name of peacebuilding have often marginalized local actors, proceeded in ways that did not adequately respond to local expectations, and at times replaced one set of problems with another” (Funk 2012, p. 392). This post-liberal critique of peacebuilding suggests the field fails to recognize from the outset the capacity and ongoing reality of people choosing peace amid violence, assuming that outsiders need to motivate and provide the means for those choices to be made.

In her in-depth case study of the UN’s peace operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2002-2006, Severine Autesserre points to a “dominant peacebuilding culture” embedded in the international system that ignores the importance of local violence and in turn marginalizes local peacebuilders. Her work reveals how the international community’s focus on liberal peace (achieved largely through elections) and national and international issues (addressed at macro policy levels) ultimately failed to address the key drivers of violence (which were often local) and undermined much-needed local peacebuilding efforts (ie, peace agency) (Autesserre 2012). Growing evidence demonstrates how failures to deliver peace

through external interventions often derive from problems such as a lack of recognition or understanding of local knowledge and capacities; cookie-cutter technical solutions that do not fit specific contexts; and, the creation of parallel economies and systems of actors that undermine local capacities for peace (Donais 2011). Contributing to these failures is an inadequate understanding of how people are already acting for peace in conflict contexts, why they are doing so, and what outside actors could do to support and expand their efforts.

As debate grows within the field itself and pressure mounts from donors and policymakers to demonstrate greater impact and better returns on peacebuilding, calls are increasing for reorienting the field away from externally driven interventions toward more effective locally-led approaches that are less costly and more sustainable. Some foundations are shifting funding toward more direct support to local initiatives, practitioners are seeking to improve their own ways of engaging local actors, and policy discussions are raising local peacebuilding questions<sup>6</sup>. In this context, research and practice focusing on locally-led approaches to peacebuilding provides a useful grounding for seeking to understand why and how people choose peace amid violence.

### ***Going Local: Peace Agency in Action***

As Anderson (2013), Boulding (2000), Lederach (1997, 2005), Richmond ((2011, 2012) and others have written in different ways, people are acting for peace even in the worst situations of violence and human strife, and these community-led efforts are

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Local First initiative by Peace Direct at [www.localfirst.org.uk](http://www.localfirst.org.uk) and USAID's *Local Solutions* paper, 2014.

fundamental to initiating and sustaining processes toward greater peace. Lederach's theoretical framing of peacebuilding as a process linking community, local leadership, and elites in society has shaped the way we understand what the field encompasses, while his decades of work with and documentation of local peacebuilding efforts shines a spotlight on the capacities of communities in the midst of conflict to find creative solutions for sustaining or advancing peaceful transformation (Lederach 1997, 2005). Boulding's work on imaging peace and understanding the existence of peace cultures through history affirms the perpetual existence of individuals and communities working for peace (Boulding 2006). Growing literature on zones of peace, infrastructures for peace, peace committees, and other indigenously-designed initiatives to create community-level mechanisms for preventing and mitigating violence demonstrate the reality that peace agency is alive and well in societies across the world (Mitchell and Hancock 2012; Van Tongeren 2013). Case studies from Colombia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Philippines, and elsewhere that illuminate some of the strategies communities employ – from engaging armed actors to mobilizing faith communities to employing nonviolent actions - provide further evidence that peace agency is a common phenomenon across cultures and geography, though its specific form and function may differ.

What are the motivations behind these efforts? A number of peace scholars from different faith backgrounds have focused on the role of religion as a motivating factor. Scholars like Scott Appleby, Marc Gopin, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, and Andrea

Bartoli, have written about the importance of beliefs, values and spiritual ethics, as well as local religious leadership and faith communities, in motivating believers to demonstrate peace agency amid conflict (Abu-Nimer 2003; Appleby 2000; Bartoli 2005; Gopin 2000;). This literature provides useful insight into the ways in which particular teachings and traditions from major faiths – Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism – can act as motivating factors for peace, as well as the role of religious leadership and communities in helping to encourage and sustain peace efforts amid violent conflict. The historic peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites, and Brethren) have been well-recognized for their role as peacemakers in various contexts, often working closely with or as part of local communities, but in fact all major world religions can claim some role in motivating peace efforts. Common values across all major faith traditions such as compassion, tolerance, non-violence, forgiveness, and justice are all sources of inspiration and sustenance for many individuals and communities that take up a cause for peace. Religion can act as an important source of strengthening values and beliefs toward peace, providing a social organizing structure that often survives through war, creating a platform for leadership, and promoting aspects of individual and group identity to support peacemaking (Moix 2014).

While important in lifting up the contributions of religion to peacemaking, this growing area of peace literature provides only limited answers to help explain peace agency. Research and practice around faith-based peacemaking arose partly in response to growing attention to the negative use of religion in fueling violent conflict,

the dark side of religion's role within conflict environments. As such, the literature does not focus on unearthing the multiple motivations and means that may lie behind broader, and often secular, phenomena of peace agency, but focuses particularly on faith-based actors and the values that drive them. This is certainly helpful in describing one slice of peace agency, but does not provide a more generally applicable theory of why and how individuals who may not be motivated by faith choose peace. It is also possible that individuals who are motivated to choose peace are also motivated toward faith traditions that emphasize peaceful values and encourage peacemaking, confusing cause and correlation.

Of note for examining peace agency, two scholar-practitioners, John Paul Lederach and Mary Anderson, have spent years developing intentional theory and practice focused on supporting community-based actors in their efforts for peace. They have continually reminded the field of the need to understand, support, and engage local people and approaches to building peace if the field hopes to reduce unintentional harm and ensure sustainable processes for peace and reconciliation become embedded in societies. In her most recent work, *Opting Out of War*, Anderson examines 14 communities that chose not to engage in violence, and in some instances to actively work to spread peace, within civil war contexts. She points to core means and motivations related to community cohesion, leadership, consultation, communication, and a willingness and ability to engage with armed groups as common factors across the experiences of these communities. Notably, the study finds international involvement

to have played little to no role in the choices these communities made to avoid violence and, in some cases, actively work for peace.

Anderson's book provides a critical jumping off point and inspiration for understanding peace agency, concluding:

*The experiences of these nonwar communities remind us that options exist. They remind us that capacities exist. They teach us that communities of people have the agency to shape things, even in the face of seemingly awful odds, to preserve the values they share and their ways of life. These lessons are not trivial.*

*(Anderson 2013, p. 176)*

This suggests not just moral beliefs at play in motivating actions, but a quite rational approach seeking to protect values that are important to a community and preserve their own existence. Calls for peace for the sake of ending suffering of one's own group or protecting children and other innocent bystanders are often heard within the context of war. Peace agency, then, can be a matter of rational choice and practical need for an individual or community threatened by the encroachment of violence and seeking a way to avoid suffering and loss for themselves and future generations.

Other emerging scholars like Oliver Kaplan of Denver University and Helen Berents of the University of Queensland are also building the evidence base for peace agency through particular case studies. Examining communities in Colombia and the Philippines that remained peaceful amid war, Kaplan is adding to the field's understanding that local actors can and do demonstrate agency even within war

situations, acting for peace on their own, often without external support or intervention (Kaplan 2013). In her research on youth in Colombia, Berents finds that children demonstrate peace agency through the creative use of spaces available to them to make sense of the violence around them and foster a different, more constructive environment (Berents 2014). These spaces in turn provide important arenas and resources for sustaining positive engagement and interaction across potential conflict lines.

In her book, *This Light That Pushes Me: Stories of African Peacebuilders*, Laura Shipler Chico profiles the personal experiences and photographs of nearly 40 individuals from across the continent who are actively working for peace amid or in the aftermath of war and genocide (Shipler Chico 2013). The stories, often offered in the peacebuilders' own words, illustrate a wide range of motivating factors behind their efforts, including religious values (many are Quaker), transformational personal experiences (some were child soldiers or were saved by others), hope for a different future, and the influence and relationship with particular people in their families and communities. Shipler Chico does not, however, idealize these peace agents. She recently reflected, "When I was working in Rwanda I always said 'There are no heroes here.' People did things for complex reasons. You heard stories of the same people who hid people in their houses to save them coming home at night with blood-soaked shirts" (first-hand interview, Aug. 3, 2014). Although many of the peacebuilders she interviewed are part of the Quaker church, they would not necessarily consider

themselves pacifists and most underwent a personal transformation of some kind before taking up peace work. They became active agents for peace because of the horrors of violence they experienced, moments of transformative vision or hope, or a sense of religious or spiritual calling. This echoes Elise Boulding's concept of a developmental process behind peace agency (Boulding 1989).

For Boulding (also Quaker), the key to choosing peace was not religious in nature but rather the practical ability to imagine, or "image", a different future – a form of intellectual or cognitive agency to break through the powerful realities of violent systems. Through years of workshops and practical research, Boulding developed her own theory and practice of "imagining the future" as a way of encouraging peace agency. The ability to envision a different, more peaceful reality than one currently experiences provides a source of hope and motivation that can support peace agency. She explains: "Knowing what you are working for affects your choices and what you do now. If you are reaching a difficult decision point in your own life, then think about that image of what you are working for and which way to go in relation to that. This would not necessarily answer it, but it would help" (Portilla 2006). Hers is essentially a theory of hope. She suggests the work of building peace is not a specialized field requiring particular study or faith motivation, but a choice that can be motivated, and in fact cultivated through practice. It is, as others have proposed, an option that can be pursued by anyone (Boulding 2010; Lederach 2005).

Lederach proposes a critical factor behind peacebuilding is *moral imagination* – “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not exist” (Lederach 2005, p. 29). He echoes Boulding’s focus on creative imagining while adding the elements of vocation, conscience, a search for simplicity amid complexity, and a willingness to risk. In over three decades of peacebuilding work around the world with local communities, Lederach finds these capacities exist in some form in every context he has encountered and that they are a vital part of the regular patterns of community life, even within highly violent situations, and critical sources for stimulating and sustaining peace. Berents concludes that it is a type of “everyday peacebuilding” that is available and active among youth in Colombia. Such local peacebuilding is “local” not by geography but because, as Richmond and Mitchell argue, it belongs to the realm of everyday activity: “the local is the site of various forms of power, resources, and agency” that can be applied toward peace (Richmond and Mitchell 2013, p. 11). This attention within the local peacebuilding literature to the role of “ordinary” actors choosing peace amid systems of violence is an important response to the post-liberal critiques of the field and its growing professionalization. As Roger MacGinty has argued, the concept and practice of “everyday peace” is a critical factor in how people navigate and survive within divided societies, especially in the face of failed international peace interventions (MacGinty 2014).

Still, if peace agency is more ordinary and accessible than we may realize, why do only some people choose it and others do not? Why do motivating factors such as spiritual values or an ability to envision a different future encourage some individuals to take action, within some situations, but not others? What exactly are those “forms of power, resources, and agency” alive in the ordinary local realities of conflict situations, and how do we tap them more intentionally to nurture peace? For more insight into these questions, we turn now to a consideration of social agency and its role within systems of violence.

### ***The Role of Agency in Choosing Peace***

In addition to the post-liberal critique of peacebuilding and growing emphasis on local and community-led peace efforts, the field of social agency sheds important light on why and how people might choose peace amid violence. Social agency can be defined generally as the capacity of individuals and groups to act based on their own intentions and self-direction. It touches on issues of free will, intentionality, leadership, conscience, and choice. The concept of agency dates back to the Enlightenment, Descartes and Immanuel Kant, and focuses on the role of individuals in shaping society. From a social agency perspective, it is the capacity of individuals to act of their own volition – to accept, reject, or change the the status quo - that can form and transform human relations and society. The role of agency was later overshadowed, by the rise of structural theories positing that broader forces – normative, political, economic, social, and environmental – shape the individual’s behavior, not the other way around.

A more recent return to social agency theory has again challenged the concept that behavior is driven only by external forces and expands our understanding of agency to include more attention to the interactive processes between self, group, and environment. Giddens structuration theory is useful here in helping link individual behavior, collective or group relationships, and structural forces for a more nuanced approach to agency that moves beyond the traditional Western focus on agency as individual independent action (Giddens 1984). Exploring agency as both an individual and collective phenomena will be important in trying to understand what might constitute specific forms of “peace agency.” Case studies and examples from the literature include both individual resisters and peacebuilders, as well as groups and communities that prevented violence and protected collectively. Even individuals are rarely able to take risks or act against the norms and systems around them without some important relational and group connections to support and sustain them. But much remains unexplained as to why, how, and under what conditions individuals and groups exercise agency.

The field is still developing theoretical foundations and empirical evidence to explain agency as a multi-dimensional, multi-layered phenomena, which span cognitive and psychosocial explanations as well as socio-psychological and inter-relational approaches (Bandura 1989, Van Lange et al 2012). Bandura, a leading thinker in the modern field of social agency, has examined the cognitive and psychosocial processes that lead to the exercise of agency. “Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none

is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives." (Bandura 1989, p. 1175). Bandura further explains the "staying power" of a "resilient self-belief system" that allows people to persist in their efforts despite set backs or rejections by others. This has important implications for understanding why and how people act for peace in the midst of violent conflict. Social agency theory suggests that individuals and communities who believe that peaceful actions will have a positive impact and help mitigate the violence will be more likely to understand such actions and to persist in them despite the risks and failures they may face. In other words, believing peace works is critical to developing an internal motivation toward it, and putting that belief into practice helps nurture the capacity to act upon it in an ongoing fashion. This correlates well with Boulding's theory and experience in carrying out workshops that help people imagine a peaceful future and develop a set of practical steps that could realize it. And it echoes Lederach, Bartoli, and others that peace is fostered and sustained through internal and interactive processes. It does not, however, explain what leads some people to believe their actions can make a difference and others to doubt or deny that capacity.

While debates continue as to the internal sources and external motivators of agency, the concept that individuals, as well as groups, have the capacity to act of their own intention, to resist the broader forces of the systems around them, and, in doing so, to have an impact on their environment, is instrumental for forming a theory of peace agency. Conflict resolution scholars have begun to examine issues of agency

within the context of peacebuilding. That violent conflict constrains and may negatively shape the ability to act from one's own intentions is a well-recognized and very powerful reality. Self-determined choices and actions are inevitably limited when lives are at stake and systems of oppression at play. That agency can be and still is exercised against those negative constraints remains true as well, and is a growing area of research for peace and conflict scholars. Increasingly, research that focuses on the role of local actors in conflict engages in the discourse and examination of "agency" as a critical factor in reconfiguring the field away from external approaches to increased support for locally-led peacebuilding.

For example, Oliver Richmond has argued for a reconceptualization of peace through the lens of "bottom up" action derived from the propensity of non-state actors within situations of conflict to actively strive to halt and prevent violence and construct more cooperative future relations – in other words, to exercise peace agency (Richmond 2005). In *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*, he and Audra Mitchell examine 16 case studies through the lens of *agency* of local actors, concluding the need for a transformational shift in the field away from a liberally interventionist agenda toward a focus on supporting peacebuilding efforts that acknowledge and empower the ability of local actors to resolve their own disputes and construct their own futures (Richmond and Mitchell 2012, emphasis added). Mary Anderson employs the language of agency, and David Chandler has recently argued that a "fundamental shift" is needed in the field to recognize "the primary source of *agency*

for peacebuilding as the local actors themselves, who often must work against the problematic approaches brought by outsiders” (Anderson 2013, p. 92, emphasis added). That is not to suggest agency is always positive or peaceful. The role of local actors in exercising agency can include taking up arms, engaging in direct violence, and spoiling peace efforts. Agency has its dark side as well.

Still, emerging theory around social agency and peacebuilding suggests that maintaining a capacity for self-directed action amid and against systems of violence – to *choose* peace- is an important factor in stimulating and sustaining peace efforts, and it is often reinforced and strengthened through collective processes. In her study of communities opting out of war, Anderson explains, “They make abundantly clear that the ability to stay out of war is not an issue of scale: rather, it is indeed the result of conscious, collective decision and choices” (Anderson 2013, p. 6). Anderson’s study, like Kaplan’s and others, examine the collective agency of communities to remain peaceful or reject violence within a broader system. Within such communities, the role of leadership, resisters, and outliers is often acknowledged as an important part of the collective processes that unfold which allow this group peace agency to override pressures toward violence. The role of individuals exerting agency then may be one factor contributing toward broader collective agency. An ability to recognize and tap one’s internal power of agency – the capacity to act out of intentional choice – may be a critical ingredient for understanding how some people act for peace, while others may

not, and how they may motivate and engage with others to spread and strengthen those choices.

Agency can also serve as an internal resource for overcoming the constraints of a violent system and accepting risks for peace. From his in-depth research into strategies of the nonviolent Peasant Worker Community of the Carare River in Colombia to maintain peace during decades of war, Kaplan concludes, “civilians are not powerless and can effectively organize against repression to make life in lawless wartime settings a little more predictable and ordered” (Kaplan 2013, p. 366). The work of Peace Direct, a UK-based organization that finds, funds, and supports local peacebuilders, affirms these findings. Through its Insight on Conflict project, Peace Direct has engaged local correspondents in 43 countries who have helped to identify over 1400 locally-led peacebuilding organizations, of which many are small associations established and sustained through hundreds of volunteer hours and the leadership of visionary peace entrepreneurs (see [www.peacedirect.org](http://www.peacedirect.org)). The plethora of self-initiated efforts to resist and positively transform violence in conflict situations around the world suggests a kind of peace agency is at work individually and collectively even more than is often acknowledged. But, how does it arise?

Related to social agency, Jerry Sternin’s studies of *positive deviance* provide a useful contribution to our inquiry. A public health practitioner working internationally to implement programs that sought to shift behaviors to promote better health, Sternin realized that in nearly every situation in which he worked there were some individuals

already demonstrating innovative and beneficial behaviors on their own that improved the health of themselves and those around them. They may have been a minority within a population, but they existed. Often their positive behaviors were not the ones developed and being implemented by the external health programs Sternin was implementing, but rather through self-led approaches that drew from local traditions, experience, and culture. Sternin began studying these “positive deviants” for insights to improving his programs and became an advocate for redesigning development approaches to identify and expand upon the positive behavioral practices that could be found already present within societies (Sternin 2002).

Fundamental to Sternin’s theory, and linked to the “everyday” approach to peacebuilding of Boulding, Lederach, Berents and others, is that those who exhibit positive deviance are not, as far as we understand, particularly special or unique in any way. They are “ordinary” people who compare in most every way with their neighbors, except they have chosen to act differently in a particular realm or activity of life. This “normalcy” parallels the conclusions of Anderson, Lederach, and Boulding that while the actions people take for peace often seem extraordinary from the outside, the people who take them are not out of the ordinary and in fact often do not perceive their actions as such. Clearly they exhibit different behavior than many of their peers that must be stimulated by particular motivations, but what they do is not something others are incapable of doing. Indeed, individuals who take risks for peace to rescue others or

prevent violence often reflect that they assume they were simply doing what anyone else would do under the same circumstances.

Combined with the concept of agency, positive deviance provides another helpful theoretical foundation. Traditional conflict theories posit that conflict arises from the individual pursuit of differing interests or needs, that is, by struggles over agency and power between individuals or groups. Positive deviance adds texture to the picture by suggesting that within conflict systems, peaceful interests, needs, and behaviors also exist inherently. People choosing peace in the midst of violence may be deviating from the choices that many others, perhaps even the majority, are making, within a conflict context, but they are often similar in important ways to demonstrations of peace agency in other contexts. Their actions deviate from the norm, but in an ordinary way. The Positive Deviance Initiative ([www.positivedeviance.org](http://www.positivedeviance.org)) explains: “Positive Deviance is based on the observation that in every community there are certain individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviors and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers, while having access to the same resources and facing similar or worse challenges.” Even more intriguing, research by the Initiative, Sternin, and a growing field of study related to positive deviance is showing that focusing attention and resources on expanding those behaviors – as opposed to just working to stop bad behaviors – can have a significant transformational change and “spreading” effect in organizations and communities (Sternin 2002).

This is not all that surprising. We know by experience and instinct that some people find positive solutions to problems even when others do not, and we know good examples help others improve (demonstration effect). What is particularly interesting about the application of positive deviance theory to an inquiry on choosing peace, is that it may help us examine and understand individual peace agency as part of what are also collective processes by which positive behavior can emerge, spread, and grow. If positively deviant behavior for peace has the potential to spread, then individual choices and actions can stimulate broader shifts toward peace. Similarly, collective demonstrations of peace agency can impact individual choices, leading to potential virtuous and expanding cycles of resilience within communities and broader society. These are difficult processes to trace or demonstrate conclusively, but it very likely does happen and positive deviance theory is offering some evidence. As such, it may help address the challenge that Anderson has expressed of how we link “peace writ small” efforts to enacting “peace writ large” (Anderson 2000). It can provide one bridging possibility between the too often rigid divide we tend to draw in theory and practice of micro (individual) and macro (system) level conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Creating this bridge is important for understanding peace agency. Motivations and means are rarely static in human behavior, and even less so in highly volatile contexts such as active conflict or violence. Structuration theory reminds us of the perpetual interplay between the micro and macro, individual and collective, and the challenge of creating research methods that help reveal the paths of interaction

between the two (Giddens 1984). Positive deviance theory does not yet answer critical questions of why (motivations) and how (means) some individuals and communities choose peace amid violence -, but it does suggest that those choices are likely to arise indigenously within communities and that they can have broader societal – spreading – impact, if they are recognized and supported effectively. Further study of choosing peace amid violence should strive to examine not only the individual motivations and means behind specific actions, but also how those choices become part of and can affect broader social processes. This calls for a relational approach to studying peace agency as an interactive phenomena that cannot be simply narrowed down to a list of common motivations and means. Exploring the inter-active reality of peace agency as a developmental and ongoing process occurring within and among people within a changing context can help us move from thinking of choosing peace as the isolated, deviant choices that some individuals make within a system of violence to examining peace agency as also a social, or structural, phenomena that exists within and as part of conflict environments.

### ***Synthesis***

Based on this review of research and practice related to peacebuilding and agency, we can begin to draw some initial conclusions and hypotheses about why and how people choose peace. First, we can and should affirm that peace agency exists. A growing body of literature is documenting its occurrence across a diverse range of geographic, cultural, and conflict contexts as an indigenous and organic human

phenomena. Given the heavy focus of our field on studying the violent side of human nature, it bears repeating that people *do* choose peace in the midst of violence. As a field, we are also increasingly recognizing that too often the local realities of peace agency are neglected, obscured, and even undermined by dominant externally-driven peacebuilding approaches. We know this is a problem and an increasing number of us are seeking to correct it. Better understanding the sources and staying power of local peace agency may help us do so.

We do not have definitive answers regarding driving motivations of some people, and not others, to opt for peace, but we can propose some broad-stroke categories worth further study. *Values and beliefs*, including but not limited to religious teachings, that emphasize compassion, tolerance, and non-violent problem-solving as norms or ideals of behavior surely play a role motivating some, though not all, peace agents. Related to this is the role of *conscience* within conflict situations. *Rational interest and practical need* to change a situation from violent to less violent in order to protect one's loved ones and community are also likely motivators. Peace agency need not be driven by spiritual ideals, it may in fact be a matter of realistic cost-benefit ratio, everyday common sense, and a desire to end suffering and offer a better future for the next generation. It may also be stimulated by *transformational experiences* that compel individuals to shift from complacency or participation in violence to active peacemaking. The personal testimonies of many peacebuilders point to this kind of personal transformation from direct experience, positive or negative. A fifth category of

*relational processes*, or particular interactions with others - whether enemy or friend, victim or leader - stimulate and sustain peace actions and are also likely an ongoing and dynamic motivating factor in peace agency. Finally, our review suggests there may be an inherent category of *positive deviance* at work within most communities, whereby some people, often a minority, naturally seek out and develop more effective responses to problems without specific or clearly identifiable motivating factors. Further study is needed to delineate particular aspects of these six categories, explain how they move people from motivation to action, explore under what circumstances each may have more salience or import, and understand how they interact with each other and within complex social systems.

While seemingly simple, the question of what motivates peace agency requires more than a strictly psychoanalytic or cognitive approach for it demands attention to both the internal drives of individuals, as well as motivating factors that develop and interact with individuals from the external context, group processes, and structural forces. Academic research and peacebuilding practice are increasingly affirming that motivations exist and drive people to act intentionally for peace within conflict systems, but teasing out precisely why people do what they do, including taking extreme risks, requires further study. Further research aimed at understanding motivations for peace agency should ideally link analysis of the micro- and the macro-, while examining the relative influencing roles of varying internal and external drivers of behavior, whether belief systems, specific experiences, or relational contexts. This is an ambitious goal and

one not fully achieved by the study that follows, but it recognizes that peace agency is not a result of solely individual, group, or structural processes, but rather a complex and ongoing process of interaction across levels of human experience and over time and space. Structuration theory and the spreading effects revealed through positive deviance studies may provide some direction for designing research toward that goal.

Turning to *how* people choose peace, what resources they draw on internally and externally, this review suggests a few initial conclusions and many more unanswered questions. First, peace agency may be extraordinarily ordinary, with a wide range of resources upon which people are able to draw to initiate and help sustain it. Peace literature suggests that capabilities to *imagine and hope* for a different future are important, as is the ongoing *practice* of doing so. Peace agency should be viewed as a dynamic and developmental process that spans individuals and communities, requires, and benefits from, ongoing practical application of imagining a different reality than already exists. *Community and collaborative processes* are also prevalent across the literature related to local peacebuilding and an important part of how individuals and groups are able to take risks and pursue continued peacemaking efforts despite difficulties and even direct loss and failures. The concept of *social agency* itself, or the ability to act from self-directed intention, whether as individuals or collectives, within a violent system, is a fundamental aspect of how people choose peace and sustain those choices over time. Finally, the *spreading effect* of positive deviance suggests that peace

agency can be initiated and widened through interaction with others and systemic processes themselves.

Still, clearly identifying internal and external means for sustaining peace agency remains a significant research challenge. The term “means” itself is clearly an imperfect word to capture the reality of peace agency as a complicated ongoing and developmental process. It is not simply the one act of witnessing for peace that we should seek to understand, but also the internal and external cognitive, experiential, material, and relational resources upon which people who exercise peace agency draw in order to continue their efforts through difficulties. Studying such means of peace agency should help us make the link between its personal, group, and societal aspects. While new case studies are illuminating some of the methods and strategies that communities employ in choosing peace over war, explanations of the complex interplay of means needed to initiate and sustain those efforts are still wanting. Moreover, the reality that choices for peace are often combined with choices to participate in violent systems in some way needs to be recognized and examined. People who choose peace do not always do so consistently or purely. Indeed the restraining nature of violent systems against peace agency suggests choosing peaceful acts are a hard won and difficult endeavor that likely requires compromise along the way.

Finally, the question of how others, particularly those outside a conflict context (ie, the international community), can best support and collaborate with those individuals exerting peace agency is perhaps the most under-addressed within current

literature and practice. Ultimately, it is this question, however, which may matter most. Given that the current peacebuilding field is dominated by interventions from the global North into conflict environments, improving our understanding of how to recognize, support, and strengthen local peace agency is critical for improving the impacts of peacebuilding efforts and addressing some of the quite valid post-liberal critiques of the field. Individuals and communities working within a local context of violence can provide critical insights not only into better approaches to address the direct realities of conflicts they are experiencing, but also into the broader structural violence that is often driven by policies and practices of the global North itself. If our hopes and intentions are in fact to create a more peaceful and just world, then recognizing our own complicity as outsiders within local systems of violence and learning how to collaborate more effectively to support community-led or local peace agency should be a top priority for our efforts and investments. The growing need to demonstrate positive impact in peacebuilding begs for more locally-led and sustainable approaches which can outlast the trends of front page conflicts and donor-driven interventions. An ethical imperative to support solutions that place those who are most directly impacted by conflict at the center, not the margins, of decision-making also suggests an urgent need for a fundamental flip in the field toward greater support for local peace agency and less reliance on external intervention.

At the same time, a local-only approach is not the solution. Peace agency is extremely difficult within systems that have turned violent, and local actors should not

be simply left on their own to find the means and motivations for it. The importance of working together as a global community across lines of geographic, resource, and power differences to collaborate for a more peaceful future suggests a need for creative re-imagination and transformation of peacebuilding approaches that link efforts more effectively and strengthen peace agency across all actors. We should strive not only to shed light on the interior contours of individual peace agency, but also, in some small way, to help reshape relationships between local and external actors as we work collectively to reveal and expand the peace that may already exist around, and within, us.

With this ambitious research agenda in mind (or perhaps setting it aside for more humble beginnings), we now turn to how this particular study was undertaken methodologically.

#### **D. How This Study Took Place (or Methodology)**

This project utilized a **collaborative action approach**, a **two-fold qualitative data collection process**, and **grounded theory analysis** to explore **three theory-building questions** related to the motivations and perspectives of local peacebuilders. Each element of this methodology is described in more detail through this chapter. However, before outlining the details of research design, it may be worth sharing some aspects of my own approach to the investigation and certain assumptions I carry with me as a researcher.

### ***Approach to Inquiry, or Values and Assumptions Revealed***

All research is inevitably shaped by the worldview, or paradigm, of the researcher, and my study is no exception. Rather than trying to suppress or sweep my assumptions and biases under the rug, I prefer to lay them out in the open so that they can be more easily recognized and, as much as possible, accounted for through the research process. Revealing my own research paradigm is also an attempt to intentionally reflect upon and make visible to the reader certain principles in the research design and conduct that are part of my own values-based research approach. These principles, and many of my own biases and assumptions, are shaped by my own Quaker faith as well as my own experiences in the peacebuilding field, as discussed elsewhere in this paper.

From the beginning of designing this research project, my hope was not to try to strip away my own biases or assume the role of neutral observer and analyst, but rather to approach this study from a paradigm of *appreciative inquiry* and *values-based research*, or what Shawn Wilson calls “relational accountability” (Wilson, 2008). Appreciative inquiry begins not from a problem-solving approach and questions around solving “what’s wrong” in a system, but rather from a starting point of recognizing the values already at work and seeking to envision the best that might emerge (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2010). It includes a strong focus on listening and discovering “with”, rather than subjective research “on”. Values-based research recognizes that the undertaking of rigorous academic inquiry is not meant simply as a theoretical and

intellectual exercise, but as a means to addressing real world problems and helping, if possible, to make the world a bit better of a place for all of us. A research paradigm of relational accountability demands that inquiry is approached “with” others, replacing the impossibility of pure objectivity with the potential of embracing relationship as a core source of learning.

In his study on indigenous research methods, Wilson describes how centuries of research on native communities by outsiders led to abusive policies and programs in part because it failed to take into account the fundamental differences in worldviews and epistemology of those communities themselves. In his words, the Western approach “focuses on problems, and often imposes outside solutions, rather than appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within” the communities (Wilson 2008, p 16). The peacebuilding field is increasingly, and unfortunately, guilty of a similar approach in the growing body of research into and programmatic work with (or “on”) local communities experiencing conflict. In her book, *Peaceland*, Autesserre describes a culture of the international peacebuilding field and how it relates, or more often fails to relate, to local communities in conflict that sounds hauntingly similar to the approach of even well-intended researchers studying Native communities a hundred years ago. As peacebuilding guru John Paul Lederach noted in a speech before the

annual meeting of the Alliance for Peacebuilding in 2016, “Our field has become dominated by template arrivals and extractive departures.”<sup>7</sup>

As an active practitioner in the field of peacebuilding and an aspiring Quaker peace scholar, I strove to embark on this study with a different approach than the one I have come to regularly critique within the peacebuilding field. I wanted not to simply extract information, knowledge, wisdom, data, from those people that I wanted “to study”, but to open a conversation with them, to listen as deeply and humbly as I could to their stories through their worldviews, and to acknowledge a real sense of responsibility that I have to them through this study, and merely because of who we each are and represent in the world. Conscious of my own position as a privileged white woman from the United States, with little experience of the daily realities faced by people living in the midst of violent conflict, I wanted to design a research method that would begin with attentive listening, push me toward deeper questioning of my own assumptions, and build on positive relationships for peace. I wanted, as much as possible, to craft a methodology that would hold me accountable to those relationships and the responsibility I carry to engage in research and use the results in ways that uphold my own values and the values of our field at its best. I was only partially successful in the end, partly due to my own short-comings and partly due to the reality that academic research is, inevitably, designed around power imbalances, and breaking down those imbalances is the job of many lifetimes.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from Lederach, John Paul. May 25, 2016. Keynote Address, Alliance for Peacebuilding Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

That said, the methodology of this project did include an intentional effort to design a research process with certain principles in mind that would help to rebalance, or at least reconfigure power dynamics and relational accountability of those involved in the generation of knowledge and its use. I also strove to demonstrate a reflective practice of persistent questioning of my own assumptions and worldview throughout the process; an openness to honestly recognizing my flaws and failures along the way (of which there were plenty); and, a willingness to change course when needed to realign methods with values and relationships.

The principles or values that I brought initially to designing and carrying out this research included:

- *Belief in the inherent goodness and worth of every individual, as well as a recognition of our flawed human nature and the capacity for evil that we all carry;*
- *An intentional favoring of relational and interactive processes, over neutral or detached ones;*
- *Trust in the ability of people to analyze and understand what motivates and sustains their choices and actions;*
- *Commitment to a process of collective truth-seeking grounded in self-reflection, appreciative listening, and cooperative action (ie, we learn more together than alone);*

- *A values-based approach to research that seeks to improve both our knowledge and practical action to help foster a more peaceful and just world; and,*
- *The belief that research should be inviting and accessible, utilizing language that is both easily understood and practically useful.*

By the end of the study (or the end of this phase of it, as the reflection, relationships, and knowledge generation carry on in many ways), I would add:

- *The beauty of each individual's gifts and struggles as a fundamental part of what makes learning fruitful and, ultimately, peace possible;*
- *The recognition that while societal power dynamics and injustices are always present, the willingness to acknowledge, challenge, and transform them is up to each of us;*
- *A belief that our individual and collective responsibility to the human dignity of each person may be our greatest resource for peace.*

The process of this research also shifted the traditional boundaries of subject-object. In many ways, Peace Direct and I became the subject of the study, as we consulted those who might be better viewed as the real experts in peacebuilding as to how we might better understand and improve our own place, power and practice in the field. The results of the study will, I hope, lift up the perspectives and voices of local peacebuilders, but it is also a reflective research project in which our own roles in the

post-colonial nature of the international peacebuilding field are acknowledged and begin to shift, while the positive contributions we can make are affirmed.

### ***Queries, Questions, and Qualitative Design***

This study was sparked by my interest in better understanding the overarching query: *How and why do some people choose to actively work for peace in the midst of violence, when many others around them do not?* More specifically, I wanted to explore three questions related to this big query that I thought might help us understand a bit better the drive and leadership of local peacebuilders, and how outsiders like myself, along with the broader collective referred to as “the international community”, could better support them. These three more focused research questions were:

- 1. How do individuals working for peace within situations of violent conflict understand their own internal motivations behind their choices/actions?***
- 2. How do they understand external factors that support and help sustain their peace efforts?***
- 3. How do they believe the international community can best support people choosing peace in their context?***

I chose to employ qualitative methods for gathering and analyzing data that might help answer these questions, working through both first-hand semi-structured interviews of a small, geographically diverse sample of local peacebuilders and with written responses to questions that were collected both prior to and during the study. More details on the data gathering and analysis process are below. The methodology

also utilized a grounded theory approach to then analyzing the data, out of a desire to give as much voice and take as much direction as possible from the perspectives of peacebuilders themselves. That said, from the beginning, I did carry certain “hunches” or “light hypotheses” with me into the study about these questions (which inevitably influenced my analysis of the interviews and responses) that are drawn from both the literature and personal experience and reflection over the years.

I framed my research questions intentionally to ask not what *are* the motivations and means for choosing peace, but rather how do those individuals who can be viewed as choosing peace understand what drives their choices and how do they believe others can support them in making such choices. This presents a number of definitional questions which the research design described below seeks to clarify. For instance, who are “individuals working for peace”? How do we identify them and distinguish them from many people doing good things for their communities? What do we mean by “choosing peace”? What about people who once engaged in violence and then changed course to take up working for peace, do they qualify? It also approaches the study as an inquiry into what individuals who are already engaged in peace efforts *believe* or *perceive* motivates them, as opposed to a more traditional scientific research question that would seek to understand from an objective study of their actions or perspectives what *does* actually motivate them. This may raise questions of selectivity bias or validity of results, but it is an intentional approach to shaping research questions that can help reveal something I believe is missing from our field.

Despite the reality that many of the most immediate choices between violence and peace are faced and made by those living within the immediate realities of violent conflict, those living outside these contexts continue to dominate the scholarship and resources directed toward peacebuilding. As the practice and study of peacebuilding begins to focus more attention on the local dynamics at play in national and regional conflicts, the importance of understanding local perspectives and potentials for peace is gaining ground. In his study of local peace committees and national peacebuilding, Andries Odendaal argues for greater attention to strengthening local systems of resilience against violence as a critical and under-attended aspect of helping peace agreements stick at a national level. Doing so, however, requires understanding local conflict dynamics and capacities for peace, which are not merely “smaller clones of the master cleavage” in a society (2013, p. 32). “Local dynamics and local agency, therefore, have an impact on the manner in which both violence and peace unfold” (Odendaal, 2013, p. 17). Put more simply, as a colleague recently asked when I described the complicated, time-consuming, and expensive processes undertaken by a large donor to determine what kinds of peacebuilding activities they should fund in a country: “Why don’t they just ask the locals?”

I also chose an approach of appreciative listening and seeking to represent the perspectives of local peacebuilders as simply that, their perspectives, out of my own personal desire to learn directly from the experience and insights of people who have chosen peace in the midst of violence, and because I have not encountered studies

dedicated to examining in-depth how local peacebuilders understand their own choices and what they believe external actors can do to best support them. If we do know that “peace writ small” is important for “peace writ large”, and we recognize that understanding the dynamics behind peace writ small requires its own examination, then asking those working for peace within a violent conflict system what motivates and sustains them in that work is, in itself, important. It can perhaps help shift the current imbalance away from externally driven analyses and approaches to addressing conflict toward greater attention to locally-led understanding and approaches to peace. It may provide a means of reflection for those peace agents themselves that could strengthen their efforts. It can improve peacebuilding programming by outsiders, as well as inform policy decisions geared toward supporting local agents for change. Finally, it may help unearth similar motivating factors expressed across a variety of conflict contexts that might tell a larger story, while helping lift up the voices, knowledge, and experiences of local peacebuilders as central to the future development of peacebuilding theory, research and practice.

### ***Collaborative Action Research***

This project was designed as collaborative action research with Peace Direct, an organization that works with local peacebuilders in situations of violent conflict around the world to support their work locally and to promote their voices internationally.<sup>8</sup> By

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<sup>8</sup> I have chosen to describe it as a collaborative action research rather than a traditional participatory action research project because the question, or problem, being explored was initiated by me. Unlike truly participatory action research, whereby the problem to be solved or question to be researched is

“collaborative action research” I mean a process of knowledge generation, exploration, and analysis with others for the purpose of improving the practical efforts of those engaged in the research and the broader field within which we work. This draws from the long tradition of “action research” in the social sciences, which Margaret Riel explains this way:

*“The subjects of action research are the actions taken, the resulting change, and the transformation of thinking, acting and feeling by the persons enacting the change. While the design of action research may originate with an individual, the process of change is always social. Over time, the action researcher often extends the arena of change to a widening group of stakeholders. The goal is a deeper understanding of the factors of change which result in positive personal and professional change.”<sup>9</sup>*

The goals of action research have also been explained as:

- *“The improvement of professional practice through continual learning and progressive problem solving;*
- *A deep understanding of practice and the development of a well specified theory of action;*
- *An improvement in the community in which one's practice is embedded through participatory research.”<sup>10</sup>*

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developed from the start by those with whom the study will be undertaken, the question of why and how people choose peace originated through my own search and I am now seeking a collaborative approach to action-oriented research to pursue it.

<sup>9</sup> Riel, Margaret. Understanding Action Research, Center for Collaborative Action, Pepperdine University, 2010 (last revision, Sept. 2013) <http://cadres.pepperdine.edu/ccar/define.html>

<sup>10</sup> Whitney, D. & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2010) *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry (2nd Ed.)*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Peace Direct ([www.peacedirect.org](http://www.peacedirect.org)) is a UK-based organization with a small US presence that provides funding and technical support to local peacebuilders in nine conflict-affected countries around the world, while also promoting the voices and work of local peacebuilders globally through projects such as the Insight on Conflict website ([www.insightonconflict.org](http://www.insightonconflict.org)) and direct advocacy with donors, governments, and multilateral institutions. Peace Direct's approach is guided by a belief that local people understand their context best and can develop the best approaches to addressing local problems. Peace Direct provides funding for projects that its partners design and develop themselves, assisting and supporting along the way, but following the lead of the local peacebuilders themselves. It works with partners to support them in developing the capacities they desire over time to strengthen their work. In addition to its current ten long-term partnerships with local organizations, Peace Direct also engages Local Peacebuilding Experts in countries to map local peacebuilding groups and publish the information online on Insight on Conflict, as a resource for practitioners and policymakers and to lift up local peacebuilders and their work. Peace Direct has a strong reputation with its partners, having ranked first in the Keystone Accountability Survey two years running (an independent survey that asks global South organizations what they think of their global North donors), and a growing reputation internationally with policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners.

I wanted to collaborate with Peace Direct on the research because of its extensive relationships and connections with local peacebuilders around the globe, its

commitment to supporting local peacebuilders as central to any peace processes and to challenging the dominant trends toward externally driven solutions, and because I have had a direct relationship myself with the organization since 2012. Serving first on its US board and now as the US Senior Representative, I have become part of what we affectionately refer to as the “Peace Direct family”, which includes the local peacebuilding partners, experts, staff, board, volunteers, consultants, and supports of the organization. Given my research interests, Peace Direct was a natural collaborator from my perspective from the beginning and readily embraced the project as relevant to its own organizational research and learning agenda. Through the research process, we agreed, I would help the organization collect the stories and perspectives of local peacebuilding partners that could, if agreeable to the participants, be utilized as resources to help promote their work and the role, needs, and capacities of local peacebuilders with Peace Direct’s global audience.

In addition, the research project will be used to inform Peace Direct’s own understanding of its partners, their perspectives and needs, and the organization’s programming and practice. Peace Direct also has its own focus on applied research related to local peacebuilding and welcomed the project in the belief it would provide benefits for its partners and others in the broader international peacebuilding world with whom it can share the results. Through the process, and as my own role within Peace Direct has grown, we have discovered new ways we might use the research and are collaborating to ensure it can be as beneficial as possible to practitioners.

This study is described as collaborative action research, rather than a pure action research or participatory action research (PAC), because I had already formulated my research questions on my own in approaching Peace Direct and we did not engage in the most participatory processes of action research that would have included the interviewees and local peacebuilder respondents in the very formulation of research inquiry and design process from the beginning, with the goal of addressing a problem or need in their own work. Rather, this research project was collaborative at an organizational level with Peace Direct in design and conduct, and included one of Peace Direct's most seasoned Local Peacebuilding Experts, as well as the Head of Research and Engagement, as part of an advisory committee, but did not directly involve the local peacebuilders in design and analysis. This does, of course, compromise in some way the principles that I laid out in the opening of this chapter. It keeps the knowledge management and use primarily in the hands of the global North/West (ie, myself and Peace Direct), and treats the local peacebuilders to some extent as "subjects" and "sample sets" of the study. However, I have been encouraged and humbled throughout the research process at the response of the local peacebuilders whom I interviewed, their genuine openness to honoring me with their stories and insights, despite my sometimes feeling like yet another Western researcher subjecting them to my curiosities, and their affirmations that the research is worthwhile to them and indeed a joint process. This has re-enforced the sense that Peace Direct has indeed been able to

create a different space and relationship with its partners than many organizations, one that truly does feel like a mutually accountable community and family first.

### ***Data Collection***

The study used a three-fold qualitative data collection process that drew on different ways in which Peace Direct engages with local peacebuilders. The first involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 local peacebuilders from a geographically diverse set of 12 countries that have been impacted by or are experiencing ongoing violent conflict of some kind. The second involved the review of a sample set of 40 written responses to questions related to the research questions that were included in Peace Direct's annual global small grants competition, called Tomorrow's Peacebuilders, over three years (2013-2015). The intention behind this mixed methods approach was to strengthen validity of the analysis and findings by including data related to the questions from a wide range of local peacebuilders, representing diversity in geography, type of conflict context and peacebuilding approaches, age, gender, ethnicity, as well as size of organization and duration of work experience in the peacebuilding field. Unexpectedly from the original design and thinking of the project, it also offered the opportunity to compare and contrast some aspects of how local peacebuilders tell their stories in first hand interviews with a specific research focus versus how they express themselves in writing for a grant application. While the original project design assumed one general analysis of all the material, the differences in expression, language, and narrative that were revealed

through the interviews and written responses led to a secondary comparative analysis that is also considered in the findings.

**1) Interviews with Local Peacebuilders.** Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with local peacebuilders from 12 countries who are connected to Peace Direct as long-term partners, local peacebuilding experts, or grantees. Peace Direct partners are a particularly appropriate group to engage with in this study as Peace Direct specifically includes *motivation* as a key trait they look for in selecting partners. As part of its work to identify partners, Peace Direct has mapped over 1400 local peacebuilders in 43 countries through its Insight on Conflict project (see [www.insightonconflict.org](http://www.insightonconflict.org)). From this broad list, Peace Direct then works with local leaders and through extensive community consultation processes to select specific partners. Peace Direct's local peacebuilder partners comprise a pre-selected group of individuals exercising peace agency at a relatively high, but not well-recognized or internationally professional level. In describing its process for partner selection, Peace Direct explains its "priority is to identify committed individuals or groups that have strong local legitimacy and it has developed a set of value-based selection criteria in order to do this." That criteria includes this approach to motivation:

***"Motivation:** are they in it for conviction? Can they demonstrate they have made sacrifices of some kind to establish their organisation? Have they led and carried out peacebuilding activities without remuneration? What kinds of investments have they made to grow and sustain their activities?"<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> See the "How Peace Direct Selects Partners" document, attached as Appendix A, for further information on how local peacebuilder partners are selected and the full list of criteria.

This element of motivation is in fact viewed by Peace Direct as absolutely critical to the ability of a group to have impact and sustain their efforts, not least since the contexts are so unstable that only highly motivated groups will continue to operate and be effective.

Of the 15 interviews, seven interviews were conducted in person at a Peace Direct gathering in Kigali, Rwanda in October 2015, six others were conducted via Skype internet calls between November 2015-March 2016, and two additional in-person interviews took place in June and July 2016, one in Washington, DC, and one in Kano, Nigeria. Fourteen of the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed in full. Due to technical details one could not be recorded. Notes were also taken during the interviews. While I conducted all the interviews, some assistance in transcribing was provided by Peace Direct research interns. The interviews lasted between 25-95 minutes, with most running just around an hour. Interviews centered around the three primary research questions explained above, with some openness to following more specific questions or related lines of discussion as they developed through conversation. The interview questions are included as Appendix C to this paper.

**2) Tomorrow's Peacebuilders Applications.** The second data source for the study was 715 small grants applications from local peacebuilders in 82 countries that were received over three years (2013, 2014, 2015) through Peace Direct's annual Tomorrow's Peacebuilders competition. Peace Direct began the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders award in 2013 as a way of "recognising the best emerging local peace

organisations in conflict-affected countries. It looks for innovative ways to promote peace, led by local people in their own communities. It aims to find and recognise the best emerging peace organisations led by local people, in conflict-affected countries worldwide.” In 2013, its first year, 240 applications were received from 54 countries; in 2014, the number of applications increased to 224 from 69 countries; in 2015, 251 applications from 74 countries were submitted. For all three years of the competition, the application specifically included a question related to the motivations of applicants in undertaking peacebuilding work (why and how they began their work).

A select sample of 43 applications was drawn from across the three years, utilizing those proposals that were short-listed by Peace Direct in the competition and which already demonstrated strong geographic diversity. The written content of each application in the sample set was then analyzed utilizing content analysis and grounded theory, along with the written transcripts of the interviews.

**3) Short-Answer Survey Question.** For the 2015 Tomorrow’s Peacebuilders competition, we added an optional research question to the grant application that invited applicants to reflect on how the international community could better support local peacebuilders like themselves. It was stated clearly that this question was entirely optional, for research purposes only, and would not impact their grant application. For this question, 126 responses from 44 countries were received.

## ***Analysis***

Content from these two data sources was analyzed utilizing a combination of reflective practice, content analysis, and grounded theory. Because the process of conducting the interviews and reviewing the written applications ran somewhat in parallel, rather than being clearly sequenced, reflective practice became an important part of the analysis process. Through research journaling, personal reflection, and discussion with others involved, some initial findings began to emerge and then became part of the ongoing process of iterative thinking and analysis as the data collection process proceeded. Content analysis and coding was also undertaken in several batches as interviews were conducted and applications reviewed. Through a grounded theory approach, an open coding system was developed as themes emerged in the data, and then further refined as analysis continued, combining themes that became linked, de-linking themes where they began to distinguish themselves, and narrowing down codes to a set of the most salient and commonly repeated themes. Codes related to the initial six hunches were utilized, but were also dropped, reconfigured, and refined as needed, based on the data itself. A qualitative analysis software program, NVivo, was used to organize the coding and analyze trends and relationships among the coded themes.

The goal of the data analysis process was to identify the most salient factors that peacebuilders identify as drivers for helping them choose peace and sustain those choices, and the most valued ways outside actors can support those choices. This included considering not only how often certain themes or codes appeared across all

the data, but also how important certain themes seemed based on the content, tone, and emphasis of the interviews and applications themselves, as well as the process of reflection and testing of findings and conclusions with the Peace Direct advisory group.

Once all interview transcriptions and applications in the sample set were coded, a set of initial findings was developed, which was then tested and discussed through a conference call with the Advisory Group, and further developed and refined. A summary of the findings and recommendations developed from them, was then shared and tested with the interviewees for their feedback. The summary of findings and recommendations were then refined again based on their input, and developed in more depth for the final writing of this paper.

### ***Preliminary Hunches***

While this research was intended to address questions that have not been adequately explored, it does not suggest an entirely new line of inquiry. Certain hypotheses drawn from the literature and personal reflection and experience acted as “hunches” that informed the methodology and analysis of the study. They informed the development of secondary follow up interview questions and the initial data coding. These are presented here as hunches, not hypotheses, because the study did not seek to explicitly test whether they were valid or not. Rather, these are shared as further background on my own thinking and experience, that has no doubt shaped the development and conclusions of this study. Ultimately, as is demonstrated in the findings and conclusions, none of these hunches proved overwhelmingly dominant, and

some were largely discarded in favor of much more salient themes that emerged through the research. However, certain aspects of them were affirmed in the stories and perspectives of the local peacebuilders and may be avenues for further research in the future.

***Hunch 1: Peace agency represents a natural occurrence of positive deviance, often by a minority group.*** Sternin's work on positive deviance suggests what might be considered a naturalist theory as to why people act for peace. That is, peace agency is simply a particular innate attitudinal or behavioral pattern that occurs in some, likely a minority, of people. Brain science increasingly suggests some individuals may simply be more "hard-wired" toward certain types of behavior, including altruism, than others. Peace agency might be one of those behaviors motivated by particular physiological, chemical, or genetic traits. While this study cannot address directly whether such a hypothesis is valid or not, it might illuminate if local peacebuilders express the motivating sources of their actions as something that is simply a natural part of their lives and who they are.

***Hunch 2: Religious or spiritual-based values compel individuals to act for peace and helps sustain those efforts.*** Our values-systems are often key drivers in our behavior. Scholars like Bartoli, Boulding, Curle, Gopin, and Lederach, all of whom identify with faith-based traditions that include a focus on peacemaking, have also studied and written about the role of spirituality in motivating people toward peace. Local peacebuilders, in describing their own motivations and what sustains them in their

efforts, might point to their religious, spiritual, or faith beliefs and values as a particularly important driving factor for their peace efforts.

***Hunch 3: Personally transformative experiences – negative or positive – motivate and sustain peace agency.*** Leaning more toward behavioral theory, this hypothesis suggests that individuals who have gone through either a traumatic experience of violence that turns them away from war, or a positive experience of the possibilities of peace can compel peace agency. Ongoing experiences with successful, or at least perceived successful, peace efforts might be needed to sustain peace agency. Anecdotal evidence points to the transformative power that direct experience can have in shaping behaviors toward or away from peace. This study may find that local peacebuilders often identify a key moment of transformation in their lives that motivated them to undertake or to carry on work for peace.

***Hunch 4: Relational processes – intergroup or intragroup – that create and sustain positive human interactions in the face of situations of violence can motivate and sustain peace agency.*** This hypothesis might draw on work on the role of relational processes between individuals and across groups that shape behavior. Conflict resolution practice based on contact theory or people-to-people approaches are related to this hypothesis, but a deeper look at the relational processes between individuals and groups that empower peace agency could deepen our understanding. Through this study, local peacebuilders might highlight the role of human relationships and relational processes as a main motivating factor for their choices toward peace.

***Hunch 5: The ability to imagine or vision a more peaceful future stimulates and sustains peace agency.*** This hypothesis draws directly from Elise Boulding's work and belief in the power to "image" a different reality than one experiences. She believed that capacity for hope and visioning of a new future was critical for engendering action for peace, and practical evidence across many conflicts suggests hope plays a vital role in encouraging peacebuilding. The findings of this study might reinforce her work by demonstrating that local peacebuilders describe a strong role of hope and imaging a better future as motivating factors for them.

***Hunch 6: Peace agency is driven by rational cost-benefit analysis and practical perceived needs.*** On a more practical level, choosing peace may sometimes be the most rational choice for individuals in pursuing their own interests. Peacebuilding can be a paid profession, can generate benefits of various kinds, and might be the less risky or costly option available. It may be that this study finds local peacebuilders express motivations of cost-benefit decision-making, self-interest, or career development in choosing to work for peace.

### ***Limitations and Challenges***

This study, like any, faced certain challenges and limitations. These included:

***1. Organizational Power and Researcher Bias.*** My relationship and position as a former board member and current consultant for Peace Direct inevitably suggested certain power dynamics and potential biases in the study that could have influenced data collection and analysis. Those interviewed for the study, and the applications that

were reviewed, were drawn entirely drawn from people and organizations seeking financial or other support from Peace Direct in some way, and my position within the Peace Direct family was both an asset and a risk. While I felt the rapport developed through the interviews was sincere, and the responses were honest, the unequal realities of power and money could have shaped the results of this study. The most apparent risk is one of a bias in the process toward demonstrating greater peace agency than truly exists, or surfacing themes of motivation that speak more directly to Peace Direct's own approach and solicitation. It also put me in a precarious position of potential power over those with whom I am seeking to engage in a collaborative action research process and raised ethical questions.

Helping to mitigate the risks was the fact that the US board and my role as a consultant for Peace Direct has no direct role in the selection of Peace Direct partners, or in funding decisions toward partners, which is done entirely by the UK organization. While the US organization does help mobilize resources for partners and support efforts to bring their work to the attention of others, it does not make financial or partnership decisions. This does not fully resolve the conflict or power imbalances, but it did at least help limit direct conflicts of interest. Peace Direct also does involve a number of its peacebuilders within the decision-making processes and structures of the organization, with an international effort to share power, and there is a relatively strong culture of trust and honesty running between the Western staff and the local peacebuilding

partners that runs counter to many large international NGOs who treat local partners largely as “sub-grantees” and “implementers.”

Ultimately, I believe the relationships of trust that I had built with some of the local peacebuilders already, and the value of Peace Direct’s reputation as committed to soliciting and amplifying the honest perspectives of local peacebuilders, outweighed the bias risks associated with my position within Peace Direct.

**2. *Selection Bias.*** While Peace Direct does work to ensure a diversity of partners who can operate in their own language and pursue their own initiatives as they want to pursue them, its peacebuilding partners inevitably represent individuals and groups that demonstrate certain qualities as defined by Peace Direct itself (though qualities for partner selection were and continue to be tested in consultation with partners and other local peacebuilders themselves). They tend to be individuals and groups with at least some connection or interest in the external community of international peacebuilding, and they tend to be able to operate in English and with access to technology. All those interviewed for the project would also have been a primary founder or leader of the organization and familiar with Peace Direct’s approach and commitment to supporting local peacebuilding. This means that the perspectives and data considered through this study do not represent all local peacebuilders, and may be biased against groups and individuals that intentionally are already rejecting the institutionalized model of peacebuilding as defined by the global North. Engaging the Tomorrow’s Peacebuilders applicants as a broader group beyond already identified

Peace Direct partners will help mitigate somewhat against this bias, but it does not resolve it. I acknowledge this bias up front and readers should understand that this study did not solicit the views of an entirely random sample of local peacebuilders. Rather it was a collaborative action project organized intentionally with an organization located in the global North that is dedicated to supporting local peacebuilders in conflict-affected countries by directly supporting their work, acting as a bridge to the broader international peacebuilding community, and helping promote their experiences and voices within that community in order to challenge and transform it.

**3. Language and interview medium limitations.** All interviews were conducted in English. While English was a first language of most of the peacebuilders interviewed, conducting the study entirely in English was clearly a limiting factor for fully expressing and understanding what may be complex and deeply personal experiences and concepts across a variety of cultures and languages. It was also more specifically limiting in the case of a number of Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications which were submitted in another language (English, French, and Spanish were accepted) and had then been translated. In those cases, I was working with an English translation that had been conducted by other Peace Direct staff or volunteers, or with the original Spanish version as a highly proficient Spanish speaker.

While I was able to conduct over half the interviews in person, which exceeded my expectations, five were conducted by Skype internet calling, which did limit the ability to read facial expressions and body language, and introduced some difficulties in

hearing and recording at times. Overall, however, I did not feel these challenges greatly affected the results of the study. Even over Skype, I was able to develop a rapport, engage in hour-long conversations, and feel a sense of sincere engagement from those I interviewed. I do hope they were able to sense my sincere gratitude and interest in the conversations as well.

**4. Differences in data sets.** Originally, I envisioned collecting information across the two different data sources (interviews and written applications) and analyzing them as one large data set. While this was possible and in general findings across all the data are included in the following chapters, I also discovered important differences between the two data sources. This included a natural difference in the content, style, tone, and language of interviews versus written answers, as well as the difference in my own experience and interpretation between reading a written response after the fact and conducting an in-person interview. Notably, the written applications also seemed sometimes included more use of technical jargon and project-based descriptions, and less personal stories and perspectives. Reflecting back, this is an obvious difference that I should have anticipated, as there is undoubtedly a significant difference in how someone approaches a person-to-person interview that is presented for research purposes, and how they approach writing an application for a small grants competition. It also speaks to the very issue of how the idea and work of peace is increasingly “projectized” and organized around funder-driven concepts and processes. This difference is acknowledged in the findings and analysis and offered insights of its own.



## PART II. FINDINGS AND DISCOVERIES

*“I will be heartless and senseless if I don’t do something about this.”*

*– Pakistani peacebuilder, interview*

*“It is precisely relationships among people that prompt actions that lead to change...”*  
(Brigg 2016, p. 65)

In this section, I present the primary findings from my research and an initial analysis of what those findings suggest in response to the three main research questions of the study. A general summary of the data is followed by the specific analysis for each research question. In Part III, I also raise additional questions and areas for further study that emerged through the research, and I present recommendations for next steps.

### **The Data**

As outlined earlier, data for this study was collected in three ways: 1) in-depth qualitative interviews with local peacebuilders from different countries who are part of Peace Direct’s close partners; 2) a review of past grant applications from the 2013-2015 Tomorrow’s Peacebuilders competition; and 3) results from an open-ended survey question that was included in the 2015 Tomorrow’s Peacebuilders application. These three processes yielded three sets of distinct but related data responding to the three

primary research questions of the study: 1) what motivates (some) people to act for peace in the midst of violence, 2) what sustains them in these efforts, 3) what do they think the international community can do to better support them and others like them. The three data sets did not correspond directly to the three questions, but rather each provided information more or less relevant to different questions.

Taken together, all three data collection processes yielded responses of some kind to at least one of the questions from at least one person working for peace in 53 different countries around the world. As expected, the data gathered reflected Peace Direct's own geographic concentration and the greater strength of its networks in certain places, such as Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Pakistan. However, the study yielded wider geographic diversity in the data than expected, with all regions of the world represented in at least some category of response and no one country or region heavily over-represented. Tables 1, 2, and 3 summarize the country distribution across the three data collection processes, and Figure 1 illustrates the geographic spread of the data globally.

**Table 1. Interviews: 15 Peacebuilders from 12 Countries**

Bosnia & Herzegovina	Rwanda
Burundi	Somalia
Democratic Republic of Congo	Sri Lanks (2)
Israel	Sudan (2)
Nigeria	Syria
Pakistan (2)	Zimbabwe

Analysis of the data required both triangulation across data sets and some isolated analysis. The in-depth interviews with 15 peacebuilders from 12 countries offered rich reflections on their personal journeys into lives dedicated to peace, providing deep and insightful responses to questions 1 and 2. The sample of 43 applications from the 2013-2015 Tomorrow's Peacebuilder's competition included many stories about how local peace groups or the individuals applying began their work for peace, but without as direct a response to the specific questions of this study. Those written responses offered broader but less deep material to analyze. Taken together, the interviews with Peace Direct partners and the written applications from a much wider and more geographically representative sample of peacebuilders, provided a strong basis for understanding how local peacebuilders perceive their motivations and what sustains them in their efforts and increased the overall validity of the study.

**Table 2. Sample Set of 43 Applications from 23 Countries**

Afghanistan	Nepal
Bosnia & Herzegovina (2)	Nigeria
Burundi	Pakistan (4)
Cameroon	Papua New Guinea
Columbia (2)	Philippines
Indonesia	Rwanda (2)
Israel/Palestine (4)	Sierra Leone
Jordan	Turkey
Kenya (4)	Uganda (6)
Lebanon (3)	United States
Myanmar	Yemen
	Zimbabwe (2)

Finally, the third research question – how can the international community better support local peacebuilders - was only included in the 2015 Tomorrow's Peacebuilders application as an optional research question and asked in the in-depth interviews. While the interviews did provide valuable responses, the bulk of the discussions tended to focus first and more deeply on the first two research questions, with the third often being a final and often short wrap up to the interviews. On the other hand, the breadth and depth of the written responses to the question as it was included in the 2015 Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications was unexpectedly fruitful. Of the 250 applications received in 2015, 126 applicants from 44 countries answered the question. Many provided thoughtful multi-paragraph reflections and specific recommendations, suggesting this is indeed a topic local peacebuilders are interested in discussing. The fact that the question appeared as part of a grant application, in which applicants are competing to impress their readers, may explain a strong 50% response rate to an optional research question. However, the nature of the question – which, if answered honestly, could well yield critiques of international organizations like the one running the competition – could also have inhibited applicants from responding. In any case, the sheer number and geographic diversity of the answers provided a strong basis for exploring possibly generalizable responses.

**Table 3. Q3: 126 Responses from 44 Countries**

Armenia (2)	Israel (4)	Philippines (3)
Benin (2)	Ivory Coast (2)	Rwanda (3)
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Lebanon (2)	Samoa
Burundi	Liberia (2)	Sierra Leone (2)
Cambodia	Jordan	South Africa
Cameroon (4)	Kenya (12)	South Sudan (3)
Central African Republic (3)	Macedonia (2)	Tanzania
Chad (3)	Madagascar	Togo
Columbia (5)	Malawi	Tunisia
Costa Rica	Nepal	Uganda (13)
Democratic Republic of Congo	Nigeria (10)	Ukraine
Ghana	Northern Ireland	Yemen (5)
Guatemala	Pakistan (9)	Zambia
Guyana	Palestine	Zimbabwe
India (3)	Papua New Guinea	

As noted earlier, the nature of the data gathered across these three collection processes did differ in a number of important ways, and presented both challenges and opportunities for the analysis. In-depth qualitative interviews inevitably offered a different type of data to work with than short answer questions on a grant application, and an explicit and optional research question added a third layer of both methodology and resulting data to the mix. I was not able to easily compare across the different data sets because coding one in-depth interview with a peacebuilder with whom a relationship with Peace Direct was already established, was not equivalent to coding one short application from a peacebuilding organization or individual seeking to establish a relationship. Combining all the data into one simple coding process was also

not straight forward as some recognition of the different modes of data collection would be needed to reduce invalid generalizations or avoid overlooking important, but less frequently coded, themes.

For the analysis presented below, I did opt to code and analyze for Questions 1 and 2 (what motivates and what sustains peace agency) across all the interviews and the full sample set of 43 Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications (2013-2015). To strengthen validity, I present here the most dominant themes that arose most clearly through both interviews and applications, without attempting to compare differences across the two modes of data collection. I did sense there were differences that would be illuminated by further study and comparison. For instance, applicants to the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders competition often focused on what might be described as peacebuilding technical jargon in describing how they began their work. This often included reference to theories of change or objectives and goals. Discussions with peacebuilders rarely elicited this type of language, suggesting that local groups understand what donors are seeking and cater to the language and frameworks of meaning that are expected. For Question 3 (what the international community can do to help), I ultimately chose to isolate and analyze all 126 responses to the question that were gathered in the 2015 Tomorrow's Peacebuilder's competition. The breadth and depth of those responses, gathered through a singular process, provided a strong basis for more quantitative based analysis as well.

Overall, the findings presented here offer the most consistent, persistent, and enduring themes that arose throughout the research process.

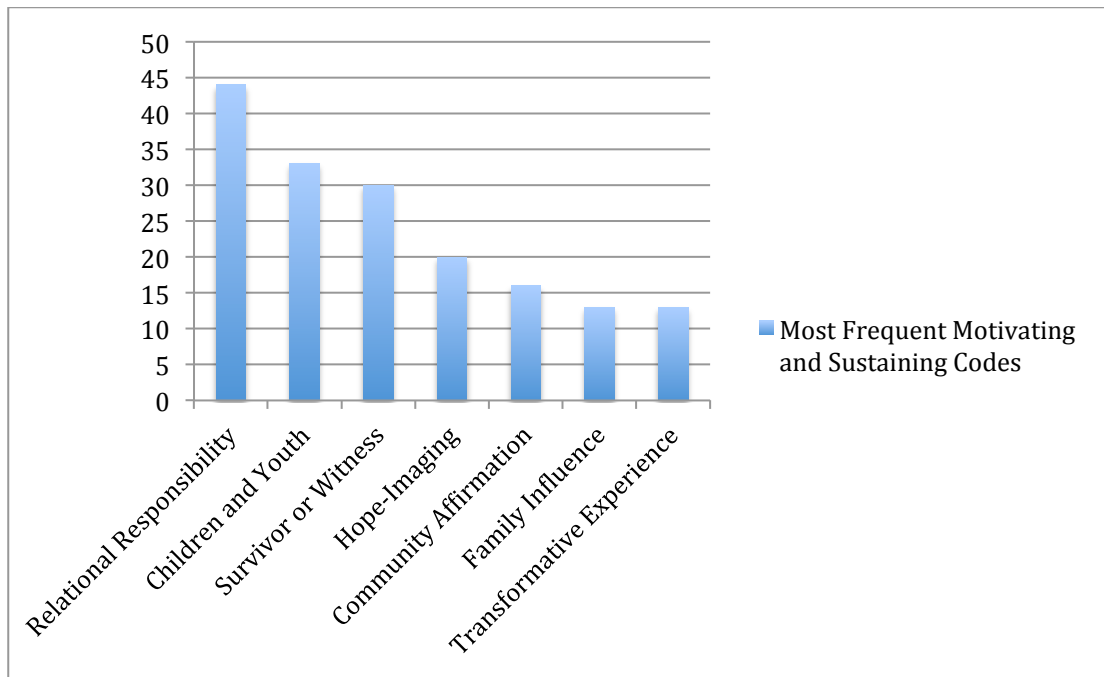
### **What Motivates Peace Agency in the Midst of Violence?**

*“...[R]elationships are at the heart of peacebuilding.” – Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

An initial review of the interviews and written responses from local peacebuilders to the question of why they decided to work for peace seems to suggest that there is no easily identifiable common characteristic or experience that promotes peace agency. An initial coding of the data produced a diverse range of over 20 themes that emerged in relation to how local peacebuilders saw their own motivations. When directly asked the question, those interviewed often paused and began by saying they were not sure. Some used phrases like, “it’s just always been in me,” or, “I don’t know that there is any one motivation.” Some pointed to a particular moment or experience that sparked them on their path; others spoke of having been inclined toward peace as long as they can remember; still others referenced particular beliefs and ideas that drive them; and many pointed to the political and social conditions in their communities and countries as a motivation for their peace work. Most striking about the data gathered in this study may be its remarkable diversity and the testament it makes to the many paths peacebuilders take and the multiple possibilities for peace they pursue. There is indeed no simple way to peace, as Thich Naht Han is known for saying. Local peacebuilders are motivated by a wide range of experiences and factors in their lives, and they express those motivations in a variety of ways. (See Appendix D for full list of original codes.)

This diversity of understanding of their own motivations is itself an important finding, as it warns against the tendencies that are on the rise in the international peacebuilding field to “projectize”, “replicate”, and “scale” local peace efforts.

Looking across the most prominent themes and more deeply into the words and stories they tell, some motivational factors do seem to rise to the top, though. Among these are themes of their own experiences of surviving violence or witnessing the suffering of others close to them, family and community influences, compassion for or relation with children and youth, connections with their communities or particular groups, and a particular determined belief that a better future is possible. These themes sometimes overlapped or repeated, and sometimes even seemed to conflict (e.g., violence experienced sparks a belief in a more peaceful future). Collectively, though, they point to a strong emphasis on relationships, and in particular on relationships that become imbued with responsibility. Across the most frequent themes related to both motivating and sustaining peace efforts was a common link of experiences in relation to others. That is, these local peacebuilders talked about being motivated to act for peace not as individuals, but in connection with relationships to others. **Rather than speaking in terms of their own agency as peace actors, these peacebuilders most often spoke in terms of their responsibility to others. This concept, which I label “relational responsibility”, emerged as the strongest theme across the data.**



**Figure 1: Most Frequent Motivators and Sustainers**

The analysis that follows delves deeper into the concept of relational responsibility as the primary finding of this study, while also considering the other most frequent themes voiced in regard to motivation.

### ***1. Relational Responsibility as Peace Agency***

In all the interviews with peacebuilders and in a significant number of the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders sample applications (25 of 43), local peacebuilders speak of their relationships with others – with their parents, their children, their aunts, uncles, or cousins; with their communities, their schools and youth, their churches, their organizations; and with the “other” and those that have been called enemies. When describing what motivates them to work for peace in their communities, they speak of

the influences of certain relationships on them, the experiences of relating to others, and the ways in which relationships have played a key role in motivating them toward peace. As they describe these relationships, they often speak of a sense of responsibility they feel in themselves toward others, and how that sense of responsibility motivates them to action. Sometimes this responsibility is described as a moment of insight and decision; other times as a process of wanting to give back to others based on their own struggles and triumphs.

*I said even with her condition she decided to do that, then I have a responsibility towards change.*                      – Sudanese peacebuilder, interview

*I felt I was more privileged through my situation and education. I learned about agriculture. I felt I could get back to the community and engage these people.*

– Ugandan peacebuilder, application

*After a successful career in banking, Mariam wanted to provide opportunities for young Muslim graduates who were facing the same prejudices as she experienced.*    - Filipino peacebuilder, application

A local peacebuilder from Burundi describes the story of his cousin of the same age being killed and how it motivated him to reject violence and begin to work for peace, “based on the fact that I related to him.” A pastor and peacebuilder in the

Democratic Republic of Congo tells the story of seeing children in the community affected by the war and feeling compelled to help them: “I didn’t know what to start but I decided at that time that I could make a little bit of difference for those children.” A rural women’s peace initiative also in the Democratic Republic of Congo explains that it is “the product of the collective awareness gained by a particular group of women” through their work together. And a Pakistani woman with international experience describes her sense of responsibility to rural communities in her region with whom she began to build relationships: “[T]he motivation is we didn’t want to disappoint those who were already working with us in this area, especially the mothers and the youth.” Another group explains their motivation to “help our brothers and sisters who are in distress” in the community.

These expressions can also be described as indications of empathy, compassion, or altruism, all concepts which are also ultimately relational but are often analyzed through the lens of individual psychology. Yet, what may be described as individual traits or attitudes are actually reliant on a connection, relation, or response to another. Similarly, a commonality across a wide range of stories from this study is the appearance of others and the relational interaction of the individual peacebuilders with them that is described as a motivating factor for acting as peace agents. **That is, it is the relational aspects of their lives and stories that these peacebuilders hold up as important to them, rather than individual expressions of agency. In doing so, they turn this study on its head. No longer is a theory of peace agency based on the**

**individual's ability to act on their own; rather, it is a much richer journey into human relationship and the ways in which our own outlooks and actions in response to situations of war and violence are shaped not just by others, but by the intersection of ourselves and others. In the context of violent conflict and war-affected societies, this study suggests that those intersections of relationality can inspire local peacebuilders because they nurture a sense of recognition and responsibility to others.**

The Community of San Jose de Apartado in Colombia articulates this sense of relationality and responsibility, and its effects on what we might call peace agency, eloquently this way in explaining the formation of their community:

*Initiatives to solve problems are assumed collectively. The internal organization of the peace community of San José de Apartadó has made possible a strong process that has allowed us to say “No” to armed groups and build relationships in which all participate and propose decisions. This process has generated a break: no longer is it weapons who decide, but we peasants who have been hit by violence and forced to move. Now we are those who resolve our own conflicts through dialogue and those who create ways to resist the war. (application)*

Local peacebuilders also expressed how relational experiences motivated them to turn away from violence and work for peace. The young Burundian peacebuilder's story referenced earlier is a good example (see text box that follows). Other stories include an Israeli soldier breaking ranks with his unit after witnessing the treatment of a Palestinian prisoner with whom he had begun to relate (text box page 93); a Kenyan

refugee whose closest family members were killed, motivating him to work for peace with other young people like himself; and, a Pakistani woman who returned from a career in international peacebuilding to commit herself to working with local communities in her region. In this way, some local peacebuilders describe finding their motivations to become peace agents in their communities through transformative experiences where their relationships with others were destroyed, challenged, changed, or established in new ways.

***Relational Responsibility through Transformative Experience – Story from Burundi***

*One of my cousins joined the army as a young soldier. He was in the army for five years, 1995-2000. He was brutally killed on the front while serving in the army and fighting rebels in June 2000. And that came as a shock. He wasn't that close as other cousins, but still, he was someone relatively my age. There is a kind of wrong feeling that sometimes young people develop... we are young... nothing can happen to us... we have a long time to live... But when I realized that someone my age was brutally killed like that...wow... I said, this is serious...this conflict is going completely violent. And its not only affecting the elders and others living in rural areas. It can also affect people my age and I realized that I could have been in his place... I could have been the victim of that attack. With that loss I understood the radicalized views and opinions I had was not the viable option, but rather a dangerous choice that was likely to destroy lives of hundreds if not thousands of people. The loss of my cousin in June 2000 was a determinant moment because it led me to reconsider my views and options of what could be the solution to the Burundian civil war that was going on then.*

...

*I connected with three young fellow students at the University in Bujumbura and what motivated them to bring back and restore hope among the youth who were the main perpetrators and at the same time the majority of the victims. That was the deepest motivation. In our ways, through action and reflection, and debate etc, how can we restore hope and bring back those who were still thinking in radical ways. And to show them we are both the actors and the victims so that we should actually start to think differently, and we need to courageously act to heal society and also in a certain way, build a new generation of responsible citizens and peacebuilders.*

Critical, it seems, to the process of recognizing and acting upon relational responsibility is a sense not only of individual choice to act for peace, as originally hypothesized, but rather a driving sense of duty to respond to the needs of others and to their community. Local peacebuilders voiced a sense of compulsory responsibility, using phrases like “I *had* to do something,” “If I didn’t do it, who would?”, and “it was my duty.” As they describe it, it is not through a sense of individual agency and empowerment that they act for peace. **Rather, through the awakening of relational responsibility, they feel *compelled* by conscience to choose peace.**

*What motivated me? Maybe it was that fire inside of me that said, ‘Why can’t you try?’*

*– Somali-Kenyan peacebuilder, interview*

*Number one that there's peace. People have to live in harmony. That alone drives me. And I've seen these experiences of what happens in the absence of peace. You know what happens? ...I know what happens where there is no peace: there's deaths, there's starvation and hunger - I don't want us to go there. So it actually drives me.*                      *– Zimbabwe peacebuilder, interview*

As these peacebuilders explain, they do feel a drive toward acting for peace, which involves both internal and external motivators. While they describe different possible sources for that drive, they express a common response of needing to act. This sense of responsibility to act for and with others came at times through the realization that one *could* make a difference, perhaps where others could not, and that one's own life depended on the security and well-being of others, that we are indeed interdependent beings.

In some cases, as illustrated in the story from Israel and Palestine that follows, the process of recognizing relational responsibility was often a progressive one that is understood reflecting back on a situation after some time. The lessons of relational responsibility emerged through both moments of insight and transformation, as well as ongoing questioning and rethinking of his own position and potential for influencing change, ultimately compelling this peacebuilder to change his entire approach to the conflict and his commitments to the “duty” of peace that he saw as belonging to everyone.

***Compelled by Relational Responsibility - Story from Israel and Palestine***

*For example, I remember one event during the war in 1991 that I was in kitchen duty in my unit near the refugee camp. I was cooking actually for my group, it was late morning and in the early morning one of the patrols brought to the camp a young Palestinian, one guy they catch during their patrol and brought him for investigation with the Israeli authorities. He was waiting in the center of camp, waiting that the people to investigate him will come. During this I'm working in the kitchen, I heard him kicking and shouting out of the tent of the kitchen. I run out and I saw one of, someone I call friend, one of my people in my unit, kicking him. Kicking this guy that was held, closed eyes, hanging with his legs and arms held in the back, and he was sitting and waiting out in the sun and one of the guys, I don't know was bored I don't know what was in his mind, came to him and started kicking him. I run away, run away from there from the kitchen, I remember myself that I was in the middle of cutting something, I had a knife in my hands. It's really odd to talk about it now. I had knife in my hands. I remember that I throw the knife and I run to this guy and throw him to the floor and we start to fight. Until people heard the noise and came around and start to separate us. I remember that I, after this occasion, I told to my officers that I don't want to go on in the service in this situation. I want to leave the unit or refuse to go on with this mission. And, I was quite old soldier in our unit. Not experienced more than the others, but more mature than the others. And the officers start to convince me to stay. And the excuse that they used which seemed to me then, and still today, very much reasonable and good, they said "if you are not going to be here, this guy could go on and kick this poor guy....."*

*Still I think even today I had the opportunity to influence some situations and make them to be less bad or to try to minimize the miserable and the unfair balances between the strongness of the army the power of the army in front of miserable civil people,*

*children, who didn't have what to do in front of the engine of the machine of the Israeli army....*

*They took the responsibility and invest time and power and thought about making change in the society....So there I have a very very important lesson in activism and in changing the future in the hope that it's possible to change the future. Not to expect from leaders or politicians to do it, that it's duty of everyone at once to see reality in the future, to make change, to make action that it will happen.*

The peacebuilders interviewed for this study and included in the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications have already gained enough education, including English language in the majority of cases, and other resources to be able to connect with the international community. In this way, they represent a more educated and well-off group than many local individuals and associations working for peace around the world. That is not to say that many of them have not been directly affected by war and violence; many of them have, and note that their experience of **being a survivor or related to other survivors** in some way is a critical part of their motivation toward peace. This is in fact one of the highest frequency codes that appears across the data, along with descriptions of **transformational experiences** in relation to others. The mere fact that they are actively engaged in peace work demonstrates that they have managed to survive or overcome situations of intense violence with greater fortune than many others. Their experiences of overcoming hardship, having good fortune or privilege, or

being blessed – as it might be described in different ways – were often woven into their stories of relational responsibility.

*In my own region, the Northwest of Pakistan, it was very hard hit by violent extremism, it is rampant, nobody feels secure... It was a realization for me – all this education in conflict resolution and calling myself a peacebuilder, but if I can't build peace in my own region, I'm a hypocrite.*

*- Pakistani peacebuilder, interview*

*Both the founders have powerful stories about what led them to work for peace. One spent time in concentration camp, the other had village wiped out. After the war they had a lot of hate for Serbs. Went through a transformative process. Set up CIM to give everybody in Bosnia a chance to go through the same process. Used the term "wounded healer" – they know what it's like to be in a place of hate and come through the other side.*

*- Peacebuilding group in Bosnia & Herzegovina, application*

One final aspect of relational responsibility worth noting is that it may arise in connection with one's own "in-group" or in response to an "out-group". A Bosnian peacebuilder places great emphasis on the multi-ethnic nature of her team as a source of inspiration, pointing to the importance of a responsibility to cross lines of ethnic conflict in her region and the motivating aspects that doing so can bring toward efforts

for peace. Other peacebuilders describe the importance of feeling a sense of responsibility to one's own group that is suffering. Still others tell stories of having to recognize when a sense of responsibility to an abusing group is impeding positive relationship with others, suggesting a possible darker side to relational responsibility that is not examined in this study but may be worth further exploration. In the following story, a Bosnian peacebuilder describes how having a multi-ethnic team has been a source of strength for their work, allowing them to develop relationships and a sense of common responsibility across the typical in/out groups in the country.

#### **Negative Relational Responsibility? – Story from Bosnia**

When it comes to Bosnia Herzegovina. I think unfortunately there is still not many people. Or there isn't a significant number of people who choose peace over hating each other, being intolerant. When I say peacebuilding, peacebuilding initiative, peacebuilding workers, we are still a minority, and there is still little of us, that's my personal impression. However when it comes to the project (team) we are multi-ethnic team, meaning we are composed of people of different nationality, people who are members of different ethnic group. I think that's our richness, because when it comes to divided communities we come as ethnically mixed team, we sent direct messages of co-existence and good example that working, living, sharing your lives together is possible, and that we actually honestly believe in what we are teaching them. That's our big advantage, and I think big support to us wanting to choose peace over the hate, lets put it like that.

But still there should be much more initiative. In Bosina Herzegovina, this speech of

hate is very present when you look at different Facebook pages or web pages or comments that you read, it's the amount of hate which you read is unbelievable. You have the feeling that the war ended a couple of years ago and not 20 years ago. And I just don't, can't understand how people can be so blind, and focus on hating each other just because they are different ethnic groups. And not seeing the different negative things which are part of their ethnic groups. For me that's really sad. But its our reality.

Unfortunately, the Bosnian peacebuilder sees the ethnic lines of loyalty in the country continuing to serve as a source for negative loyalty and division. This raises the question of whether relational connections of responsibility based on exclusion of a perceived other can act as a negative force within conflict systems, if, for instance, one feels a responsibility to others who press a message and actions of exclusion and violence toward others. This study does not attempt to answer that question but notes its importance for further study.

**To summarize a primary finding of this study, then, local peacebuilders point to relational experiences and aspects of their lives that instill a sense of responsibility to others as a key motivating factor behind their decisions and actions for peace. This relational responsibility compels them to act for peace. Peace agency, then, may be less a matter of individual choice and more an expression of human connection.**

Looking more at the data, we can now delve further into the specific aspects of relational responsibility and some of the other themes that emerged.

## **2. Family Relationships and Peace Agency**

*How do you deal with being away from your family?*

*It's very hard for me. I love my family very much. But it's the only way. We don't have any other choices. We either stay with our families or we do something that make us sure that they will live a better life after everything stops. If I'm near to them and any bad things happen to them, I can't imagine my reaction to this. So I want to help in any way, to see them living a better life in a peaceful and not dangerous place. I need to do something, and this is my only hope because I don't agree in any other way with what is going on inside Syria. So this is my only way to protect them*

*. – Syrian peacebuilder, interview*

I was intrigued to discover how often the peacebuilders I interviewed brought up family relationships during their interviews, sometimes as part of a specific response to a question, and sometimes woven into something they were discussing that would not, at first, seem directly related to family matters. As this Syrian woman explained, she felt compelled to do peacebuilding work with refugees who had fled the conflict in her home country as part of building a better future for her own family. This was clearly a difficult and emotional choice for her to make, as it necessitated leaving her family, including her children, behind. Yet, she saw this as the only way to help protect them and as something she must do. She describes a “need” to do something as her only “hope”, linking her sense of responsibility and her persistent belief in a better future

directly with her family relationships. For her, acting for peace is not a choice, but a necessity and one intimately related to her role as a mother, sister, daughter.

In fact, the role of family appeared as one of the strongest themes throughout the analysis, although it was more prominent in the individual interviews than the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications. Again, this may point to a difference between how local peacebuilders talk about their experiences one-on-one and what they write about for an international donor. Such a difference would not be surprising for any of us, actually. Rarely do we explicitly focus on the family and family relationships when we discuss, analyze, or program for international peacebuilding. Yet, again and again, local peacebuilders pointed to family members who shaped their views and motivated them to work for peace. These were often parent figures, but also cousins, siblings, or more distant relatives. Beyond the influence of specific individuals, they also spoke of the family as a unit, one's responsibility to it, and the intersection between family relationships and broader societal peace and conflict issues.

For instance, this Zimbabwean peacebuilder spoke of the role her father played in nurturing her own commitment to women's rights, despite receiving the opposite message from her immediate social and political surroundings:

*So I think that's where my love of women's empowerment stemmed from, because what I was seeing in my neighborhood - women being beaten up by their husbands, being deprived to go to school. But I want to say my father was different in that respect. He did not treat me different from my brothers. He*

*actually was the one who I want to give credit it to him....I use to be good at school and he was the one who pushed me pushed me pushed me.*

*- Zimbabwean peacebuilder, interview*

Similarly, this Sri Lankan woman credited her parents for naming her peacemaker early on in her life, an act that had significant impact on her then and throughout her growth as an interfaith peace leader.

*When I was six, if my mother and father ever got into an argument, I would go and I would sit by them, and I would wait. And then I would just be trying to see what I could do, just quietly, to help. I would talk to one of them, and then to the other one, I was going in between them you know, and I was just six. And my mother she said to me, you are a peacemaker, this is who you will be.*

*- Sri Lankan peacebuilder, interview*

These kinds of references to the influence of family members suggest the importance of the formative nature of our interactions with our parents and other relatives when we are young in shaping not only our views of the world and how conflict and peace exists and unfolds in it, but also in our views of our own roles as individuals and the possibilities we can embrace in ourselves even within systems of injustice and violence. This early and lasting impact of positive family relationships within the context of conflict situations can be seen in the story from a Somali-Kenyan peacebuilder below, as well as through the story of a Bosnian peacebuilder shared in the text box that follows this section.

*I also remember my father, who was a small businessman, every time he came back from a safari, he was arrested. Every time, he was harassed because he was Somali – where have you been, where are you going, and he was arrested. What motivated me really...my dad went through so many difficult things. He was a good man, a good father, he worked hard. Not having much but trying to make ends meet. But after my 7th birthday, things got hard. He was not allowed to move around anymore, and life became difficult for us. And the whole thing was taken over by my mom. Mom did some small businesses, and my dad became very frustrated that he had to stay there.....So what motivated me was the environment where I grew up. The frustrations I felt....After my first job, I sent the money back to my mom because I knew all she was going through.*

*– Somali-Kenyan peacebuilder, interview*

It is worth noting that while this study was focused on motivations of local peacebuilders and how they believe the international community can better support them, the importance of family relationships also came up a number of times in the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications when groups were discussing their work and its impact. This is notable because it is rare for the international peacebuilding community to explicitly focus on strengthening family relationships as a primary focus for their interventions in conflict-affected societies. Groups such as youth or widows or young men may be a key population with which they work, but family relationships are usually

left outside the program design. Local peacebuilders, though, tend to be much more attuned to the connections between family relations and societal relations in their communities, and because they live, marry, parent, and have much more direct family relationships embedded within the conflict context, the interplay between individual, family, and society is much more ever-present.

Consider how these peacebuilders express the connections they see between family, community, and peace.

*Relationship is extremely important. It is the relationship we have developed with the mother and that we have tried to shape with her with the sons.*

*– Pakistani peacebuilder, interview*

*Despite the many constant changes that the community has faced, we managed to be respected, to show to the perpetrators that we do not feel hate or resentment. As a community we have collected our dead, but also we have collected the dead of the torturers and delivered them to their families, because we believe that human dignity is greater than hatred and rancor.*

*- Colombian peace group, application*

*The greatest impact of our programme is seen in how parents and guardians have gained control of their youths that had become unmanageable, as well as the unreserved acceptance of the formerly abducted youths by the community; parents and children are now working together to change their lives.*

*- Ugandan peacebuilding group, application*

While each context and specific action described is unique, they share a common recognition that family relationships are an important part of restoring or nurturing a broader societal peace. Family harmony and the influence of family members is seen as an integral part of a peacebuilding system, not as a separate sphere that is more private and interpersonal. By contrast, international peacebuilding interventions often tend to isolate family and interpersonal relationships as outside the context of their work, drawing lines between more community-based or public sphere peacebuilding programs and the realm of the family and home. In fact, as these interviews suggested, we may do better to recognize the interconnected nature of individual, family, and community more overtly and seek to create systems-based approaches that strengthen those interconnections rather than isolate them from each other.

**The Role of Family in Peace Agency – Story from Bosnia & Herzegovina**

*My family was what used to call a typical pre-war Bosnian family, in a sense it was very much national ethnically mixed family. My grandmother was Czech, my grandfather was Germany - that's on my mother's side. So my mother's side were Catholic religion family. My Father's side was Orthodox Serb. So before the war it was a very beautiful thing. But for me it still is beautiful thing was that we were very fortunate in a sense that we got to celebrate two Christmases - you know that Catholic and Orthodox Christmas. For children it was a huge joy and something that we really enjoyed in our family.*

...

*Because I was 18 years old when war in Bosnia started, and for me when the war started, families turned against each other, which happened in Bosnia Herzegovina, that*

*was a big shock definitely.*

*But because my family stayed united, unified. You know, we never allowed that kind of conflict hurt our family. It was always my father, and my mother's first two sisters who were both married to Orthodox served men. They were actually protecting non-Orthodox part of the family. So family really stayed unified...in quite difficult times. So probably for me, that's why for me its normal that we should live together, should respect each other, and that it shouldn't be important to which ethnic group we belong to, or which religion we respect, that some other things are more important.*

### **3. Children and Youth as Peace Agents and Motivators**

Related to both a focus on family and the broader concept of relational responsibility is the theme of children and youth, which appeared quite strongly across both interviews and written applications. It was, in fact, the second highest appearing code across the data. The topic of children as a motivation factor came up quite strongly during interviews with local peacebuilders who were parents, while the broader theme of youth cut across many of the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications. It should be noted that one year of the competition included a specific call for a thematic youth and peacebuilding prize, which may well have increased the number of applicants that year from youth-focused organizations and the inclination to raise the theme of youth directly in applications. However, the broad and random sampling and the high

prevalence of the theme throughout the interviews, along with the prevalence of the theme in other years' applications, strengthens the validity of this finding.

In some cases one's own relationships with children or the experience of children in their community was identified specifically as motivations for engaging in peace efforts. In others, youth themselves were acting as peace agents, often buoyed by their relationships with other youth. And in many cases, a desire to support youth and children to avoid their suffering, help them reject violence and become active peacebuilders, was at play. Some peacebuilders described witnessing the plight of young people impacted by armed conflict and feeling a responsibility to act on their behalf. Others emphasized the role of youth as both victims of violence and agents of peace themselves, and the motivation that brought to themselves and the communities to take action.

*Just from my personal background I would like to add that I have two little boys, six and eight years old. And I am trying to raise them to think that it is not names that determine what human beings are because in Bosnia....it is very important what is your name and surname meaning to which religious or ethnic group you belong to. But I am trying to teach my sons that it is far more important what human beings we are, how we treat each other, and how we live our lives.*

– *Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

*[Our organization] was founded in 2005 by a student who suffered Lord Resistance rebel's abduction in 1992 when he was 11 years old. He survived*

*several attacks, witness maiming and killing of his fellow captives, forced to carry heavy load and worked long distance among others. Together with other 12 young people who were directly affected by the insurgency in Northern Uganda formed [the organization] with the aim of protecting the children from all forms of abuse and addressing the adverse effects of the war on the youth and children.*

*– Ugandan peacebuilding group, application*

It is worth noting that the topic of children as it related to relational responsibility and peace agency was also a complex one internally for some of the local peacebuilders who were interviewed. Balancing responsibilities with their own children and responsibilities to serve their community was not always easy. As one peacebuilder explained:

*There will come a moment of doubt in your work...an example I have is when I was working on peacebuilding and I feel like my kids are in need of me and my husband was away at that time because he needs to do another job, so I have to be with my kids. There are sometimes when you choose. You continue the thing you are doing and you keep your relations with people, so I can be there and they understand this is your situation at the moment*

*- Sudanese peacebuilder, interview*

Overall, though, these peacebuilders saw their relationships with their children as part and parcel of their commitments and work for peace.

#### **4. Hope, Imaging, and Belief**

*We had a dream of a different Burundi, a different Burundi that was not violent and full of radicalism... that was peaceful. That is why we started a club called "I have a Dream" where we are just meeting as friends and sharing our dreams. It was a small circle to share our dreams of a good, positive Burundi. How would it look different? What can be our role as teenagers or secondary school peoples? Can we do something to make that dream happen? ....That was the deepest motivation. In our ways, through action and reflection, and debate, how can we restore hope and bring back those who were still thinking in radical ways.*

*- Burundian peacebuilder, interview*

Though less prevalent than themes of relationship to others, this study did affirm one of the initial “hunches” regarding motivation for peace agency, namely the idea of hope and imaging first theorized and put into practice by Elise Boulding which is discussed earlier. Throughout the interviews and the applications, local peacebuilders described a belief in the possibility of “a different future” and used the word “hope” with notable frequency. The local peacebuilders who were interviewed, despite facing significant personal risks and having witnessed significant violence, spoke with a sense of hope and possibility for not only their work but the potential realization of peace in their societies, if not in their lifetime, then in the future for their children and their communities. This hope, similar to relational responsibility, was a source of motivation compelling them to action.

*Because I believe in myself and my country and in the good things that we live in our community and I believe in hope and I want to fight peacefully, to find the ways to myself and to all the people. And nobody can do this by themselves. We have to do something in a collaborative way. To help each other, to cooperate with each other. So I have to work with groups I have to work with people. I have to speak loud. It's much better than fighting each other. I feel that something good must happen and we have to do something to make the good things happen. So I'm trying my best and I know a lot of Syrians who are trying their best to do this. – Syrian peacebuilder, interview*

A peace community in Colombia established in one of the areas most affected by both militia and government forces explains the firm belief in a different future that motivated their leaders:

*The founding leaders had hope in the power to change the story of their country....Despite the adversities, the obstacles, the massacres, the targeted killings, the threats, the community walks firmly in hope for the construction of an alternative world....The community believes in a present and a future where life with dignity enriches every tomorrow. (application)*

A group in Pakistan describes its belief in the power of imagining a peaceful future:

*Envisioning the power of creative practice to be able to alter and inform the future, the co-founders applied the creative tools in order to reach out to the audience to engage in a dialogue towards imagining, peace-building, bridging gaps, altering their habitat. [Our organization] was born out of the necessity to*

*improvise the tools of engagement in order to aware, educate and in some ways change the way the youth imagines a possible future. (application)*

These peacebuilders recognize hope not simply as optimism in the future, but as a vital for element of their lives and work. They speak of the ability to imagine new futures as a critical “tool” and a source of “power” in the process of peaceful. And they point to hope as a “creative practice” that needs to be fostered and exercised within themselves and their communities.

The presence of hope as a motivator does not explain from where that hope springs for these local peacebuilders themselves. However, they did point to some sources of hope and inspiration for themselves, again often citing relational aspects of their lives and work. They found hope in the people and communities they worked with and the sense of determination and commitment that they witnessed as they engaged in the hard work of peacebuilding.

*[T]heir level of engagement is totally amazing. In a very risky environment. That gives us a greater determination...gives us hope that there is a critical mass of silent peacebuilders who just need a space of action....there are people out there who just don't have a space to act but they are thirsty, they are hungry for peace and if they are given a chance they are ready to act.*

*- Burundian peacebuilder, interview*

*Motivate to do my work, hmm, actually seeing the moment when you see change ... when two tribes in conflict, and then to see the tears of people who were*

*hating each other, especially men, now reconciling. So that point when you see how the change has happened in this community and when they tell me how their lives have been changed.*

*- Sudanese woman peacebuilder, interview*

*I think one of the things...when we see that there are people whose lives have changed, and if we just imagine that we, like as a person, I am able to prevent just one person from this militant group or one woman that I've helped and she is now out of that misery or out of that situation, she is now an independent woman, she is a free woman, that gives us more courage, more strength.*

*- Pakistani peacebuilder, interview*

Thus, hope exists not simply as something that lives in the future, but as a vital source of motivation in the daily work of these peacebuilders. Hope and positive change are reinforcing as even small moments of reconciliation or change are experienced in their work, their motivation and hope for greater change also grows. Hope acts as a multiplier for peace agency, where positive actions by some, or even one, inspire actions by others. Again, this speaks to the power of the Bouldings' idea that "what is possible exists" – when we see the possibilities for a different world already present and occurring in the world around us, we are inspired that such possibilities can grow.

## **5. Faith and Relationship with God**

Also related to one of the original hunches in this study, a number of peacebuilders said their commitment to peace was inspired by their faith and expressed their motivations in terms of relationship to God. This arose as a less prevalent but still present theme in the data and is of particular interest given my own Quaker background and experience with faith as a motivator for my own peace work. Within the interviews, religion and spirituality was referenced or discussed in depth by only a third of the peacebuilders. Within the Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications, the theme of religion and spirituality arose periodically, though not as strongly as other themes. Ranked against the other codes it fell just below the top six themes presented in Table 4 in terms of frequency. It appeared most prevalent among groups with a particular focus in their work on interfaith peacebuilding, and was sometimes discussed in terms of the solution as well as a motivating factor for them. As one South Asian group noted, *"They know that religious peacebuilding is part of the solution to conflicts whereas some in the international community seem to treat religion as a problem."*

More interesting than finding that for some peacebuilders their faith is a motivating factor, (which is somewhat self-evident from the influence of religious figures and communities on the field itself over the years), is to consider how these motivations relate to the concept of relational responsibility. As one peacebuilder and pastor in the Democratic Republic of Congo explains:

*Of course my faith has always and is always motivating me. Its what has allowed me to continue to live and do what I'm doing. (interview)*

He goes on to link his relationship to God with his sense of relational responsibility for peace with others as well:

*Peace is not absence of war. Peace is not absence of war and its not presence of harmony. Peace, for me, is when people live together in recognition of the value that God put in one another. For me, that's peace. Because when we recognize what God has put in another person, we won't fight, we won't in fact...we won't remain in violence and conflict eternally, because we recognize in someone's life God's input and God's will. That's peace for me. (interview)*

For those who are motivated by their faith, it is again a sense of relational responsibility to God, or perhaps dual responsibility to both God and other human beings that spurs actions for peace. As expressed by this peacebuilder, it is also a belief that there is a sacred part – a part of God – within others that may lead to such commitments to peace. If violence not only harms other human beings, but also harms God, there would be a strong theological basis for working to prevent war and promote peace. This is similar to my own Quaker belief in that of God in every person as the theological basis behind a practical commitment to nonviolence and peace.

## **6. Individual Character and Positive Deviance**

*So it was just some, you know, genes. – Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

I cannot discuss the core findings of this study without returning again briefly to the idea that peace agency might somehow be something that's "just in me." Listening to and reading the stories, motivations, and aspirations of individuals and groups who are working for peace in some of the most war-ravaged countries cannot help but leave one thinking that these people are just special. That they are more courageous, more heroic than the rest of us. That they have something in their genes that prompts them to take a leadership role for peace. Some peacebuilders themselves sometimes suggested as much.

*So I think ever since I was a little, when I moved back to my primary school, my secondary school, I was always the leader, best pupil in the class...pulling the school together. You know very, good student. You know, I think I was just born like that.*

*- Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

This could return us to the theory of positive deviance discussed earlier and the notion that in any group there are always some individuals, often a minority who will innovate and find positive solutions to problems. (Sternin 2002) In fact, there is likely a bit of positive deviance at play in local peacebuilding as the testimonies of these peacebuilders often spoke of determination, courage, and what I came to think of as just plain "gumption" by the end of the research. However, even when the local

peacebuilders interviewed for this study boiled their motivations down to something that was just naturally in them, they also would then go on to reference back to relationships in their lives that shaped them.

*So I think it the genes [that] we got in the right way. And of course we had support from our family, who let us do what is the best, really trusted in our choices, and I think they proved right. – Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

It may be then, that positive deviance is also connected to relationality, that it is not just in our genes, but a mix of our relational experiences and our natural design that allow a minority of people to break out of the norms and chart a different, more promising path. This story from Indonesia points to the mixture of individual character and relational experiences that helped shape one female peace and human rights leader:

*[The] founder and Board [chair] of [our organization], is a women activist and human rights law expert. She began her concern on women issue since she was in high school, where she got chances to learn social analysis, journalism, gender analysis, etc. [Her] call for a fight in [violence against women] issues began to strengthen in 1995 when there was a rape case in Bekasi, West Java. [She] became aware about violence against women. In 1998, [she] and her friends established [the organization]. [She] was later selected as the N-Peace Awardee, Role Model for Peace.*

*- Indonesian peacebuilding group, application*

In any case, these peacebuilders also often underlined the ability of – and need for – everyone to work for peace, and emphasized the potential for small individual efforts to spread and grow.

*[E]ach peace community member has [their] own story.... its different from one person to another, one story to another story.*

*- Sudanese peacebuilder, interview*

We return to this theme of individual character and determination again in the next section.

To summarize key findings on the question of how local peacebuilders understand their own motivations to act for peace in the midst of violence, we find a fundamental sense of relational responsibility, spurred by a felt sense of human connection with others, is linked to a number of motivating factors. Six of those factors, as outlined above, are pictured here.



**Figure 2: Six Motivators of Relational Responsibility and Peace Agency**

### **What Sustains Peace Agency against Risk?**

*The most important value of a peacebuilder to have is being positive and not surrendering.*

*– Filipino peacebuilder, application*

In addition to exploring the motivations for people choosing peace in the midst of violence, this study also asked what helps sustain peacebuilders against the risks they face. The risks local peacebuilders and international peacebuilders face in undertaking their work are not the same. For people living and working in their own communities, some risks are lower – they know the language, culture and social norms, have established relationships and networks that can help them navigate conflict, and are

known by others who may help protect them if dangers arise. However, they face significantly greater risks than international interveners in many other ways. Most notably, they usually do not have the same options to leave when violence or other risks escalate. They are bound to their communities by those same relationships and networks, and they face risks related to family and loved ones that international peacebuilders often do not. In making their choice for peace, they may also go against the positions or expectations of their families and communities and face the risk of rejection from those they love.

### ***1. The Costs of Peace Agency***

Local peacebuilders in both interviews and written descriptions of their work recounted numerous stories of the risks and costs they faced in choosing to act for peace. These included risks associated with how others perceived them and the choices they made to act for peace, direct threats of violence and harm, economic and reputational loss, and the many sensitivities that come with peacebuilding work in tense and volatile contexts. Some examples follow.

*I tried to talk to people but people are somehow crazy because of all the bad things that are happening around them. So every day I was having this question “are you with us or with them? Are you doing this or that?” And after some times there...I was threatened with my life.*

*- Syrian peacebuilder, interview*

*Then I was starting slowly to share the reconsideration of views, but many people rejected me and rejected my thoughts. They considered some of us to be crazy, stupid, young teenagers. They would say, "you guys don't know what's going on...you don't know how these things are serious... you have to.... be ready to defend yourself, your community, and your family. If you are not thinking to take up arms you will get completely terminated....Even in my close family, people were not understanding.*

*– Burundian peacebuilder, interview*

*In these more than 16 years, we have suffered over 2,000 human rights violations, including more than 250 assassinations of members of our community, with total impunity.*

*- Colombian peace group, application*

*Despite his motive and his work result being peaceful the Zimbabwe security agents have arrested him more than 15 times in the last 6 years. He shortly went into exile in 2010 fearing for his life but returned after realising that if all activist can run away who will represent the people and drive peace initiatives.*

*- Zimbabwean peacebuilding group, application*

*Many politicians still use violence. For a small organisation using local resources. Our organisation can be declared an enemy. Politicians can use people and bribe them and we turn them against us. That is what we are fighting against.*

*– Kenyan peacebuilder, application*

*The issue of hate speech and violence between communities in Myanmar is extremely tense and dangerous, and must be responded to sensitively and always keeping in mind effective entry points.*

*- Myanmar peacebuilding group, application*

Peacebuilding work is inherently risky work. The direct risks of violence and harm are an experience those in the global North professional peacebuilding field only occasionally confront. For local peacebuilders, the risks are a part of daily life. Unlike internationals operating in other countries, local peacebuilders face the risks of conflict as inherent to their lives, not merely a risk of the job they choose. Despite the elevated risks working for peace often entails in these environments, they carry on.

The issue of family arose in these discussions as a challenge or risk, particularly for women who opted to engage in active, often risky, peace work. This illustrates a gender dynamic at play in terms of costs and risks for women peacebuilders.

*I'm the only girl in my family, and my brothers they've always dominated, so when I was growing up and I was getting exposed to these things and I was getting educated...I started to question the status quo and I became unpopular. They just could not understand me and the way I was doing things.*

*– Zimbabwean woman peacebuilder, interview*

*My family sometimes, mother and father didn't understand why should I travel a lot? Why should I go to these areas? What's the problem? ....So its difficult for*

*them to understand that it's something that I am. I find myself in it actually. I find it can prove something. Something that's different.*

*- Sudanese woman peacebuilder, interview*

*So when we are women, we have to break those barriers on every level. There's a lot of harassment by men in our society, public harassment, harassment in universities, in colleges, everywhere, we have to break those as well. With that, I think that when young women work, it's not the work like any other organization, but it's really a unique thing and as our organization was the first young woman led organization in Pakistan, so I think it takes a lot of courage as well. A lot of courage and confidence. Because you have to be ready for all the negative things as well.*

*- Pakistani woman peacebuilder, interview*

*Yes, it's very hard. But I think this is my choice, because I don't want to just sit at house and see all what's happening without trying to help. And I'm separated with my family. My family is still inside Syria and I'm out. But I will go back. One day I will go back.*

*– Syrian woman peacebuilder, interview*

Women peacebuilders are increasingly recognized for the critical and often unique role they can play in directly preventing violence, mitigating community conflict, and advancing structural change. What is not discussed as often is what impacts being a peacebuilder has on them as women within families within often patriarchal societies. These women peacebuilders must not only overcome barriers against women within

society and peacebuilding work itself, they must also continue to juggle the responsibilities and roles of family and home care that remain disproportionately placed on the shoulders of women. The peacebuilding work they feel called to thus becomes a risk to their family roles and relationships in ways unique to women.

Simply recognizing the multi-layered risks and costs that local peacebuilders face in choosing to lead efforts for peace in their societies is worth greater attention by the international community. Despite the many risks that these local peacebuilders face, though, they remain committed to their work and find ways to carry on. When asked where they found the sustaining power to do so, they again returned to the theme of relationships, affirming not only their sense of relational responsibility to others, but also the reciprocal strength and support they gain from the communities with whom they work and their loved ones.

## ***2. Community Affirmation and Relationships that Sustain***

*Our strength is based in collective community work.*

*– Colombian peace community, application*

If relational responsibility acts as a motivating factor for people to act for peace in the midst of violence, then this study also suggests it can become an interactive “virtuous cycle” (Ricigliano 2015) within a system of violence that helps feed and expand the possibilities for peace (see Chart 3). When local peacebuilders faced risks and costs to their work, they described finding strength to continue their work through relationships with others and the affirmation they received from others for their efforts.

Sometimes this came from their own colleagues within their organizations or groups working for peace. Sometimes it came from the communities with whom they were engaging. And sometimes it came from their personal relationships with family and friends.

*The level of engagement of youth beneficiaries of our programs – their level of engagement is totally amazing. In a very risky environment. That gives us a greater determination...gives us hope that there is a critical mass of silent peacebuilders who just need a space of action....there are people out there who just don't have a space to act but they are thirsty, they are hungry for peace and if they are given a chance they are ready to act.*

*- Burundian peacebuilder, interview*

*What motivated me [to continue] was seeing that community succeed. They were threatened and tortured and beaten down, and they didn't give up. They didn't give up. And they became one of the richest, most successful communities in our area. And I thought what motivates you is this culture of soldiering on. And if they can do it, well then I should try too.*

*– Somali Kenyan peacebuilder, interview*

*I realized if we don't keep working with these women they will become so disappointed (and also with the NGO world which is seen now already so Western driven)...that's why we felt we had to continue this work with these mothers. No money, we used our own endowment money and raised our own*

*funds. ...[T]he motivation is we didn't want to disappoint those who were already working with us in this area, especially the mothers and the youth.*

*- Pakistani peacebuilder, interview*

*When I look back at these 20 years there some difficult times. But never difficult that I would give up. Really I never had those kind of thoughts, you know. Yes there were times I would tell to my colleagues the pressure is so difficult, I cannot, I am not sure how long I will be able to continue. But we as a team, we are an excellent team. We [are] 10 full-time employees. We are more friends than colleagues because of all the long years we are together. And I am that kind of a person that I talk, and when I have troubles I would talk about them. And when you share it with your colleagues, your friends, when you talk about it, it becomes easier. So I am quite fortunate that we are a team as we are. And when we have these team support and go through problems together, that's a huge help in this kind of work.*

*– Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

A Nigerian peacebuilder points to the bonds formed between himself and others who were marginalized and affected by war when they came together to form an organization and work for peace in their communities in the North of the country. As he explains:

*The staying power is our story, the story we want to share, the story of forgiveness, of bringing people together for the unity of the country. That's our story, and that is our staying power. (interview)*

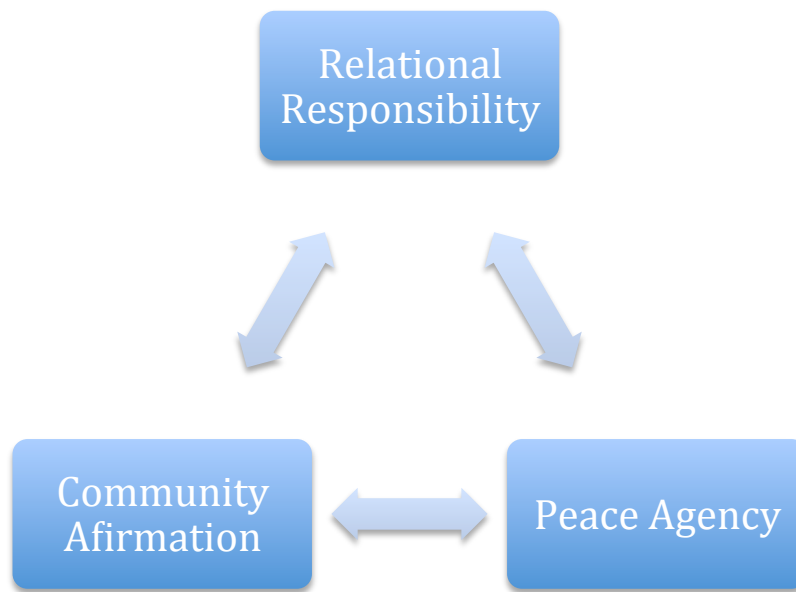
A key sustaining factor for local peacebuilders may also be the reality that this is not just their story, but their home, their community that is enduring the impacts of war and violence. This inevitably imparts a sense of connection and relational responsibility that even the most dedicated outsiders will rarely feel.

*Despite the challenges, they are determined to carry on, because the region is their home and they see it as their duty to improve the lives of the people who live there.*

*– Pakistani peacebuilder, application*

*And thank you because you accepted my emotions and my thoughts because, you know, it's your country, your people, and your family, you can't just be all the time reasonable. I don't know exactly how reasonable I am right now, because it's a lot going on and I'm not sure, but I'm just doing my best to be in the right place.*

*- Syrian peacebuilder, interview*



**Figure 3: Reinforcing Process of Peace Agency**

**Parental Support Sustains Young Women Peacebuilders – Story from Pakistan**

*And I was telling you previously how when we were kids, because we were taught in schools that going to jihadist is a good thing and it's fighting for justice, we also want to fight for justice, and that was the thing that our father was very important to. He would actually teach us about the constitution about human rights about the UN about all the international human rights instruments in home, so almost every day you know, we had a lesson in our home. And, it was not always only limited to that, he would even for example tell us "ok this is, today you have to study these 5 points in the constitution and you have to come back and you have to tell me". So we would actually, you know – my and my sister's storybooks are not about Disney and princesses, they were always about human rights about activism about these stories, and I think that played a very huge role*

*in shaping our work, in shaping our personalities and the way we have approached all of these things.*

*So, I was going to school, my father was arrested for one month, and we never missed a single day of our school. So I think our mother also gave us courage that she knew her husband was in prison and she couldn't do anything because she's a housewife, she's not that educated and you know, but still, I still remember the day our mother wrote – she was telling us to write a press release and we were writing it and we sent it to all the local newspapers and that was actually the day my father was released from prison.*

*....*

*I think that every experience has – if we had to stop our work I think, those are the moments we would have decided enough is enough, we don't want this mess. But we never stopped our work even in that difficult time, so I think it's more that I think it comes from our blood and from our parents, especially our father, he always taught us you have to resist against the oppression. So I think that's what we have learned from it, because all these years he has been resisting the injustices, he has been resisting the most powerful people in Pakistan because there were people in government who had authorities and they had misused these authorities against my father, but he never gave up on his values, he never give up on his beliefs. I think we saw him all our lives that he stood on his beliefs and I think that is what transferred onto us, that no matter what happens, even if there are a lot of difficult times, so that if you believe in something, just stand by it. So never just let anyone crush your goals in your life. He always taught us to be strong, he gave us so many skills I think, and still we have to learn a lot from him. I think he is the one behind it.*

### **3. Hope, Determination, and Gumption**

The sense of hope, determination, and gumption that local peacebuilders express with regard to their initial motivations to work for peace also comes through when discussing what helps them sustain their efforts against risks and challenges. Again, this research suggests a connection between the individual character of these peacebuilders and their relational experiences, but it is also worth lifting up their sense of individual commitment and persistent hope in the power of individuals and communities to make change, particularly in light of growing attention within the peacebuilding field to identifying sources of resilience for peace.

*Sometimes, as all the people, I feel like nothing will change and everything will stay corrupted. But I think that if we didn't do something, everything will stay corrupted. But we are working, and we are working really hard. And I'm satisfied with what I am doing and what the others do to try to help and to try to find a peaceful solution. It will be very hard because it is very new for us, but we will find our way.*

*– Syrian peacebuilder, interview*

*We are committed to do what we can to change our society. Even without funds, I use my own money to travel to Gulu, to communicate.*

*- Ugandan peacebuilder, application*

The commitment and determination of these local peacebuilders came through clearly despite the obstacles to success that their efforts faced.

*It was, and remains, politically difficult for a woman to raise arms issues in Nepal. Despite many challenges, [the founder] has been an active campaigner for peace and disarmament before, during and after the conflict, regularly engaging with high-ranking government officials, senior military officers, and leaders of armed groups.*

- Nepali peacebuilding organization, application

*As such, aware that the future was unclear and completely unpromising for dignified development for women, these rural women decided to take action. They put in place a structure to allow them to work to promote and defend their rights, their emancipation, and to work for a better future for their daughters who were victims of the discrimination promoted by backward customs. Their aims would also include fighting against malnutrition, and promoting peace and sustainable development. So was created [our organization].*

- Congolese peacebuilding organization, application

Their words also inspire and encourage their own agency and the agency of others to take action and embrace their responsibility toward others.

*We told the youths and their parents that, they have what it takes to build their own lives.*

- Ugandan peacebuilding group, application

*Our participants also experience a powerful sense of agency and responsibility to stand up for justice.*

*- Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilding group, application*

In sum, then, on the question of what sustains local peacebuilders against the risks they face, these individuals and groups expressed strong themes of relationship again. The relationships with their colleagues, families, and those they seek to serve are a vital source of support and affirmation. Hope appears again as a source of staying power, and expressions of individual character and what might be called gumption come through vividly in their words.

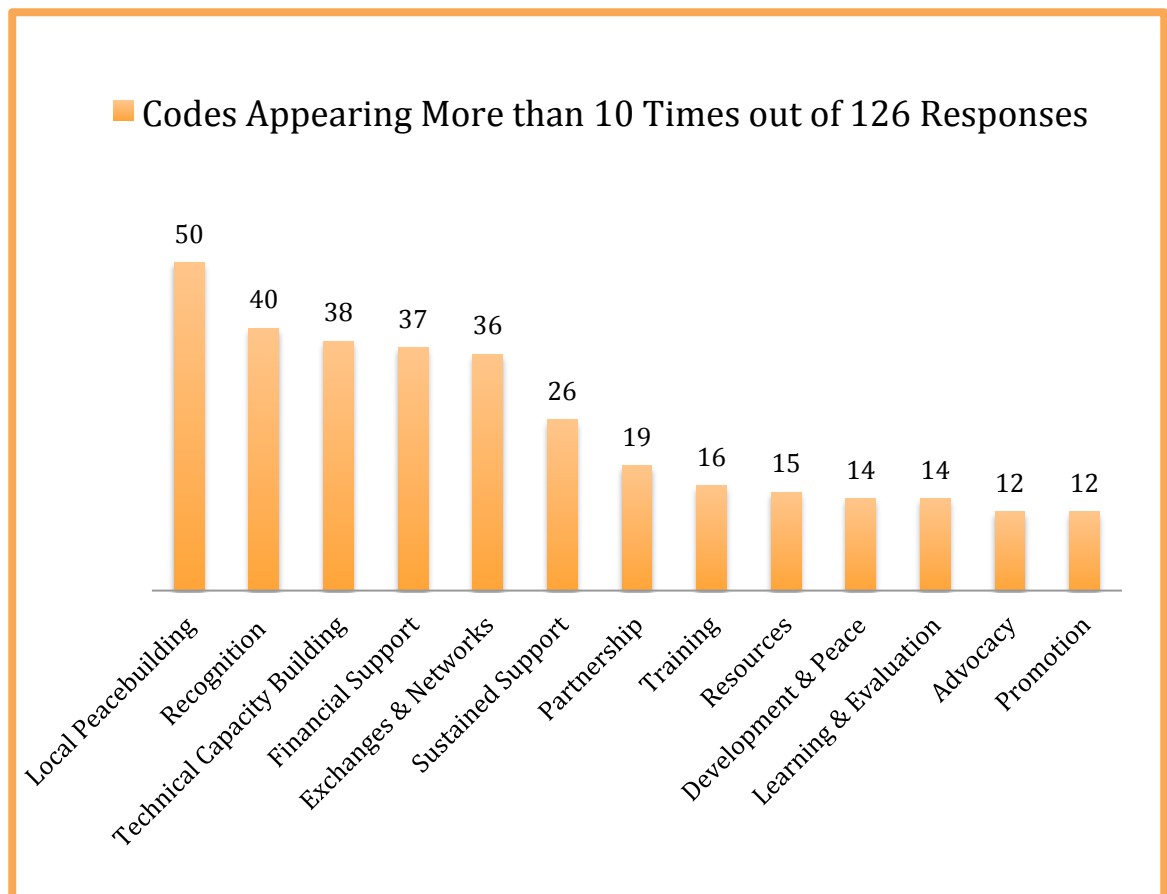
### **How Can the International Community Support?**

*The true work is in laying a foundation for trust and respect that is the necessary foundation for a just future.*

*– Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilding group, application*

The third and final research question this study considered is what local peacebuilders believe the international community can do to better support their efforts. As noted earlier, this question was specifically included in the 2015 Tomorrow's Application process as an optional research question, yielding 126 responses from 44 countries. It was also asked as the final question in the in-depth interviews with 15 local peacebuilders. All responses were then coded through the same grounded theory approach used for the other questions. This again yielded a diverse range of themes

through an initial analysis, which were then further grouped and refined. Figure 4 shows themes that appeared more than 10 times in the responses.



**Figure 4: Frequent Codes for Q3 International Support**

The findings below further group and analyze the responses (both written and from interviews) for a more in-depth discussion of the most prominent and reoccurring themes that were raised by local peacebuilders. It is worth noting that while there were a significant number of responses related directly to financial support, funding was not

the first request these local peacebuilders made. Instead, responses focused more on greater support to the work of local peacebuilders as primary agents of change, greater recognition and respect, and how to improve relationships between local peacebuilders and international interveners. While these themes were often combined with a request for increased funding as well, the overall picture is one of local peacebuilders seeking much more engaged relationships and partnership. This is all the more notable given that the question was posed in the context of a grant application.

In this analysis, I have chosen to group themes together in five primary areas where these local peacebuilders would like to see greater support and change from the international community: 1) Recognition, Partnership, and Local Peacebuilding, 2) Technical Capacity, Financial Support, and Beyond, 3) Impact, Sustainability, and Learning, 4) Exchanges and Networking, and 5) Development and Peace.

### ***1. Recognition, Partnership, and Local Peacebuilding***

The findings of this study affirm and build on other work that has demonstrated a strong desire among local communities who are often at the receiving end of international aid and engagement to be treated with greater respect, recognition, and dignity. (Anderson, Brown, and Jean 2012) They express a confidence in themselves and their communities to find the solutions their communities need, and skepticism of international interveners who come without adequate knowledge of the language, culture, and context. These local peacebuilders emphasize the need for greater support to local- and community-led peacebuilding, as well as the role of relationship in their

own work and in how they want to be treated by international interveners. They do not reject international engagement, but rather encourage an approach that is more deeply grounded in genuine partnership and respect for their role as primary peace agents.

**This suggests that the idea of relational responsibility is not only a compelling motivator in their own work and communities, but also an expectation they extend to international peacebuilding engagements.** Too often international peacebuilding interventions fail to reflect this core reality of their lived experience of seeking peace in the midst of violence because they have become too technocratic and disconnected from the fundamental human nature of what peacebuilding is for local communities directly impacted by war and violence. Local peacebuilders in this study expressed a desire for international peacebuilders to enter into relationship with them, to make that relational process part of their commitment, and to sustain it beyond short-term interventions.

*It's an enduring work that needs patience, time and lifelong relationships. The international community can support this work by coming along side us, instead of not listening and doing their own work without us. It is our communities and our people who know what we need the most.*

*- South Sudanese peacebuilding organization, application*

*We have learnt that it is crucial to gain the trust of the community and community leaders by adopting a sensitive and gradual approach to working with them and ensuring their buying into the interventions. It is vital to ensure their continuous engagement and feedback and to show that the intervention will bring benefits to the whole community.*

*– Liberian peacebuilding group, application*

*Our organisation maintains a representation across varied regions of the country, our volunteers are integrated locally within their communities, favouring a strong relationship with the people that we aim to serve.*

*– Rwandan peacebuilding organization, application*

This request for deeper relationship was not simply a desire for greater human connection in the work, but also a very practical desire for creating methods and approaches that would yield greater impact for the quest for peace in their communities.

*For you to produce effective results, you need to understand the different contexts in which you work. Our context is different from Sri Lanka's, its different from Burundi. We have our own ways of doing things. You have to understand our culture, because if you don't do that, you won't be effective.*

*- Zimbabwean peacebuilding organization, application*

*The more effective international actors are those who understand and know the country and the communities they are working for. Many international workers come with no previous understandings and stay for short periods. They are then replaced with another person who needs to learn again. International organizations could also do a better job to truly support local initiatives, as the support offered is usually to find groups and individuals willing to “collaborate” for the projects they’ve already conceived. Sometimes we see certain topics become the only issues international groups are willing to support and this can send a strange message to communities.*

*- Congolese peacebuilding group, application*

Local peacebuilders were not rejecting the need for international support and collaboration, but rather requesting a reshaping of the approaches and priorities, strengthened trust-building with communities, and a greater leadership role in the process.

*Yes, it’s very important to use the facilities of the community, if this is the word. The rich community and they have a lot really and we can use it in a smart way and we can be convincing to them. We just need to bring a little bit some books and to have some drawing facilities and to be able to go to the camps...and we can fulfill this work. It’s not that much hard work and it doesn’t need that huge*

*amount of money. It needs just to accept that we can't come to the society and say "this is right and this is wrong" because I'm sure that every community have a little bit of wrong things but they have a lot of brilliant things and we can use this. This is what I think.*

*- Syrian peacebuilder, interview*

*Trust. That we have built with youth and mothers but also with the whole community. Continue and sustain commitment. Its not a one time thing you can do. Many peacebuilding groups that come take it as a project and then they leave and that kills the whole spirit of building social cohesion or building peace in the communities.*

*- Pakistani peacebuilder, interview*

*Its important, especially in a conflict situation, its very important to empower people at a grassroots level, because they are the ones that are used...so if you empower them I think you will have done a good job....These locally led initiatives. They are a powerful tool for peacebuilding.*

*– Zimbabwean peacebuilder, interview*

In addition to recognizing and supporting the work of local peacebuilders, a number of those who responded emphasized the importance of lifting up their work for others to see. Local peacebuilders recognize that the access, networks, and exposure international peacebuilders can bring offers a kind of support they often cannot find within their own communities and networks.

*We should try to do international promotion for our work. Hoping also that may be some of the interested donors will hear of our work... and maybe decide to help support our peacebuilding. That's definitely one challenge we have in front of us...to find the best way to do international promotion of our work, hoping that would lead to some new support of our work.*

*– Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

In sum, local peacebuilders expressed a strong desire for greater recognition by the international peacebuilding community. This included not only awareness of their work and capacities, but a deeper sense of recognizing the leadership they already offer, the knowledge and skills they actively bring to the work for peace in their communities, and their place at the center of global peacebuilding practice. For them, partnership was not a term bound by projects and funding, but a relational commitment at a human level and one that requires trust-building, long-term accompaniment, and fair processes of decision-making and resource sharing. This reorientation of recognition and partnerships of dignity is not only needed out of respect and equity, but in order to improve the practice and impact of our shared peacebuilding endeavors.

## **2. Technical Capacity Building, Financial Support and Beyond**

*Better support by the international community would mean that they should not only extend their funding, but also share their expertise and training.*

*– Pakistani peacebuilding group, application*

While local peacebuilding groups were very clear that they would like the international community to increase direct funding to them, and in some cases that their work would “simply be impossible” without it, they actually mentioned technical capacity building in the form of specific knowledge, skills, and organizational development even more often. It was thus not only a “transactional” exchange they were requesting, but a “transformational” one,<sup>12</sup> through which they could improve their impact, sustain their organizations, and avoid long-term dependency.

*Local organizations are often the best suited to intervene and make positive changes, but international organizations are reticent to fund local groups because they don't want them to become dependent on outside funding. Yet, without that funding, it is very hard to build sustainable organizations.*

*– Samoan peacebuilding organization, application*

*International community can play an important role by enabling and supporting local peacebuilders. In communities where conflict is on going or on the rise, and which by definition the most needing communities to peacebuilding activities, there is a direct need to financial and institutional support.*

*- Yemeni peacebuilding organization, application*

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<sup>12</sup> See paper by Simon Fisher (2012) comparing transactional and transformational relationships, provided to Peace Direct during a 2016 consultation and included as Annex F.

*[W]e have to say first of all that we wish the international community could support local peace initiatives better financially and materially. The constant struggle for funds is debilitating and demoralizing.*

*- Palestinian peacebuilding organization, application*

*Building capacity and allowing for local ownership, thus ensuring sustainability would hugely help local peace builders in situations of conflict.*

*– Kenyan peacebuilding organization, application*

Local peacebuilding groups also provided a number of specific ideas for improving the way funding is directed. This included more resources for early prevention, ensuring funders reach beyond large capital-based organizations to also support small community-based peace groups, and investing in youth and women.

*The most important is to believe in the power of young people, and young women especially. Whenever there are organizations that are led by old men, or even boys, they're more trusted and they can get the funds very easily, compared to the organizations led by young women. So this is one of the things that you trust and support because that's important because that's not happening.*

*- Syrian peacebuilder, interview*

*Local peace builders lack resources to intervene promptly when conflict arises.*

*The international community does not seem to be excited when local peace builders present projects on conflict-prevention, that is , nipping conflicts in the bud. They would want to intervene only when a conflict has grown full-blown.*

*That makes our work difficult. Supporting local peace builders to invest in early warning systems would avert more conflicts than resolving them.*

*- Cameroon peacebuilding group, application*

*Many creative local peace actors and peacebuilding organisations are unable to achieve their dreams and make sustainable impact because of financial instability, many local peacebuilding organisations disappears a few years after their formation because the current funding terrain favours big, old and well established organisations –many of whom keep recycling old ideas without much innovation. International actors should invest in new start up creative peacebuilding projects, support them as partners along their formative stage and help them scale up in future through long term financial and capacity building commitments.*

*- Ugandan peacebuilding group, application*

Rarely did these peacebuilders respond with only a request for funding and technical capacity building. Rather, their requests were often multi-layered, demonstrating a recognition of a variety of needs as well as a variety of avenues through which the international community can strengthen and support local peacebuilding.

*The international community can support our work through funding, capacity building through trainings, publicising the work of local peacebuilders at the*

*global level, facilitating regional conferences and workshop, and sharing peacebuilding educational materials. International actor can improve on how they relate to local peacebuilders by maintaining regular contact and sharing best practices around the world.*

*- Kenyan peacebuilding group, application*

There requests for improved engagement were also based on their own experiences of failed programs of training or capacity building brought by international organizations that failed to recognize their existing capacities or real needs. As described in the box below, shifting to a more effective and respectful practice would involve significant community consultation and involvement in the process of needs assessment, program design, and taking the lead in implementation, while international actors provide support and resources that allow them to pursue the solutions they believe are best suited for their communities.

**Improving Support to Local Peacebuilding – Advice from Uganda**

*The international community can better support local peacebuilders by being “a guide on the side” as opposed to the “sage on the stage.” If we examine the impact of the millions of dollars that went into reintegration programming by international NGOs, we see that it has been marginally successful. Formerly abducted women fell through the cracks and few benefitted from reintegration programming. Those that did benefit were trained in catering and tailoring and now the market is so glutted, no one can find work. The community continues to marginalize them as they are not perceived as productive members of society. The methods used by the NGOs were based on western perceptions*

*of the issues in post-war Uganda. They measured PTSD (a western construct) and offered counseling that did not largely include the community (ignoring the collective nature of our culture). They never asked us about indigenous ways of healing or what we needed to build peace. However, they did bring an abundance of expertise. We suggest that the international community begins by asking us what we need in order to build peace in Northern Uganda. At the table should be a wide variety of officials, stakeholders and local community members. They should facilitate the process until we have a plan. Then they need to offer support (knowledge training, skills training, funding) to allow us to implement that plan.*

*- Ugandan peacebuilding group*

### **3. Impact, Sustainability, and Learning**

*According to our experience, peacebuilding requires time and represents a daily, long-term commitment. – Tunisian peacebuilding group, application*

A third thematic focus in the responses from local peacebuilders were issues of impact, sustainability, and learning. Responses included specific examples of failed peacebuilding interventions, often for lack of sustained funding or knowledge about the local context. Some noted the difficulty in meeting donor conditions for monitoring and evaluation and shared a sense of frustration that the changes they are working for are not easily measured within current approaches, or without longer timeframes of commitment and evaluation. Local peacebuilders were not asking for an end to monitoring and evaluation, but rather improved practices that better match the realities they face and what they see as the processes of peacebuilding necessary in their

societies. They requested better sharing a lessons learned and good practice, as well as recognition of the importance of even small steps toward peace.

*Peace is not just like other fields like agriculture. Peace is such a hard thing to measure. We know we have such a big challenge. But the moment we look at the lives we have touched, the people whose perspectives we have changed, how many peace clubs have been set up, how many young people now appreciate diversity – we look at that and realise we have made a difference. It was very difficult for people to sit down from both sides, but having them share their stories, ask for forgiveness from each other, plant symbolic trees, these are some of things we look at and say “yes we have had some success in our peace work”. When the children say what they have been through, and are able to move on, these are the indicators of success we look at. The outcomes are the interactions between the communities.*

*– Kenyan peacebuilding organization, applicaiton*

*The impact of such programs at the community level – where, for one young boy we support, a wheelchair means the difference between crawling to school and being able to wheel himself there – is hard to quantify.*

*- Nepalese peacebuilding organization, application*

They also expressed frustrations with dominant approaches that do little to strengthen and sustain local capacities, set unrealistic expectations for the slow, sensitive work of peacebuilding, and require demonstrations of large-scale impact that often may take years to begin to see.

*[T]here seems to be the perennial problem of sustainability and local ownership. Immediately, the funding for projects folds up, the project dies and very little effort is done to strengthen the local institutions to carry out the work supported by the international community. Oftentimes, the International donors have their conditionalities that do not necessarily take into account local realities, but are out to satisfy the donors rather than really empowering local organizations.*

*– Cameroon peacebuilding organization, application*

*I always like to mention that there is this beautiful saying which Einstein said that “it is easier to smash an atom than to remove a prejudice”. So its really difficult to remove this prejudices stereo type, which one ethnic group has for other ethnic groups, that is exactly what we are doing in Bosnia. That’s why our work is so fragile on a long-term, it has to be done on a sensitive way, and for that we need international support, definitely.*

*– Bosnian peacebuilder, interview*

*And even if sometimes we feel like what we’re doing is not the thing that has a bigger impact, but if you see a small change... and this would really have an*

*impact on the community...you keep doing the work, in the hope that one day you see a change in a big area.*

*– Sudanese peacebuilder, interview*

At the same time, local peacebuilders wanted to improve the learning and sharing of good practices among themselves and with the broader international community. They did not shy away from rigorous learning and documentation, but wanted it to serve their purpose and respect their approaches.

*Good stories and practices must be documented well and shared. Too often no funding or technical provisions are allocated for this process or even soon after this results in the loss of important lessons to the field.*

*- Guyanan peacebuilding organization, application*

*Timely periodic narrative reports, financial and audited reports, monitoring and evaluation to show success and impact of interventions made are some of the good practices that should be sustained.*

*– Nigerian peacebuilding organization, application*

As illustrated by the story below, unlike the international peacebuilding field's current focus on scale and replicability, local peacebuilders recognized the important contributions of even small steps toward peace within communities impacted by war and violence. The impact was measured not by numbers and scale, but by hope and belief that small changes today plant the seeds for broader shifts in the future.

The issue of sustained support was particularly emphasized in relation to post-conflict societies and the tendency of the international community to shift attention and funding too quickly away from countries coming out of violent conflict.

#### **Small is Beautiful – A Story from Lebanon and Syria**

*Another thing that happened it was in a program that was social integration between the Syrian refugees the Palestinian-Syrian refugees and the Lebanese. The Lebanese kids between 5-15 years just keep hitting the Syrian and Palestinian kids, just saying “you don’t come to our schools, you are refugees, we are rich people” and its just little kids speaking but its making problems to the families. The Lebanese families and to the Syrian families. So we make this program which depended on some things which are very simple, but it’s making love with it, if I can say this. So we planted a lot of things like plants like tomatoes, cucumbers, these things. And they planted them, these kids, the Syrians and the Lebanese and the Palestinian kids. Then I made a big bowl of salad for them and we ate together. So after that they were trying to help each other, because it was like ten weeks of work together, they just stopped hurting each other, stopped fighting and they were much nicer to each other. It’s a small move for the world, but I think in hard work and in sustainable environment when you work harder and harder at this and for long time, we can find changes. Because it’s not like medicine. We can’t say to people, “this is what we have to do and everything will happen in the right way”. We have to be patient and work in long terms.*

*It is critical that the international community sustain its interest in post-conflict countries. Few of the underlying factors that drove conflict in Liberia have*

*abated. We have received significant donor money without major progress. This should be considered unacceptable.....In our view, the key issue with the support of the international community for peace-building in Liberia is that it is not sustained. Three year projects will not undo decades (even centuries) of poor governance. International partners should also think creatively, rather than emphasizing programs in the governance sector.*

*- Liberian peacebuilding organization, application*

*Sustainability of the projects is a big problem for small NGO like us due to lack of funding. Apart from that international donor should support local peace building efforts as compared to imposing their agenda on above. Local peace builder are in good position to know the local mechanism of peace and security. After 1970 and 9/11 the conflict trend change from interstate to intra state, local problem needs local solution. Such efforts should be encouraged with flexible time line as per the needs and wishes of the peace builders on ground.*

*- Pakistani peacebuilding organization, application*

When it came to impact and learning, local peacebuilders were striving for both quality of outcomes and more ethical partnerships. They asked for more listening and a ceding of power over knowledge and technical processes by the international community so that they could both lead their own peace efforts and benefit from the expertise, resources, and collaboration with the international community. They

emphasized again the need for long-term commitment and sustainable practices that support strengthening the role and capacities of local peacebuilders over time.

#### **4. Exchanges and Networking**

A fourth request and good practice mentioned by numerous groups was more opportunities for exchanges and networking with other local peacebuilders. This was noted as something that not only helps with deepening skills and learning, but also as a way of providing moral support and connection to others facing similar challenges.

*There is still a lot of opportunity for greater interaction and knowledge sharing between the international actors and war-affected communities in northern Uganda. This is important in terms of consultation going from the ground level up to the international level, but also downwards in terms of knowledge sharing, capacity building and other trainings.... Some good practices includes seconding international staff to support local peacebuilders and learn from them along the partnership, providing core grants to ensure flexibility in programming and institutional development as well as internship placements, volunteers and organising exchange visits.*

*- Ugandan peacebuilding organization, application*

*Aside funding, which is significant in ensuring that projects are designed and implemented, and social challenges are addressed effectively, other important areas where the international community can be of great help and support are in the specific areas of...partnership development, fellowships and exchange*

*programs, information sharing, including creating platforms and opportunities for our local success stories and modest efforts to be highlighted to the global audience.*

- Nigerian peacebuilding organization, application

Local peacebuilders saw exchanges as an effective and respectful way for them to gain greater experience and expertise, while also leaving space for their own leadership and collaboration with other peacebuilders, local and international.

*Creating regional and/or international networking platforms for peace-builders. Peace-building is often not a job for individuals but for all working together even those in opposition. It is about building partnerships. A networking platform will be ideal where peace practitioners will exchange ideas on what has worked before where on what kind of conflict.*

- Kenyan peacebuilding organization, application

The importance of feeling connected with others who were struggling for peace in the midst of violence came through in both interviews and written responses. In some cases, peacebuilders referenced their own experiences in exchanges or networking and how important it was for them to feel part of a broader movement for peace.

*You are part of something bigger than everyone, everywhere, not just pray and hope to the peace in the holy land. They are doing actions of peace in their communities between ethnical separations in Bosnia, in Africa between foreign*

*combatants, in other places. It makes you understand that this is legitimate and powerful and hope and action everywhere.*

*- Israeli peacebuilder, interview*

## **5. Development and Peace**

Finally, local peacebuilders repeatedly noted the importance of integrating peacebuilding and development in their communities. At times this came through as a sense of frustration that the international community tends to distinguish too much between addressing issues of peace and conflict, and those of development and poverty.

*The international community can better support our work, by helping fund more sustainable projects that would reduce poverty in these high conflict areas in addition to peacebuilding activities, to make these projects more sustainable, as the main root cause of these conflicts are very often poverty and lack of social development. Peacebuilding activities have to go hand in hand with more sustainable projects so that the participants we work with don't feel lost and disappointed once our projects with them are done. Examples could be cultural cafes, cultural spaces, football stadium etc. that would at the same time provide breathing spaces for these people as well as job opportunities.*

*- Lebanese peacebuilding organization, application*

*[International] actors can support addressing the root causes of conflict, including poverty and development.*

*- Benin peacebuilding organization, application*

*The international community should support local actors in their efforts of resolution and prevention of conflict through funding to combat poverty and the effects of climate change, including local actors in international decisions.*

*- Togo peacebuilding organization, application*

In their response, a Liberian women's organization pointed out the critical need to include women in development and peacebuilding processes:

*[Our organization] has learnt women's organisations strongly link violence and impoverishment of communities to their lack of participation. (application)*

Some also pointed to the specific need for supporting jobs and livelihoods as part of peacebuilding.

*Also people need livelihoods so they are not manipulated into violence. If there was greater support for jobs and health and livelihoods, conflict would be less.*

*- Filipino peacebuilding organization, application*

*The international community need to help community members to become self-sufficient and independent by helping the employed have employable skills to help them get jobs or be creators of jobs. This will help reduce idleness on the part of youths. They will therefore be engaged in a productive process and this helps in promoting peace.*

*-Kenyan peacebuilding organization, application*

Beyond their responses to this specific question, it is worth noting that local peacebuilders also pointed repeatedly to the importance of linking development and peacebuilding in their own work, and the need for such integrated approaches to be effective.

*We are convinced that peace is the foundation of development and wellbeing of the population... They started with the theme 'productive work, the foundation of peace'. They were convinced that there can be no development without peace. It was impossible to have development, health, all the things necessary for the wellbeing of the population, without peace.*

*- Burundian peacebuilding organization, application*

*The effective capacity building of these community level structures in promoting the understanding of PEACE, they have multiplied effects of enhancing a comprehensive human rights based approaches to development. Through improved understanding of their rights and entitlements the action will foster the role of community members as non state actors who effectively participate in community development planning with government departments, local authorities, NGOs and including the local business people.*

*- Zimbabwean peacebuilding organization, application*

This is notable because the trends in the field have been toward increased specialization, technical focus on conflict and peacebuilding, and, some would say, a too narrow approach to what constitutes the work of advancing peace. While local peacebuilders are often viewed by the international community as not being focused enough to have specific impacts on isolated theories of change, local peacebuilders often expressed a sophisticated and more comprehensive approach to solving problems in their societies, as well as a flexibility that is difficult to program and fund through current international donors. I began to call this flexible and comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of their communities in dynamic ways “responsive peacebuilding”.

**Based on this study, we might define *responsive peacebuilding*, then, as the ability to shape, adjust, and refine efforts to advance sustainable peace in ways that recognize and respond to the broad spectrum and changing nature of a community’s needs and opportunities.** Consider these comments from local peacebuilders about the integrated and flexible nature of their work.

*For a multifaceted conflict that we witness in Pakistan, solution needs to be dynamic as well as multidimensional including social, economic, political, etc. International community can play a role in each of the given categories but majority of such solutions should be sustainable and internally driven to have more impact and greater acceptance.*

*- Pakistani peacebuilding organization, application*

*Its mission is to promote a culture of peace, the rights of rural women and girls, food security, and sustainable development. The main areas of its work are: peace and reconciling communities; food security (agro-pastoral work); human rights; good governance and accountability; educating the public about peace, human rights and development through the media; fighting against sexual violence and all forms of gender-based violence; recovering children from the mines in the Fizi-Itombwe region, and providing them with guidance and supervision; raising awareness among armed groups on the demobilisation, disarmament and socioeconomic rehabilitation of self-demobilised ex-combatants; raising community awareness on the fight against backward customs, fighting against the signing up of children in armed groups and mines, etc.*

*- Congolese peacebuilding organization, application*

*Our organisation started as a youth empowerment organisation through cultural appreciation and sports development; however as northern Uganda got engulfed in civil conflict, the impact necessitated us to shift focus from just empowering youths to psychosocial help and taking on the role of peace builder, as mental health as a result of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was pervasive during and after the insurgency.*

*- Ugandan peacebuilding organization, application*

Given the international community's inclusion of a specific goal for supporting peaceful and just societies (Goal 16) in the Sustainable Development Goals, the idea of responsive peacebuilding and ensuring an integrated approach to peace and development may be particularly timely. I return to this idea in the recommendations.

Finally, in addition to the grounded theory process of identifying core themes from this research question, a word frequency analysis was run on the 126 written, identifying the top 40 words that occurred across all the text.<sup>13</sup> The top 40 words (excluding words less than 3 letters and with certain non-meaning words such as prepositions removed) are presented here in a word cloud and offer their own compelling snapshot of the views of these these local peacebuilders on the question of how the international community can better support them.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview transcripts were excluded from this analysis because they tended to include a more open discussion with less ability to rigorously isolate specific text for question 3.

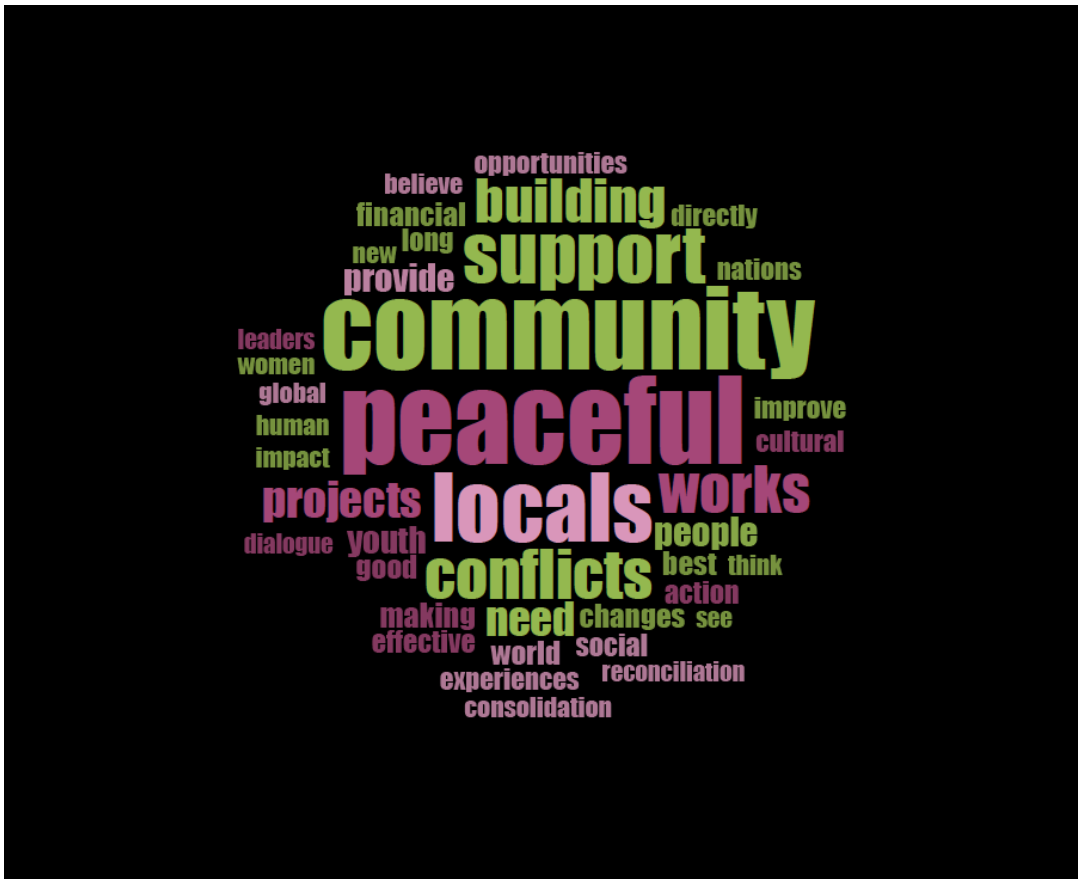


Figure 5: Word Cloud of Responses to International Support Question

**Table 4. Summary of Recommendations from Local Peacebuilders**

1. Recognize, affirm, and amplify to others the knowledge, expertise, and capacities for peace already present within communities and among local peacebuilders.
2. Trust local knowledge, leadership, and solutions as the starting point for peacebuilding efforts.
3. Engage with local peacebuilders to develop partnerships of relational responsibility, embodying mutual respect, human connection, and long-term accompaniment.
4. Provide increased financial, technical, and capacity-building resources to local peacebuilders.
5. Increase resources for early prevention, reach beyond large capital-based organizations to support small community-based peace groups, and invest in youth and women.
6. Support exchanges and networking to share knowledge across local conflict contexts.
7. Improve impact and learning through locally-led approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Recognize the value of small-scale peacebuilding and need for long-term, sustainable approaches.
8. Fund and support integrated, responsive approaches to peacebuilding and development.

Having reviewed key findings across all three of the research questions in this study, we now turn to considering what they might teach us and what recommendations they suggest for improving our collective search for peace.

### PART III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

When I began this study, I believed it was primarily about individual agency, the ability of individuals – or at least some individuals - to consciously choose their path between war and peace. I realize now it is not nearly so simple a matter as individual choice. Indeed, while individual agency most certainly exists and can be exercised, remarkably, under even the most grueling conditions, those who end up as what we call peacebuilders do not see their lives as a matter of individual choice. Indeed, and perhaps conversely, they often understand themselves as *compelled* to act for peace out of a *relational responsibility* that derives from a felt *human connection* with others. They may be motivated less by agency and more by community. *Family and children*, in particular, play a fundamental role in how they understand, interpret, and sustain their commitments to peace. They assume the risks and hardships of their actions for peace with critical support from family and friends, but also *despite the personal rejection and painful distancing from other loved ones*. Relationships play a key role in sustaining their efforts as well, as does their *sense of hope, determination, and gumption*. In terms of support from outsiders, even more than much-needed *financial and technical support* from the international community, they request *recognition, genuine partnership, and greater support for community-based approaches*.

These findings are not necessarily new or original, but some of them are unexpected. The focus on relational responsibility that emerged as the strongest theme across the data, as opposed to the original hypothesis focused on agency or choice, highlights a different starting point for local peacebuilders who are working within war-affected communities than much of the established so-called international peacebuilding field. Local peacebuilders clearly identify peacebuilding as a relational process, a long-term process, and one that needs to be responsive to a range of community needs in a flexible, dynamic way. They affirm the sense that “I am because you are” as a critical starting point for their peace efforts and their relationships with the international peacebuilding field.

The shift from agency to relationship also points to my own deeply engrained assumptions and cultural outlook as a white woman from the United States peacebuilding community. My innate desire to believe that people can and do make intentional choices – that they exercise individual peace agency – in the midst of war reflects some of the biases of the global North and US-Euro centric peacebuilding field in general. We often only see peace as something to be “built” with the same individualistic mindset that shapes our cultures of decision-making, career-building, diplomacy, and development assistance. While we know peacebuilding is at its core a community project, we can find it hard to affirm and work within the relational realities that this implies. Instead, we tend to focus on institutions that can be approached as largely people-less structures to be built, or on individual cases, whether they be people

trained in conflict resolution or communities engaged in a social cohesion project, that we can add up one by one to “scale” to a final end state of peace. We also still persist in assuming that people are driven largely by their own self-interests, making conscious decisions based upon a Western notion of cost-benefit trade offs, despite persistent evidence to the contrary. This is of course not universally true of the peacebuilding field. As explained in earlier chapters, these are growing areas of critique and change in the field. However, in terms of how the knowledge, decision-making, funding, and other resources are controlled and managed for international peacebuilding, there is little denying that the global North remains in charge. This study urges us all to help change that.

### **Defining and Supporting Relational Responsibility**

*“[T]o embrace thick relationality is to deeply commit to relationship, including through the recognition that human beings invariably come into being together such that all being is co-being (Nancy 2000). With co-being comes responsibility for the others that one is involved with, and for outcomes.” (Brigg 2016, p. 66)*

The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who lived through World Wars I and II as refugee, soldier, and prisoner of war, crafted a philosophy based on the “ethics of the Other,” the “wisdom of love”, and the assertion that “responsibility precedes any objective search for truth.” (Levinas 1989) The African tradition of “Ubuntu”, often translated as “I am because you are,” also speaks to the relational realities that

comprise the human experience and suggest a responsibility for not only one's self and the other, but also for the relational space that emerges between them.

The conflict resolution and peacebuilding fields too have emphasized the important of relationships in understanding human conflict and seeking to advance greater peace. However, the role of human relationships is often limited to the narrower field of interpersonal conflict resolution, without significant attention in the growing international peacebuilding arena on how relational realities between individuals can affect the broader societal dynamics of conflict, or might substantively contribute to the illusive search for "peace writ large." Some modern scholars are challenging this somewhat narrowing delineation through a re-focusing on relationships and relational systems. Morgan Brigg, an Australian scholar, recently proposed a reorientation of the field toward what he calls "relational peacebuilding." As he explains, "Relationality is being missed because peace/conflict studies have become too derivative of social science; how thoroughly we end up ignoring the things that other people prioritize through social science." (Brigg 2016, p. 57) Brigg defines relational peacebuilding along a spectrum of "thin, thicker, and thick," and advocates for both the growing trend toward local leadership and engagement, as well as "more thorough-going forms of self-reflexivity." As relationality becomes thicker between the peacebuilding intervener and the local community, the dynamic potential of the interactive processes between them are more realized and "each is transformed through interaction with the other," allowing for the emergence of entirely new

systems, structures, and relationships within the local society and bridging to the global community. (Brigg 2016)

Brigg's theory of relational peacebuilding is particularly relevant to the results of this study and affirms the primary finding that local peacebuilders articulate a sense of relational responsibility that motivates their own peace agency and sustains their commitments to act for peace despite the risks. As he explains,

*In peacebuilding, relationality captures the ways in which practitioners and scholars are increasingly focused, in the wake of failures and critiques of liberal peacebuilding, on partnership, relationship and exchange, particularly with local counterparts and populations....These shifts are increasingly considered necessary to enable the realization of peacebuilding objectives and goals.” (Brigg 2016, 58)*

Relational responsibility may also constitute a form of what development professionals call social capital. Unlike more traditional forms of capital, social capital refers to both tangible and intangible resources within a community, including social networks, or what the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) describes as “bonds, bridges, and linkages.” In fact, the original definition of social capital offered by Lyda Hanifan in 1916 referred to those assets that “count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit.”<sup>14</sup> Strengthening and leveraging

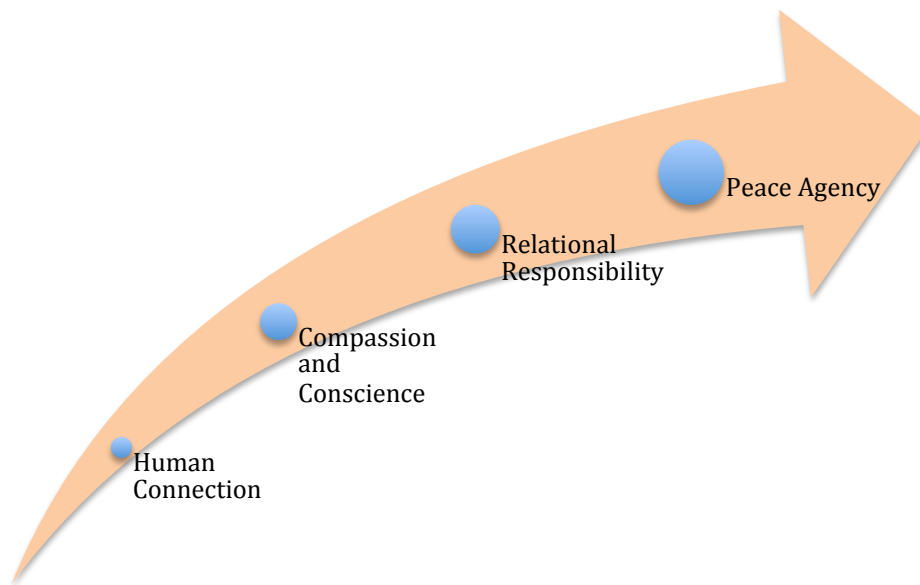
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<sup>14</sup> See *OECD Insight: Human Capital*, online at <https://www.oecd.org/insights/37966934.pdf>.

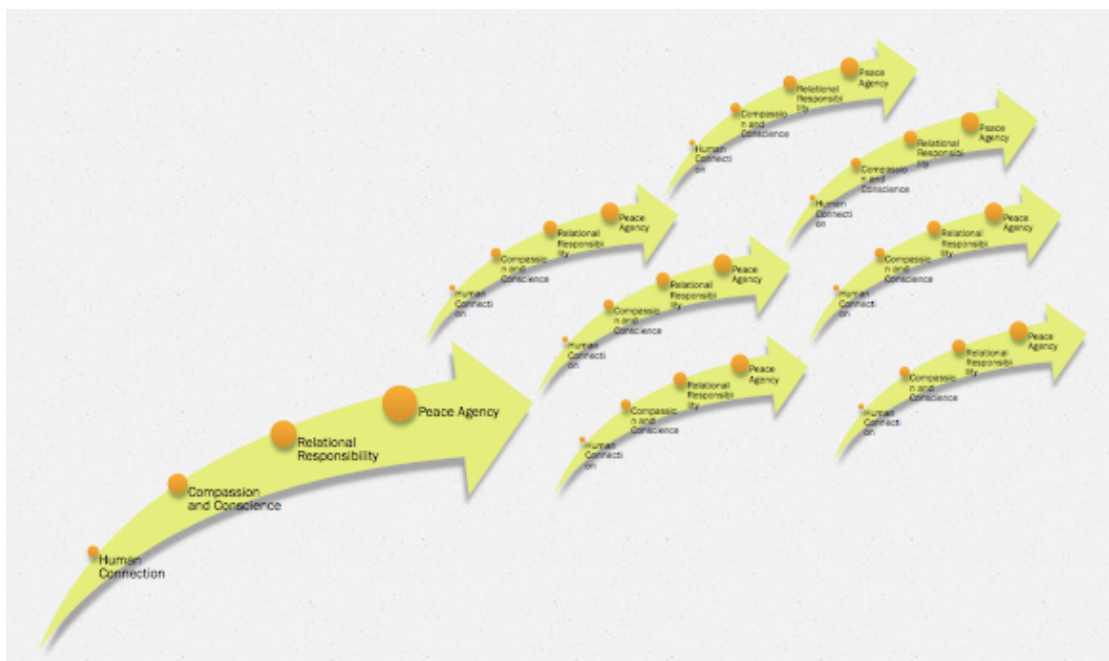
these forms of social capital, as opposed to just goods and labor, has become a central tenet of good development approaches.

Using relational peacebuilding and social capital as a theoretical backdrop, and based upon the perspectives of local peacebuilders engaged in this study, we can now develop a definition of relational responsibility, suggest its relationship to a theory of peace agency, and propose recommendations deriving from this study.

**Relational responsibility can be defined as a sense of commitment and compassion toward others based upon a recognition or experience of our interconnection and interdependence. Local peacebuilders point to relational experiences and aspects of their lives that instill a sense of compassion, conscience, and ultimately responsibility toward others as a key motivating and sustaining factor in their choice to act for peace in the midst of violence. This relational responsibility is further strengthened through the processes of engagement and connections they feel with others in their work for peace. Peace agency, thus, can be sparked by and helps encourage further relational responsibility over time, fostering a form of social capital that can expand the possibilities for peace within individuals and societies. See figures 6 and 7.**



**Figure 6: Relational Responsibility and Peace Agency**



**Figure 7: Expansive Potential of Relational Responsibility**

## **Recommendations for Supporting Relational Responsibility as Peace Agency**

*Ultimately, lasting peace can only come from within individuals. It cannot be imposed externally. The international community needs to support those who demonstrate this reality in every way possible.*

*- Palestinian peacebuilding organization, application*

The following recommendations, based on the findings of this study, are offered for all of us who aspire to contribute our small part to creating a more peaceful and just world. Some are more specific to international donors and organizations that work in a dedicated fashion in what we now call the peacebuilding field. All also suggest areas for further study and action.

### ***1. Foster relational responsibility within ourselves and with others.***

This study suggests the peacebuilding field should recognize and support local, familial, and community-based relationships that foster a sense of positive responsibility to one another, as a fundamental part of systems-wide peacebuilding practice.

Wherever we are positioned within the field, work can be done in our own lives and communities to strengthen the kinds of positive bonds of responsibility and mutual relationship that peacebuilders in this study lifted up as important motivators and sustainers. For those working with communities, or supporting others who do, this also means allowing space, time, and intentional effort to be placed on intangible efforts such as building relationships of trust, being in solidarity with communities, responding

to relational needs and opportunities that are not included in project designs, and nurturing a sense of interconnection and responsibility toward others as a key aspect of peacebuilding. Too often it is these aspects of the hard work of peace that seem too difficult to measure or report and so are neglected by practitioners and donors alike.

## ***2. Focus greater attention on the role of family, children, and youth.***

Investing individual and organizational time and resources into supporting positive family relationships for peace may seem naïve when the international peacebuilding field has finally drawn the attention of high level policymakers at the UN and even some budget commitments among major donors. However, this study suggests it may be quite important, particularly for those who are working on the frontlines of conflict. Local peacebuilders may more easily focus on familial relationships as integral to broader peace because they live their family lives in the midst of volatile and risky contexts. They may more easily understand that the distance between relational responsibility within the family and relational responsibility to your enemy in society is not so wide. In her book reflecting on family life, Quaker peace scholar Elise Boulding points out that we often use metaphors of the family in relation to international peace and advised, “Home is the training ground where people first learn to love, to hate, to get angry, to fear, to forgive.” (Boulding 1989, p. 84) “In the household we have a place to stand, a place to work at being human, to work at humanizing the planet, a place where love can break in. It is a place where we can begin functioning right now, just as we are, with what we know at this moment.” (Boulding

1989, p. 198) The local peacebuilders in this study affirmed her insights and suggested greater attention should be given to the role of family and supporting positive family relationships in the midst of violent conflict.

In particular, this study affirms the need to support the role of children and youth as change agents for peace. Children not only help motivate others to positive action, they also express peace agency and relational responsibility themselves in remarkable ways. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security passed in December 2015, provides an important international opening and platform to give youth and children a greater voice in peace processes in their societies and globally. As global and national networks of youth form to help implement this resolution, funders and practitioners should offer generous support alongside them.

### ***3. Recognize, Trust, and Directly Support Local Peacebuilders***

This study affirmed the growing call from both local and international peacebuilders alike to recognize and create greater space for local leadership, to trust those impacted by conflict to lead change in their societies, and to more directly channel concrete resources and funding toward local peacebuilding. While this is easily said, it is not as easily done. It requires a giving up of power and privilege from the global North, and a ceding of space and leadership to those in the global South. It demands leadership and integrity from local communities who may have become accustomed to the unhealthy dependencies of the international aid system. It beckons all of us toward a willingness to accept greater risk and to work in sometimes

uncomfortable spaces. And it challenges increasingly entrenched systems of bureaucratic decision-making and funding to make fundamental changes. The pay off for doing so, however, is extremely promising. As this study affirmed, the potential for locally-led peacebuilding to improve the impacts, outcomes, and long-term processes of social change in conflict-affected environments is significant. As critiques of the international peacebuilding field's failures grow, changing course toward greater recognition and support for local peacebuilders may also be a necessity.

#### ***4. Develop genuine partnerships and sustain them for the long-term.***

Supporting greater local leadership in peacebuilding is not just a matter of increased trust, recognition, and direct support. It also asks us to reshape relationships between communities living in the midst of conflict and interveners with a genuine desire to help. Reconstructed partnerships for relational responsibility and responsive peacebuilding will need to be grounded in dignity, mutual respect, a collaborative search for peace grounded in locally-led approaches, and, most notably, commitments that are sustained for much longer than is the current practice in the field. A key take away from this study is that local peacebuilders want their international supporters to understand that peace is a process, often a long one, that may not be easily measured in a few years with linear theories of change, log frames and observable indicators. Indeed, as complexity and systems theories teach us, and as history has demonstrated repeatedly, major changes in societies toward or away from peace rarely follow logical, linear paths. It is often the unexpected events, small shifts, or sudden tipping points

that make the most difference in triggering an escalation of conflict or a breakthrough for peace (e.g., Coleman et al. 2011, p. 41). Expecting the unexpected and supporting small catalysts for change, over the long term, and with no guarantee that the changes you desire will happen in your lifetime, are not easy approaches for funders and professional peacebuilding organizations to absorb. They may, however, yield greater results in fostering long-term and durable peace than current approaches demanding short-term, linear cause-effect thinking and planning. At a practical level, the international peacebuilding field can find more ways to meet the requests from local peacebuilders for more exchanges and networking opportunities, promotion and publicity for their work, and learning processes that allow them to take the lead and that serve first and foremost the communities impacted by war and violence.

### ***5. Support the Practice of Hope***

This study showed that hope plays a vital role in motivating and sustaining peace agency in the midst of violence. Much greater research, exploration, and innovation is needed within the peacebuilding field to find ways of fostering and sustaining hope. Elise Boulding's imaging workshops offer one model from the past, but new media, new modes of interacting, and new realities of peace and conflict will likely require others. This is one particular area where children and youth can help lead the way. The resilience of children impacted by war and violence, as well as their creativity and ability to imagine a better world, is a vital source of strength for families and communities, and another form of social capital worth investing in. Growing attention in the field to

addressing trauma among children (and others) is a positive step toward helping preserve hope in conflict-affected societies. More support for programs and efforts that focus explicitly on fostering hope, some of which were described by local peacebuilders in this study, would be another valuable step. A need for improved practice by the peacebuilding community, where “tools” that foster capacities for people to envision a peaceful future are as important, if not more so, as the other technical peacebuilding skills of conflict analysis, dialogue, and evaluation that have become the standard of international interventions. All the peacebuilding trainings and programs will mean little if the individuals and communities experiencing the conflict are unable to tap into what seems this basic source of motivation and strength compelling people to act for peace. In fact, we may need to ask ourselves as a field if the methods and tools we are using encourage or discourage the practice of hope in individuals and communities.

***6. Promote more integrated, responsive peacebuilding approaches that link development and peace, locally and internationally.***

Increasingly the international peacebuilding and development fields are reconnecting where their paths may have been distancing in the past. This is a good sign for addressing better the needs of local communities and local peacebuilders. The passage of Goal 16 to Advance Peaceful and Just Societies, as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, was an important step toward ensuring the better integration – and guarding against further siloing – of the fields. The implementation of this goal, however, will require significant advocacy, policy development, funding

support, and – most critically - , practical realization in communities and societies. To ensure Goal 16 furthers the trend of integrated and responsive peacebuilding, local peacebuilders should be actively included in the development and measurement of indicators, the creation and advancement of local, national, and international advocacy efforts, and the policy decision-making processes that will follow. Local and international peacebuilding practitioners, funders, scholars, and advocates can take concrete steps now to develop and support approaches that link poverty-reduction, sustainable development and jobs creation with conflict prevention, resolution, and long-term peacebuilding. This can include greater general support and core funding from donors that allows local peacebuilding and development groups to integrate and respond flexibly to changing dynamics in their societies.

***7. Pursue further participatory action research between local and international peacebuilders.***

The peacebuilding field is increasingly dedicating more time and resources to research to better understand what works and how to improve our practice. This is an important learning moment for the field that will shape the future of resource allocation, knowledge, and the distribution of power. Engaging in participatory action research and locally-led evaluation, where those working daily for peace in conflict-affected communities are understood to be the experts and leaders in the research process and the international community provides accompaniment, technical knowledge, and helps amplify the findings to the broader global community and

advocate for a redistribution of power and resources. For those of us in the global North, this can provide another way to use our privilege in the pursuit of greater justice (and impact) in the field. For local peacebuilders, gaining ownership and voice in the research agenda of the international peacebuilding field is an important step toward reclaiming power and control of the future of their communities. The collaborative process of action research offers opportunity for reconstructing relationships in new ways, affirming mutual relational responsibility between local and international peacebuilders, and building a stronger community of knowledge, practice, and human connection.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the findings of this study challenge and encourage us to fundamentally reshape our field in a number of ways. First, they suggest that *human relationships – even more so than individual choices – are the primary source of peace agency*. Second, they remind us that *family relationships, youth and children are essential drivers for peace processes*. Third, they affirm the *importance of hope and visioning as critical building blocks for peace*. Fourth, they underline the *everyday nature of people choosing peace*, the both extraordinary and ordinary nature of acting for peace in the midst of violence. And fifth, they provide a number of *specific recommendations from local peacebuilders* around the world as to how the international community can better support their work. None of the findings of this study are necessarily groundbreaking, and many build on and affirm the work of other scholars and practitioners. Taken

together, though, they may help deepen our understanding of how peace is continually unfolding within and around us, and how we might expand that unfolding a bit further.

Looking back on my own journey thus far and the experience of this study, I feel remarkably blessed to have had a family that supported and inspired me toward peace work, a community of faith that nurtures and believes in the peacebuilder in all of us, and a professional and academic life rich with interactions with others who are working to live into a better world. I have been continually encouraged, called, and even required to try to choose peace in the midst of structures of violence and war by this community and my place in it. And while I have been fortunate to have been led to many travels and experiences around the world, learning from and trying to support communities engaged in local peacebuilding work in countries impacted by violent conflict, I have also been persistently led back to localize my own peacebuilding, to focus my efforts and energies where I might make the most difference, and where my relational responsibility demands I choose to act.

Throughout this study, I have referred to conflict-affected countries or communities to refer mostly to those places where armed groups have actively fought, or might fight soon, and people struggle to prevent, end, or recover from an overt situation of direct violence. In doing so, I have largely cordoned my own country, the United States, off into some other category that would presumably not be conflict-affected. In fact, my local context – Washington, DC – is an epicenter of policies and practices that drive direct, structural, and cultural conflict in my own country and

around the world. Throughout my journey as a US Quaker peacebuilder, I have repeatedly been reminded that the most important peace work I can contribute to is that of acting as a responsible citizen in my own country and community, where I can make a difference locally and globally. I will never forget the conversation, which I still call a moment of truth, with a Kenyan Quaker peacebuilder who, after some days together in a peace conference, said to me: “Thank you for coming here to support us. We really do appreciate it. But, could you do us a favor please, when you go back to your country. Could you please work on your own government and its policies in the world? Then we can do our peacebuilding work here better as well.”

I am deeply grateful for these calls to relational responsibility that I have experienced in my own journey of peace agency. Through them, I have come to see not only the necessity of supporting those local peacebuilders who are leading efforts in their communities, but also of taking responsibility for the difference I can make in mine as well. That is after all, the essence of relational responsibility – the responsibilities we incur by being in relationship with others.

As for the final question of my study, what do I think the international community can do better to support local peacebuilders? Perhaps the best way we can support them is by ensuring our own governments and communities are doing all we can to live responsibly and in right relationship in the world. Reminding ourselves that we too can be – and already are - local peacebuilders is a start.

We are because you are.



**Figure 8: Initial Word Cloud of Top 40 Words across All Data**

*This word cloud shows the most frequently occurring words across all data in a first general analysis of interview transcripts and applications.*

## **APPENDIX A: HOW PEACE DIRECT CHOOSES PARTNERS**

The approach used by Peace Direct in its support for grassroots peacebuilding holds a number of important lessons for international agencies trying to ensure the local legitimacy of their partners. It stands out from the standard approach taken by international agencies in two distinct ways:

1. It broadens its understanding of capacity beyond organisational ability to implement projects and manage funds; its priority is to identify committed individuals or groups that have strong local legitimacy and it has developed a set of value-based selection criteria in order to do this
2. From the earliest stage Peace Direct enables its prospective partners to deliver their own programmes by supplying small unrestricted core grants as part of a year-long selection process for long term partnerships.

### **1) Selection Criteria**

As part of Peace Direct's role to increase the accessibility of local peacebuilders it has mapped over 820 local peacebuilders in 26 countries through its Insight on Conflict (IoC) programme ([www.insightonconflict.org](http://www.insightonconflict.org)). This provides Peace Direct with a broad oversight of peacebuilding organisations from which to better inform its selection processes. Using national staff as the IoC Local Correspondents provides a local perspective on which organisations are most effective and this is complemented further down the selection process by assessing the reputation of potential partners at the community level.

Peace Direct's prime resource for finding information on a wide range of peacebuilding organisations is Insight on Conflict (IoC). IoC is an online resource that uses knowledge dissemination to overcome practical and attitudinal obstacles that prevent more support going to local peace builders. Through organisational profiles, blog posts, and newsletters, IoC presents information on local peace builders and their practical realities to policy makers, peacebuilding practitioners and academia. In doing so, it aims to increase awareness of these local actors and their potential as partners. Indeed, as well as seeking to change people's attitudes towards local peacebuilding, the site is an important resource for identifying partners, both for Peace Direct and other practitioners. Peace Direct employs 'Local Correspondents' in each region, who maintain accurate information on conflict contexts and each profiled group. At

present the site features over 800 profiles of peacebuilding organisations in 24 different conflict regions/countries. Local Correspondents play a central role in identifying leading peacebuilding organisations. Their search, however, is not limited to groups on the IoC website. The relevant Local Correspondent can provide further advice on the context and civil society more broadly, as well as offering connections for other experts.

When it comes to assessing the reputation at the community level of the potential partners the ideal approach for Peace Direct is to use the Local Correspondents or other local consultants to meet with communities where the potential partner has worked, visiting more remote areas to assess their reach and deliberately looking at their ability to cross conflict divides. At this stage it is important not just to ask the community leader but ordinary community members and assess the satisfaction of previous beneficiaries. Unfortunately, funding is not always available for such an approach in which case Peace Direct will rely more on what the Local Correspondent can find out from other reliable sources and by looking at indicators such as their ability to mobilise volunteers, the demographic of staff and how that relates to conflict dynamics, evidence of commitment to peacebuilding and the history of the organisation and its motivations.

Using IoC as a key starting point, Peace Direct uses the following value-based framework for assessing a potential partner:

- **Track record:** what is the potential partner's history of peacebuilding activities and how has it been recorded? How long has the partner been engaging in these activities and what kind of reputation has it gained over time?
- **Local leadership:** is the partner a long-term resident in its community of operation? How extensive are their networks?
- **Motivation:** are they in it for conviction? Can they demonstrate they have made sacrifices of some kind to establish their organisation? Have they led and carried out peacebuilding activities without remuneration? What kinds of investments have they made to grow and sustain their activities?
- **Collaboration:** who have they worked with in the past? Are they open to working with others? Do collaborations and partnerships form part of the change process they have envisaged?
- **Objectivity:** are they affiliated with specific (religious, ethnic or political) groups? If they are, how does it affect their ability to support local communities in a way that does not incite tension or contribute towards divisions?
- **Value addition:** is it clear where a partnership with Peace Direct will add value to the work of the organisation?
- **Ability to mobilise communities:** what kind of relationship does the potential partner have with the communities it intends to benefit? Do their projects win community support and are they valued by those affected by their work? Is it able to mobilise volunteers?

In addition it looks for the following qualities as desirable, but not essential:

- Potential to work in strategic partnerships with government and/or other duty-bearers who are able to influence change
- The potential to act as spokesperson for Peace Direct (ability to network and communicate in a compelling and persuasive way)
- Evidence of cost effectiveness
- Evidence of capacity to gather evidence and/or M&E systems in place

## **2. Providing small unrestricted grants**

The best way to understand a potential partner is to actually work with them. Peace Direct allocates small unrestricted core grants to potential partners and then works with them for one year to assess the potential for a constructive long-term partnership and what, if any, value Peace Direct can add. These core grants are up to \$10,000 per year and recognise that what small organisations often need most are core costs to give some stability to their desired activities. Peace Direct also wants to give the potential partner the opportunity to do what they want to do as a way of understanding them and assessing their potential to deliver effective, context specific, peacebuilding.

During this seed funding period, Peace Direct and the potential partner are able to establish trusted relationships and identify the strengths and weaknesses of each other and how they can complement each other. During this time personal relationships are important for both sides of the partnership to feel comfortable with raising concerns, openly discuss weaknesses and ask for help. To help assess this potential for an equal partnership, Peace Direct has worked with local peacebuilders to identify the core characteristics of what makes a good local-international partnership. These nine characteristics<sup>15</sup> form discussion points between Peace Direct and the partner to better understand the potential for a genuine partnership. It identifies areas for improvement and gives the local partner an opportunity to identify areas of improvement of Peace Direct.

From this point of trust and understanding Peace Direct can work with the potential partner to better articulate and evidence the work that they are doing. This is the first part of Peace Direct's 'tier model' of support which is designed to gradually bridge the capacity of small organisations with the expectations of the international community. By understanding what limits the peacebuilding sector and the obstacles that local peacebuilders face, Peace Direct is able to provide tailored support to its partners to help them grow in a managed way and become increasingly independent of Peace Direct. This period of seed funding enables Peace

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<sup>15</sup> Effective communication, common values, long-term commitment, transparency, shared learning, contextual awareness, organisational growth, participatory processes, moral support.

Direct to help the local partner to identify their theories of change, the relevance to the local context and begin to better articulate their impact for the international community.

This is important as often good local partners are rejected by the international community because they cannot speak the right jargon, cannot decide their work succinctly or struggle to complete proposal forms. By using local correspondents in the first instance, these externally driven requirements are less important and allow Peace Direct to give potential partners more time to convey this information during the year-long seed funding.

This combination of core grant to ensure the activities are locally led combined with the skills to articulate that work better to the international community means that by the end of the seed funding Peace Direct can make an informed decision on the following:

1. How good are the community connections of the potential partner and what is their ability to mobilise others for peace?
2. Is the theory of change and vision for peacebuilding realistic and appropriate to the context? How does it complement the activities of others?
3. Do they have the potential to grow and meet the increasing demands of donors?

Based on the experience during the period of seed funding, Peace Direct will decide whether to select the local organisation as a partner. If it does, it will make a commitment for three years which in most cases is continued indefinitely as Peace Direct accompanies the partner through the tiers.

During this partnership Peace Direct sees itself as an extension of their local partners rather than the other way round, helping the local partner reach into the international community. The ultimate objective is for the partner to reach tier 4 and become independent of Peace Direct with its own international connections and direct funding.

## **APPENDIX B: PROJECT TIMELINE**

### **January-March, 2015**

- Develop semi-structured interview questions with Peace Direct
- Identify 10-12 interviewees and begin outreach to schedule interviews
- Develop question for inclusion in Tomorrow's Peacebuilders 2015
- Initial contact with Peace Direct research advisory group

### **April-July, 2015**

- Begin interviews
- Trip to London to review Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications from 2013-2014
- Initial round of coding/analysis; refine as needed
- Peace Exchange with Peace Direct peacebuilders (date?) – opportunity for in-person interviews

### **August-October, 2015**

- Interviews completed
- 2015 Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications collected
- Continue review of data/coding/analysis and refinement

### **November-December 2015**

- Follow up interviews and testing of results thus far
- Complete review of 2013-2014 Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications
- Continue review of data/coding/analysis and refinement

### **January-March, 2016**

- Review results of 2015 Tomorrow's Peacebuilders applications
- Share initial results with Peace Direct research advisory group
- Refine findings

### **April-August, 2016**

- Complete analysis of 2015 applications
- Triangulate all data and develop initial conclusions and recommendations
- Begin writing up findings and conclusions

September – October, 2016

- Test findings and conclusions with Advisory Group
- Skype call with Morgan Brigg on relational peacebuilding
- Final writing of complete draft

November 9, 2016 - Dissertation Defense

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Tell me about yourself and your work for peace.
2. What motivated or led you to this work? Was it a conscious choice? Can you point to particular reasons or moments of decision?
3. What supports or sustains you in choosing peace? Do you encounter challenges or risks? How do you overcome them?
4. How do you think people outside your community or country can best support your efforts for peace? Do you have examples where outsiders made a positive difference? What would you like people in the international community to know or do to help?

## **APPENDIX D: LIST OF ALL ORIGINAL CODES**

Advocacy  
Arts  
Children and Youth  
Community Affirmation  
Defining Peace  
Development and Peace  
Dignity  
Education  
Encouragement  
Exchanges and Networks  
External Collaborator  
Family Influence  
Financial Support  
Hope-Imaging  
Inclusion in Peace Processes  
Jobs and Livelihoods  
Leadership  
Lessons Learned  
M&E  
Nonviolent Movements  
Partnerships  
Peace Agency  
Prevention  
Promotion  
Recognition  
Rejection  
Relational Responsibility  
Religion and Spirituality  
Research  
Resources  
Responsive Peacebuilding  
Risk  
Support local communities

Survivor  
Sustained support  
Technical Capacity Building  
Training  
Transformative Experience  
Trauma Healing  
Unanticipated Change

## APPENDIX E: FISHER'S TECHNICAL VS. TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

### Technical and transformative approaches to change

*Do you see yourself as more of a technician or a transformer, or neither?*

Much conflict-related work can be seen as potentially transformative, addressing the deep structures of violence, oppression, poverty and ecological destruction. Peace-building and empowerment programmes are examples.

There is much also that can be viewed as more technical and tangible. Emergency or peacemaking interventions are often seen in that category., and initiatives such as small arms reduction programmes and security sector reform.

Frequently the two approaches are clearly separated, when they need not necessarily be. Peace work then loses its power to effect real change, and can even become part of the problem it seeks to address.

The table below gives some examples of how the technical and transformative approaches can be characterised.

	Technical approach	Transformative approach
<b>GOALS</b>		
<b>Overall Purpose</b>	To end a specific situation: eg. acute poverty or open conflict: 'negative' peace	In addition, to influence the underlying structure and culture as an integrated element in building something better: 'positive' peace
<b>Agenda</b>	Set by funders and project holders, with some limited consultation with community	Set and continually reviewed with community, in consultation with funders and project holders
<b>Objectives</b>	Achievement of project objectives	Promoting shared vision of/for community, of which project/programme work is part
<b>Priority</b>	Content of programme	Solidarity; relationships as well as content
<b>STRATEGY</b>		
<b>Focus</b>	A specific piece of work	Building elements of wider change into a

		specific piece of work
<b>Evaluation</b>	Focus on efficiency, project successes	Efficiency plus bigger picture impact
<b>Learning</b>	Downplaying failures	Taking failures as starting-points; inclusion of self-reflection and action learning
<b>Issues</b>	Solve presenting issues	Expand, change, transcend contested issues
<b>Theory of change</b>	Implicit: change in immediate situation will ripple out	Explicit: developed in relation to analysis and systems thinking
<b>Scope</b>	One level, one sector	Multi-level, local-global, alliances across sectors
<b>Time horizon</b>	Duration of project (plus extension)	Medium to long term
<b>VALUES</b>		
<b>Accountability</b>	Primarily, in practice, to funders	Primarily to identified partners / community
<b>Whose peace?</b>	Power relations are unchangeable: need to accommodate	Peace is for whole community, especially the weakest: option to work to change power relations if better future requires it
<b>Self image</b>	A professional doing a good job of work	Agent of change, modelling struggle and transformation
<b>ANALYSIS</b>		
<b>Context</b>	Project and work-focussed, done by project staff	Adds ongoing conflict analysis and future scenario planning, all undertaken with wider community
<b>Actors</b>	Good working relationship	In addition, works for change of perspective, goals, heart, will, inclusive sense of identity
<b>View of violence</b>	Prevent and defuse it; ambivalent about its use	Race, gender and class dimensions are integral part of violence; transforming the energy into positive outcomes; active promotion of non-violent approaches
<b>View of conflict</b>	A problem in the way of achieving goals	Inevitable, an opportunity for development and change, consider options to intensify

It is interesting to note that roughly two thirds of the headings above can be seen as complementary rather than in opposition to each other. In these cases, a technical approach can lead on to, or contain within it, a transformative one. For example, under 'priority' it requires only a shift of emphasis to include a conscious focus on building relationships as an adjunct to addressing the explicit content or task. This framework, then, demonstrates that the seeds of

transformation can be sown in the smallest pieces of 'technical' peace or development work, if only we are creative and courageous.

Still, some key elements in the table are almost inevitably at odds with each other. These point to choices which may have a major impact on the direction the initiative takes: whose agenda is it, who are we accountable to, whose peace and development are we working for?

Development practitioners may see a parallel in the long-running and sometimes acrimonious debate about the relationship between humanitarian relief and development. In the former case, it is argued, a task is to be done, a humanitarian imperative to be followed. The counterargument is that no action involving human beings can be solely technical, there are social relations involved in every intervention and they can be damaged or enhanced by the action. As a result, much thought has been given to how relief can be done in a developmental way.

### **So what?**

How far do you recognise these suggested patterns? Can you see dangers in either or both approaches? What mechanisms might be needed to bring the two approaches together?

From: Simon Fisher and Lada Zimina. Letter to Peacebuilders,  
([www.lettertopeacebuilders.ning.com](http://www.lettertopeacebuilders.ning.com)). 2008

Simon Fisher

2012

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Bridget Moix is a Quaker peace scholar-practitioner with more than 20 years experience advocating, teaching, and studying issues of international peace and conflict.

She has served with a number of non-governmental peace organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee, the Casa de los Amigos (Mexico), the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Oxfam America, the Quaker Peace Center (South Africa), and the Quaker United Nations Office. Currently, Bridget serves as Senior US Representative for Peace Direct, a UK-based non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting local people working for peace around the world and to promoting more effective and equitable peacebuilding policies and practices. From 2013-2015, Bridget served as an Atrocities Prevention Fellow with the US Agency for International Development.

Bridget holds a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University, a Masters in International Affairs from Columbia University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and English from Ohio Wesleyan University. Her research and advocacy interests include local peacebuilding, nonviolence, Quaker peacemaking, ending war, and advancing a more humane and peaceful US foreign policy.

Over the years, Bridget has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in peace and conflict studies at a number of institutions, including Haverford College, Columbia University, George Washington University, and Eastern Mennonite University. She has lived in Mexico and South Africa and has been blessed to travel to many places.

Bridget resides in Washington, DC, with her family, and is a member of the Religious Society of Friends. She is the mother of two boys who challenge and inspire her peace work every day.