

Enhancing the capacities of marginalised groups for inclusive peace processes

Ana E. Juncos, Gilberto Algar-Faria and Natalie Jester (University of Bristol)

Introduction

This policy briefing relates to the [PeaceCapacity project](#). PeaceCapacity was born out of the findings of the [EU-CIVCAP project](#), which assessed EU capabilities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, concluding that 1) local civil society engagement is essential to achieving sustainable peace, and 2) some groups remain marginalised within these processes. PeaceCapacity therefore sought to explore these findings and address their implications in a practical manner, by designing training materials and holding three workshops with marginalised civil society actors (in Pristina, Hargeisa, and London) in order to understand the benefits and challenges of this approach. This policy briefing is intended to provide organisations (of all sizes) undertaking peace and/or capacity-building activities with principles and practical advice that will enable them to improve their practice.

Recommendations in brief

- 1. While international knowledge and practice can be relevant resources in capacity-building activities, capacity builders should adapt initiatives to the particularities of the context to avoid applying a one-size-fits-all approach** and to ensure that training materials remain relevant to the local participants. Where possible local participants and other key local organisations should be consulted during the design and delivery phases.
- 2. Capacity builders should better the chances of a capacity building activity becoming sustainable by ‘training the trainer’,** or at least including in their programmes detailed information about how participants can train other people to use existing training materials.
- 3. Capacity builders should be aware of, and should exploit the potential of new technologies, in particular [social media](#), to promote inclusiveness and increase the capacity of marginalised groups in peace processes.** They should also seek to mitigate/minimise some of the [risks associated with the use of these technologies](#), especially where it can lead to further exclusion
- 4. [Evaluation](#) and effective learning mechanisms should be put in place.** Capacity-building programmes need to develop consistent monitoring mechanisms to facilitate continuous improvement, reporting and track progress over time. Evaluation mechanisms can also support changes to capacity-building activities where participants have identified particular problems regarding the content or methodology.

Background

Recent years have seen a local turn in peacebuilding and capacity-building endeavours by seeking to better integrate local actors into these activities. However, capacity builders will need to be aware of who the 'local' is. In many instances, capacity-building activities targeting the 'local' often privilege particular, more powerful groups such as men, ethnic majorities, heterosexuals, and able-bodied and/or wealthier people. As a result, 'local' solutions may reinforce existing power structures, and marginalise groups that are already marginalised. Efforts to foster peace and reconciliation generally still exclude marginalised groups, and minorities. In particular, certain demographics are typically shut out of peacebuilding processes, typically: [women, young people, ethnic or religious minorities, LGBT people, and/or disabled people](#). Where these groups are excluded from peacebuilding activities, interventions will be less likely to succeed because excluded groups may not support processes they do not feel included in.

Building the capacity of local actors, in particular [marginalised groups](#), can contribute to early warning efforts. However, while many states and international organisations have dedicated considerable efforts and funding to conflict prevention activities, these are in many cases only focusing on the state/governmental level. This is despite the fact that research demonstrates that effective conflict prevention requires the involvement of a wide range of actors at the local level, including women, minorities, young people, [many of whom are themselves stakeholders in the conflict](#).

Capacity-building activities targeting marginalised groups can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of peacebuilding activities. Capacity-building refers to efforts to strengthen organisations' and individuals' capacities to meet the challenges of achieving sustainable [peace](#) and can include [training](#) and [workshops](#) as well as mentoring activities. [While peacebuilding and capacity-building exercises are known to be expensive, they are financially considerably 'cheaper' than dealing with the consequences of conflict](#). Therefore, increased spending on activities for marginalised groups should be seen as a sound investment in sustainable peace. Capacity-building measures, which enable local people to do more for themselves, are intended to be long-term and ideally self-sustaining, meaning that in the longer term they are more cost-effective than one-off external interventions, which do not strengthen local capacities.



Participants at PeaceCapacity workshop, Kosovo, October 2017. Photo: University of Bristol/Gilberto Algar-Faria.

Recommendations in full

There are several issues that capacity builders need to be reflective about when designing new initiatives. In this regard, understanding the local context and ensuring [local ownership](#) of these processes are two crucial elements.

While international knowledge and practice can be relevant resources in capacity-building activities, capacity builders should adapt a given initiative to the particularities of the context to avoid applying a one-size-fits-all approach and to ensure that training materials remain relevant to the local participants. For instance, workshops must be innovative, adapting to local needs and to the views and priorities of the participants. Meanwhile, the support system for these workshops—composed of funders and evaluators—must be flexible in accepting that programmes that are locally-owned may not necessarily produce what is generally understood amongst the external actor community to be a ‘result’. Where possible local participants and other key local organisations should be consulted during the design and delivery phases. Per above, ‘the local’ is often conceptualised in a way that marginalises certain groups; designing capacity-building activities that include marginalised groups enhances their confidence and expertise making it easier for them to become involved.

There are also particular issues that need more attention in order to improve the effectiveness of current capacity-building activities targeting marginalised groups. For instance, more emphasis on capacity-building should be in place as part of conflict prevention initiatives where conflict is likely. Locally-owned and [people-centred](#) initiatives should also be supported, practically and financially, in order to improve the effectiveness of conflict prevention. Moreover, since capacity-building is a long-term endeavour, particular attention should be given to the question of how to sustain the work long enough to produce [lasting results](#). Capacity builders need to ensure that changes in individual and organisational practices remain in the medium and the long-term. For instance, one can better the chances of a capacity building activity becoming sustainable by ‘training the trainer’, or at least including in their programmes detailed information about how participants can train other people to use existing training materials. Capacity builders should be aware of, and should exploit the potential of new technologies, in particular [social media](#), to promote inclusiveness and increase the capacity of marginalised groups in peace processes. They should also seek to mitigate and minimise where possible the [risks associated with the use of these technologies](#), especially where it can lead to further exclusion.

Finally, [evaluation](#) and effective learning mechanisms should be put in place. Capacity-building programmes need to develop consistent monitoring mechanisms to facilitate continuous improvement and reporting and therefore to track progress over time. Evaluation mechanisms can also support changes to capacity-building activities where participants have identified particular problems regarding the content or methodology. Taking other formal or informal forms of feedback during the implementation of capacity-building programmes can facilitate adaptation to local circumstances, contexts and the needs of participants in order to avoid applying a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

Contact information

Principal Investigator – Dr Ana E. Juncos: A.E.Juncos@bristol.ac.uk

Website: <https://peacecapacity.net/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/peacecapacity>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/peacecapacity>

Partner information

PeaceCapacity is a consortium of five institutions, led by the University of Bristol (UK). Click on a partner organisation's logo to visit their website.



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