

Adaptive Peacebuilding Guidebook

for Peacebuilding and Development Cooperation Practitioners



Adaptive Peacebuilding Guidebook for Peacebuilding and Development Cooperation Practitioners

Written by Cedric de Coning, Tsunetaka Tsuchiya, and Ako Muto

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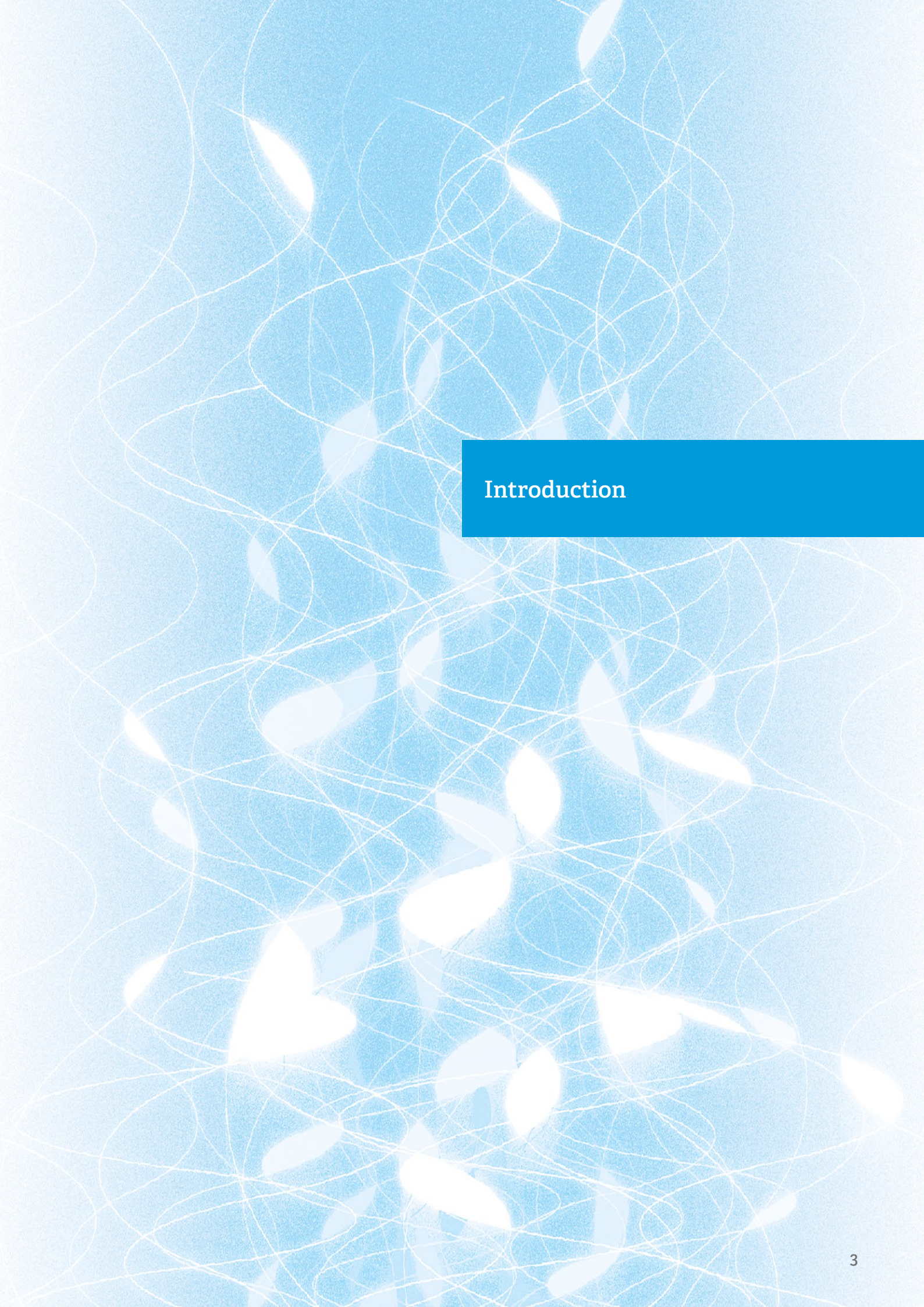
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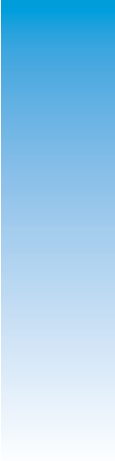
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Introduction



Introduction

Aim of This Book

Peacebuilding has had mixed results. Despite significant efforts, learning and professionalisation across many countries over the last few decades, the outcomes have remained inconsistent. If ending wars and building peace is so uncertain, unpredictable, and complex, how can peacebuilders meaningfully contribute to ending wars and sustaining peace? In this guidebook, we introduce a new approach to peacebuilding that has been developed to address the complexity and uncertainty of helping a society move onto a more peaceful trajectory. This approach is called Adaptive Peacebuilding.

The Adaptive Peacebuilding approach differs from other approaches to peacebuilding and development that are externally driven, top-down, and pre-determined. These are approaches where peacebuilders have a pre-determined idea of what peace is and a pre-determined theory of change for how peace and development can be achieved.

Adaptive Peacebuilding recognises that the outcome of a peacebuilding process cannot be pre-determined, as it needs to emerge from the specific context and from the experience and active engagement of the people affected by the conflict. However, it is possible to identify core elements and step-by-step method that can guide an adaptive and participatory approach to peacebuilding. This guide therefore aims to provide peacebuilding and development practitioners with principled guidance to navigate the uncertainties of peacebuilding programming in conflict-affected societies.

Many institutions engaged in peacebuilding already have their own guidelines or manuals. This guidebook is not intended to replace them, but rather to add an adaptive perspective. It aims to function as a supplementary reference—a practical guidebook that managers and practitioners, in headquarters, country offices, and the field, can draw upon when confronting complex challenges.

Each chapter includes case studies contributed by partner organisations, selected in line with the chapter content and presented in alphabetical order. These real-world examples demonstrate how the core principles and methodologies of Adaptive Peacebuilding are operationalised across diverse and complex contexts. By documenting both successes and lessons derived from practical challenges, they reinforce the guidance provided and offer a grounded perspective on the adaptive process in action.

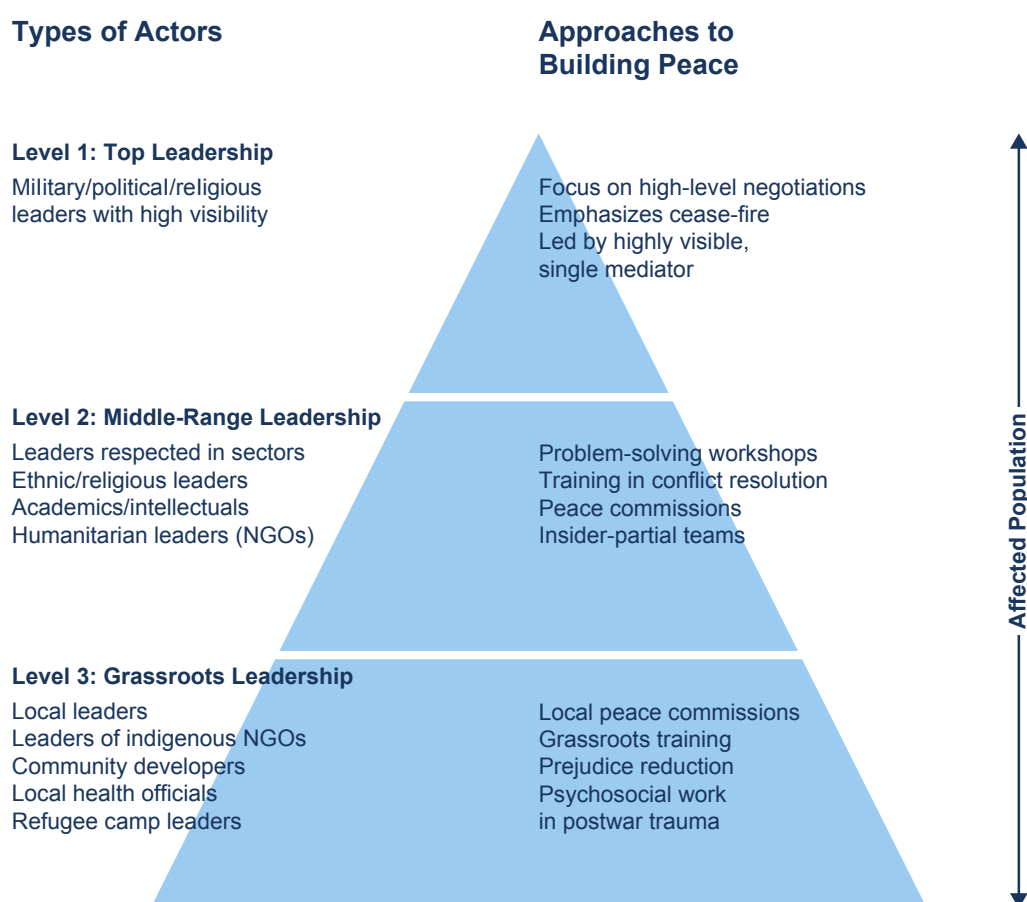
Why Adaptive Peacebuilding?

What is Adaptive Peacebuilding?

Adaptive Peacebuilding is an approach to peacebuilding where peacebuilders, together with the communities and people affected by the conflict, actively engage in a process to sustain peace and resolve conflicts by employing an iterative process of learning and adaptation.¹

Peacebuilding is a process for assisting societies to prevent violent conflict, or to manage and resolve conflict, and to recover from conflict in ways that help to prevent future conflict. Peacebuilding activities are often supported by financing and technical expertise from international development cooperation agencies, and thus, there is a close relationship between peacebuilding and development. Peacebuilding activities are often initiated and coordinated by local or national NGOs and supported by international NGOs,

Figure 1: Peacebuilding Actors and Approaches



Source: John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), p. 39. Reproduced from https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/hierarchical_intervention_levels, with permission of Professor Emeritus Lederach and adapted by the authors.

¹ Cedric de Coning, "Adaptive Peacebuilding," *International Affairs* 94 (2): 301–317 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix251>

government agencies such as JICA, and international organisations like the United Nations. The guidebook includes a number of case studies that provide an indication of the range of peacebuilding actors and the spectrum of peacebuilding dimensions in this field.

A society is peaceful when its social institutions are able to ensure that political competition is managed peacefully and that no significant social or political groups use violence to pursue their interests. For peace to be self-sustaining, a society needs to develop and sustain social institutions (formal and informal) that can identify and manage disputes peacefully.

Adaptive Peacebuilding recognises that people have free will and that social systems are complex. This means that peacebuilders cannot design interventions on the desk that will reliably generate pre-determined outcomes. To deal with this uncertainty and unpredictability, peacebuilders have to employ an iterative process of learning by doing. The “adaptive” in Adaptive Peacebuilding refers to this process of continuously

Table 1: How is Adaptive Peacebuilding different from other approaches to peacebuilding?

	Determined-design Peacebuilding	Adaptive Peacebuilding
Results framework	Pre-determined outcomes	Outcomes emerge out of a participatory and adaptive approach and are context-specific
Theory of change	Pre-determined linear causal theory of change	Inductive process of learning from experience and adapting to feedback
Localisation	Affected society consulted about how to implement pre-designed programme	Affected society determines objectives, co-designs programme, steers implementation, participates in monitoring and evaluation
Relationship between peacebuilders and community	Process is driven by peacebuilders, community is consulted	Process is driven by community, peacebuilders provide support
Role of Monitoring and Evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation to identify results for purposes of accountability to funders	Monitoring and evaluation to generate learning that informs adaptation and makes peacebuilding more flexible and nimble
Project cycle	Projects start with assessment and end with evaluation.	Process is iterative, with assessment and evaluation forming part of an ongoing cycle of learning

adapting their approach based on what peacebuilders and the society they are assisting learn from their efforts toward peace in a particular context.

Adaptive Peacebuilding also recognises that peace has to emerge from within a society through a process of trial and error. Peace cannot simply be copied from somewhere else and imposed by peacebuilders; rather, it has to emerge over time as societies develop their own social institutions that determine what peace means for them in their own historical and socio-ecological context.

This is why Adaptive Peacebuilding emphasises that peacebuilding has to be a participatory process in which the people affected by the conflict take the key decisions that drive their own peace process, and where the role of peacebuilders is focused on process facilitation.

Complicated systems vs Complex systems

Adaptive peacebuilding sees social systems as complex, recognising the unpredictable, non-linear, and emergent nature of local social dynamics. In contrast, conventional pre-determined peacebuilding project planning assumes that outcomes can be controlled and predicted through standardised interventions.

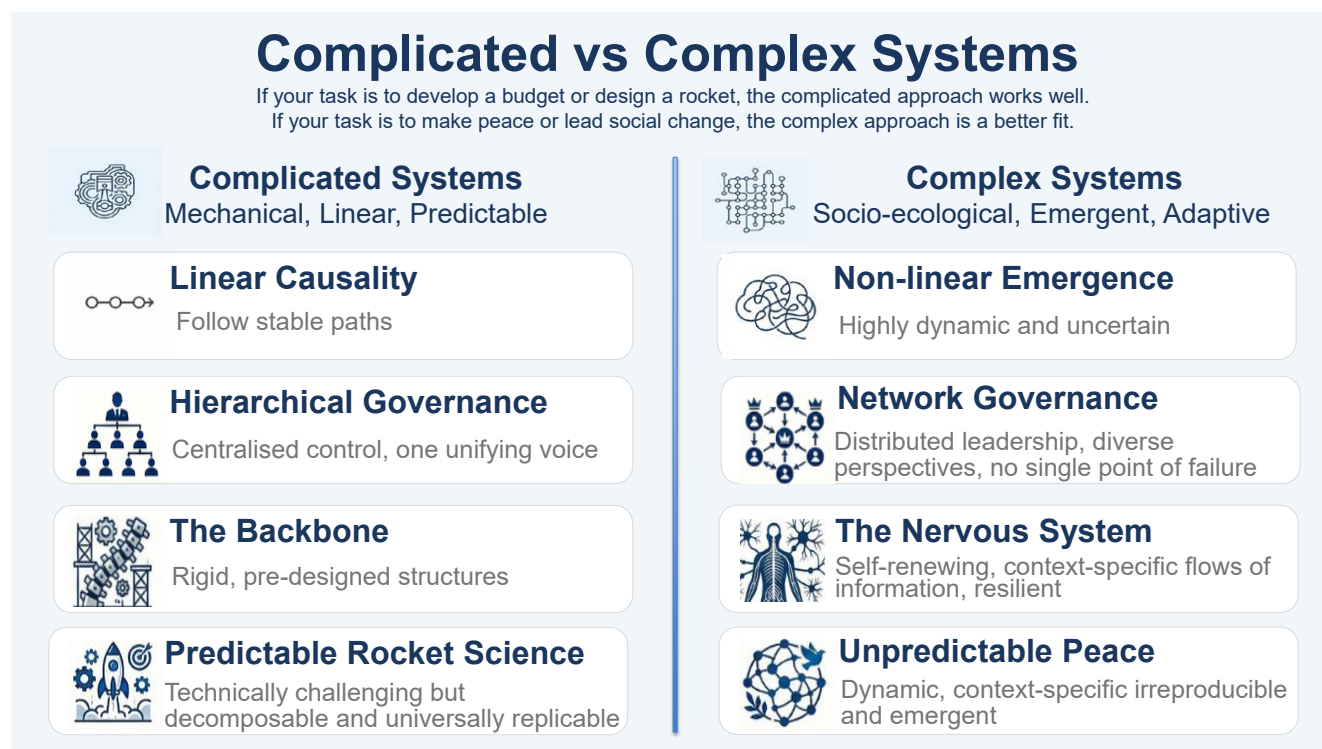
The uncertainty, unpredictability, and irreproducibility of peacebuilding outcomes in these contexts are characteristics of complex social system behaviour, not a result of insufficient knowledge or inadequate planning or implementation. One way to highlight the unique characteristics of complex systems is to contrast them with complicated systems.

A complicated system can potentially be fully understood and predicted, provided sufficient information is available. Designing, building, and launching a rocket into space is highly complicated, but once mastered, the same process can be repeated with a reasonable degree of certainty and predictability.

In contrast, social systems are complex, meaning they continuously adapt and self-organise based on non-linear feedback dynamics. As a result, it is not possible to replicate the design elements that contributed to the relatively successful outcomes achieved in one peacebuilding process in another social context with the expectation that it will produce the same result.

International peacebuilding and development programming have long suffered from an engineering-inspired model that international experts have the agency to diagnose a conflict, and plan and implement a linear-causal step-by-step peace intervention that can 'build' peace and 'fix' failed states.

Figure 2: Complicated systems vs Complex systems



Source: created by the authors (icons are assisted by AI)

Why Do We Need an Adaptive Approach?

Reality is complex, and thus uncertain and unpredictable. We need an adaptive approach to make sense of and cope with the complexity of trying to influence socio-ecological systems.

It is not possible to undertake a peacebuilding project and predict the outcome with precision at the outset. This applies, for example, to a community violence-reduction initiative in Iraq or security sector reform in Somalia. Nor is it possible to take a model that has performed relatively well—for instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa or Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement—and repeat it elsewhere with the expectation that it will produce the same result.

States and societies differ in fundamental ways from structures, such as bridges, which can be built according to a plan, or mechanical systems that can be repaired when they break down. Societies and communities are made up of individuals with free will that, unlike a bridge or a machine, can choose to resist or adapt to external influence in ways that peacebuilders cannot anticipate.

The people affected by and involved in any given conflict or crisis situation are the critical knowledge holders; in other words, they are the only ones who understand their context, history, beliefs, and culture. They are also the only ones who can develop and sustain the social institutions needed to sustain peace. For this reason, they need to be given primary agency to make and sustain their own peace. In this sense, peace

is an emergent process, generated and sustained by the active participation of the relevant community or society.

External peacebuilders can assist the process, but if they interfere too much—if they direct the process and attempt to control the outcomes to serve their own interests—they will disrupt the feedback processes critical for self-organisation to emerge and be sustained. Trying to control the outcome produces the opposite of what peacebuilding or development aims to achieve: it generates dependence and undermines self-sustainability.

This is why Adaptive Peacebuilding emphasises both adaptation and participation.

Iterative Process

As the socio-ecological environments within which societies and communities function are continuously evolving, an adaptive approach should follow an ongoing iterative process that facilitates continuous evolution and adaptation.

Peacebuilders need to recognise that any effects achieved will be temporary and subject to emerging dynamics. In other words, a specific programme—for example, a crime reduction programme—may be effective for a period, but can then become less effective over time as those affected adapt to it; for example, when some criminals develop ways to circumvent the programme. This is why all programmes need to be continuously evaluated and adapted.

When and Where Can One Use an Adaptive Peacebuilding Approach?

The adaptive approach can be used throughout the entire project cycle, from needs assessment to conflict analysis, through planning and implementation, and in monitoring and evaluation. Each of these elements of the project cycle is further explained in the following chapters.

Adaptive Peacebuilding is scalable from local programmes to national campaigns or to international operations and strategic frameworks. The same principles and steps can be used regardless of whether one is working at the local community level, national or country office level, or the strategic level. Examples of these different scales will be shared in the following chapters.

At the operational and strategic levels, this implies an iterative and collaborative process of reviewing conflict analysis and theories of change, as well as adapting planning within an ongoing institutional learning process.

The approach can be applied to a wide range of peacebuilding and development efforts—for example, in designing a strategy to prevent violent extremism in a country or region, or an initiative to manage shared resources peacefully between communities.

Evidence from Applied Adaptive Peacebuilding

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Adaptive Peacebuilding approach, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Ogata Sadako Research Institute for Peace and Development (JICA ORI) undertook a research project that analysed context-specific, participatory, and adaptive approaches to peace across a number of countries and policy contexts, based on the experiences and outcomes of peace interventions in the recent past.

The case studies in this research project included Colombia, Mozambique, Palestine, Syria, and Timor-Leste, which represent different conflicts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, and involve a diverse range of conflict situations, peacebuilding actors and peace processes.²

The research found that context-specific approaches to mediation and peacebuilding that empower local agency are a key element influencing the self-sustainability of peace processes.³

Context-specific peacebuilding refers to bottom-up or homegrown approaches to achieving and sustaining peace grounded in local or national cultural, historical, and political understandings of peace. It differs from approaches to peace that import the values and concepts of peace from elsewhere. The people affected by the conflict determine the ideas or content, priorities, and values. The peacebuilding process is aimed at facilitating a participatory process that helps to strengthen or generate new social institutions through local and national ownership and leadership.

The case studies also showed that there is a link between the extent to which a peace initiative is context-specific and adaptive, and the level of self-sustainability attained.

Overall, the case studies show that context-specific and adaptive approaches to peacebuilding—ones that invest in people and encourage the active participation of affected communities—are more effective than top-down and determined-design approaches because they stimulate the emergence of local social institutions that work to promote and sustain peace.⁴

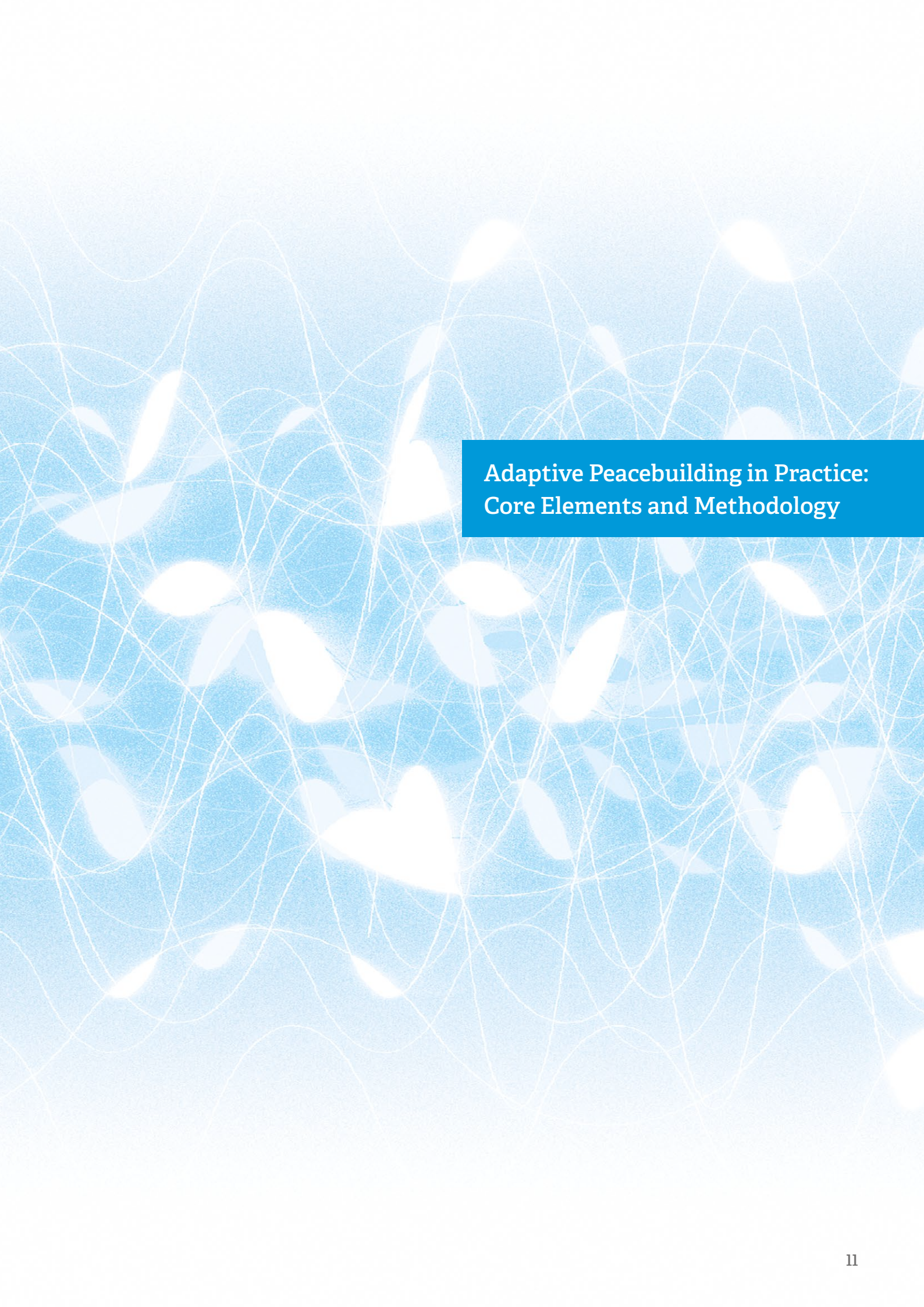
Conclusion

In this first chapter, we have introduced Adaptive Peacebuilding by explaining what it is, how it is different from other peacebuilding approaches, and the effectiveness of the Adaptive Peacebuilding approaches. In the next chapter, we introduce the core elements of Adaptive Peacebuilding.

2 More information on this research project is available on the website of the JICA ORI: https://www.jica.go.jp/english/jica_ri/research/peace/20190401-20220331.html.

3 Cedric de Coning, Ako Muto, and Rui Saraiva, *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

4 Cedric de Coning, Rui Saraiva, and Ako Muto, *Adaptive Peacebuilding: A New Approach to Sustaining Peace in the 21st Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).



Adaptive Peacebuilding in Practice: Core Elements and Methodology

Adaptive Peacebuilding in Practice: Core Elements and Methodology

Introduction

In the first chapter of the guide, we introduced Adaptive Peacebuilding. We explained that because socio-ecological systems are complex, their behaviour is ultimately unpredictable. One implication of this uncertainty is that we cannot design a peacebuilding or development intervention using a linear causal theory of change and reliably expect it to generate the intended effects. We then introduced Adaptive Peacebuilding as a specific approach to peacebuilding and a method for coping with this complexity.

In this chapter, we introduce five core elements of Adaptive Peacebuilding that can serve as an overall guide for making sense of and undertaking peacebuilding and development interventions across different contexts and scales. These core elements set out the essential principles—knowledge and approaches to peacebuilding practice—that can serve as guardrails for implementing Adaptive Peacebuilding.

We also introduce the Adaptive Peacebuilding methodology, comprising four steps to guide its use in practice.

Each context is different, and the methodology is designed to support a process—implemented in partnership with the affected communities and stakeholders—through which peace can emerge in that particular context. The five core elements guide our work across multiple contexts and scales because they capture and explain the essential aspects of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process. They are thus generic elements that guide the process we employ, regardless of the specific issues at play or the context in which we operate.

The Five Core Elements of Adaptive Peacebuilding

1. Adapt through Active Learning

We often talk about conflicts or peace processes being complex, but what does that actually mean? In everyday use, the term “complex” typically implies the involvement of multiple actors. It can also mean that the drivers of a conflict are multidimensional, i.e., there are economic, political, security, and other dimensions that need to be taken into account to understand the dynamics driving and sustaining a conflict system. We can also add a third element, namely that many developments occur and interact with each

other at the same time. The compounding effects of these factors mean that it becomes impossible to meaningfully isolate causality, and we are therefore unable to predict with precision at the outset how a specific conflict system will develop or respond to a specific intervention.

Adaptive Peacebuilding recognises that the communities and societies that peacebuilders engage with are complex social systems. This implies that it is not possible to make sense of or predict the future behaviour of such systems using deductive theoretical approaches based only on the past behaviour of similar systems, or even the same system in a different context. It also means that one cannot attempt to influence such systems using pre-planned linear cause-and-effect theories of change and realistically expect them to produce pre-determined outcomes.

Instead, making sense of complex systems and attempting to influence them requires an inductive approach that generates and continuously adapts knowledge through concerted efforts to learn from context-specific and iterative attempts to purposefully engage with the system. One can summarise this approach to knowledge generation as learning from doing and doing from learning. We will discuss how this is done in practice in the methodology section. This adaptive approach to developing and continuously revising the knowledge that emerges from the process of acting and learning is what the “adaptive” in Adaptive Peacebuilding refers to.

2. Build Peace from Within

Adaptive Peacebuilding recognises that peace is not something that can be imposed or administered by peacebuilders. Peace is a continuously emergent process that is generated by the active participation of a society in sustaining its own peace. The people affected by, and involved in, any given conflict situation are thus the critical knowledge holders who have the primary agency to make and sustain their own peace. The empowered agency of the people involved is critical for the effectiveness and sustainability of any peace initiative.

Initiatives to prevent or manage conflict or to sustain a peace process must emerge and evolve from a collaborative and experiential process in which the people affected by the conflict have the agency to direct the process. This also implies that the peace process must be context and time-specific, and helps to explain why peace processes based on standards and norms exported from elsewhere have usually been less effective and unsustainable.

Peacebuilders can support and stimulate the process, but the critical agency needs to emerge from the social institutions of the affected community or society. The resilience of the self-organising capacity of a society determines the extent to which it can withstand pressures and shocks that risk a (re)lapse into violent conflict. Peacebuilding should thus be about safeguarding, stimulating, facilitating, and creating the space for societies to develop robust and resilient capacities to self-organise peacefully.

3. Stimulate Adaptive Capacity and Avoid Dependence

External peacebuilders can assist the process of sustaining peace, but if they interfere too much—if they start to direct the process and attempt to control the outcomes to serve their interests—they will disrupt the

feedback processes critical for self-organisation to emerge and to be sustained.

This typically happens when peacebuilders attempt to engineer the process in order to generate pre-determined outcomes desired by their host institution or the system that funds their work. Trying to control the outcome produces the opposite of what peacebuilding aims to achieve; it generates dependence, it undermines self-sustainability, and it can prolong instability.

State and social institutions develop resilience through iterative trial and error over generations. Too much filtering and cushioning slow down and inhibit these feedback processes. Every time an external peacebuilder “solves a problem,” it denies internal social institutions an opportunity to learn from doing, including learning from failing. Getting it wrong and trying again stimulates the learning and adaptation processes necessary for social institutions to develop and become robust. Too much external interference distorts these system dynamics. For example, a stabilisation dilemma emerges when an international peace operation is so effective in providing stability that the ruling political elites have little incentive to invest in the political settlements necessary to bring about self-sustainable peace.⁵

It is also important to recognise that all interventions in complex social systems will generate intended and unintended consequences. It is highly likely that some of the consequences will be harmful. It is therefore important to monitor not just for intended outcomes, but for all effects, so that harmful effects can be identified as early as possible and acted on. This is another reason why it is important to involve the people affected by conflict in the whole project cycle, so that they are part of the process, co-responsible for decisions at every level that will affect them, and part of the process of monitoring, identifying harmful effects, and making decisions about what to do about them.

4. Invest in Efforts to Sustain Peace over the Long Term

The need to sustain peace never ends. You can't declare that a conflict has been resolved and stop investing in the social institutions that sustain peace. You can achieve and celebrate milestones; for example, the signing of a peace agreement or the conclusion of a successful and peaceful election, but we need to recognise that these gains are always potentially reversible. Peacebuilders need to move beyond focusing only on specific “problems” that need to be “resolved” within pre-determined timeframes. Instead, they need to invest in supporting the development of the underlying resilience of a society that enables it to better manage future shocks and setbacks. This means investing in social institutions that promote norms of tolerance and inclusion, and that put in place local capacities for identifying and managing social tensions or disputes before they become more serious. This is also the essence of the difference between a conflict resolution approach to peacebuilding, which assumes a conflict can be resolved once and for all, and the sustaining peace approach to peacebuilding, which is aimed at investing in the capacity of societies to manage future tensions themselves.

This also implies that peacebuilders have to be cautious about how they use the notions of “best practices”

⁵ Cedric de Coning, “How Not to Do UN Peacekeeping: Avoid the Stabilization Dilemma with Principled and Adaptive Mandating and Leadership.” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 29 no. 2: 152–167 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02902008>.

and “lessons learned.” It is important to assess the effects interventions have generated, and to learn from our experiences. However, that does not mean that something once learned in one context will work in another. A particular initiative may work well in one situation but is unlikely to have the same effect when scaled up or applied in another context. This is why the Adaptive Peacebuilding approach is based on learning and continuous adaptation.

Lastly, peacebuilders must be cautious about unrealistic timeframes. Building peace is not like building a house, which can be carried out step-by-step within a pre-determined timeframe. Building peace is more like gardening, which requires continuous nurturing. We can provide water and fertilisers, and we can weed and deal with pests, but the garden grows at its own unhurried pace. It is important not to confuse our own internal planning and reporting cycles with the timeframes needed for peace to emerge and to be sustained. We plant trees for the next generation. Not everything we need to invest in will show results within a given reporting period. The gardening metaphor is also useful in reminding us to be cautious and not to use all our efforts to deal only with the immediate symptoms. We also need to spend sufficient time to address the underlying drivers and causes of conflict.

5. Empower Resilient Communities and Societies

Adaptive peacebuilding recognises that conflict is a normal and necessary element of change. Its focus is on supporting the ability of communities and stakeholders to cope with and manage this process of change so that they can avoid violent conflict.

If a society is fragile, it means that the social institutions that govern its politics, security, justice, and economy lack resilience. Resilience refers to the ability of social institutions to absorb and adapt to internal and external shocks and setbacks, and transform by addressing the root causes of conflict. If a society is fragile, there is a risk that it may not be able to manage these tensions, pressures, disputes, crises, and shocks without relapsing into violent conflict. This risk can gradually be reduced as social institutions develop the resilience necessary to cope with any specific

Is it possible to achieve sustainable peace?

The example of Mauritius

The Sustaining Peace project at Columbia University conducted research in Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, to examine the characteristics of its peaceful multicultural society. Initially colonised by the Dutch, French, and British, Mauritius subsequently became home to a diverse population, including descendants of enslaved Africans, Indian indentured workers, and Chinese traders. Despite experiencing ethnic riots in the 1960s and 1990s, the island has since been recognised for its high ranking on the Global Peace Index, with stability, full democracy, and strong political freedoms.

Notwithstanding the prevailing peace, a number of challenges persist, including economic inequalities rooted in historical divisions, discrimination against individuals who identify as LGBTQ, and intergroup tensions. Local narratives illustrate the persistence of caste and class divisions, with residents characterising peace in Mauritius as “fragile.”

Nonetheless, the island sustains harmony through practices such as a strong social safety net, a Truth and Justice Commission addressing past injustices, and norms discouraging confrontation. Celebrations across cultural lines, like Diwali and Eid, contribute to a daily social fabric of peaceful coexistence.

Read more about the Sustaining Peace project at: <https://sustainingpeaceproject.com>

threats they may face.

The Adaptive Peacebuilding approach aims to help societies develop the resilience they need to cope with and adapt to change by fostering greater complexity in their social institutions. For peace to be self-sustainable, a society needs a network of mutually reinforcing institutions capable of managing disputes peacefully. Peacebuilding is thus essentially about stimulating and facilitating the capacity of societies to sustain peace themselves, i.e., assisting societies in developing a sufficiently robust and resilient network of social institutions so that they can self-organise and evolve peacefully, despite social competition, environmental stress, and unexpected shocks.

The Four Steps of the Adaptive Peacebuilding Method

The basic method of the Adaptive Peacebuilding approach comprises four steps. The four steps are assess and analyse, set objectives and plan, implement and monitor, and reflect, adapt and repeat. They must be continuously repeated in cycles that enable overall learning from doing.

Because Adaptive Peacebuilding recognises that it is not possible to reliably pre-design a causal path that can bring about an intended future state, the method is inductive and experiential; in other words, it is designed to learn from experience through repeated cycles of engagement, feedback, and reflection.

The aim is not to experiment until we find the correct answer or to achieve the best way, but to continuously evolve together with society and, in that way, to become as effective and sustainable as possible.

We also need to avoid causing harm. Peacebuilding is likely to have intended and unintended outcomes. Some of these unintended consequences can be harmful. We should be guided by the Do No Harm principle, which means acting in ways that proactively aim to avoid harm, and where harm occurs, identifying and correcting it as quickly as possible.

What is the Do No Harm principle?

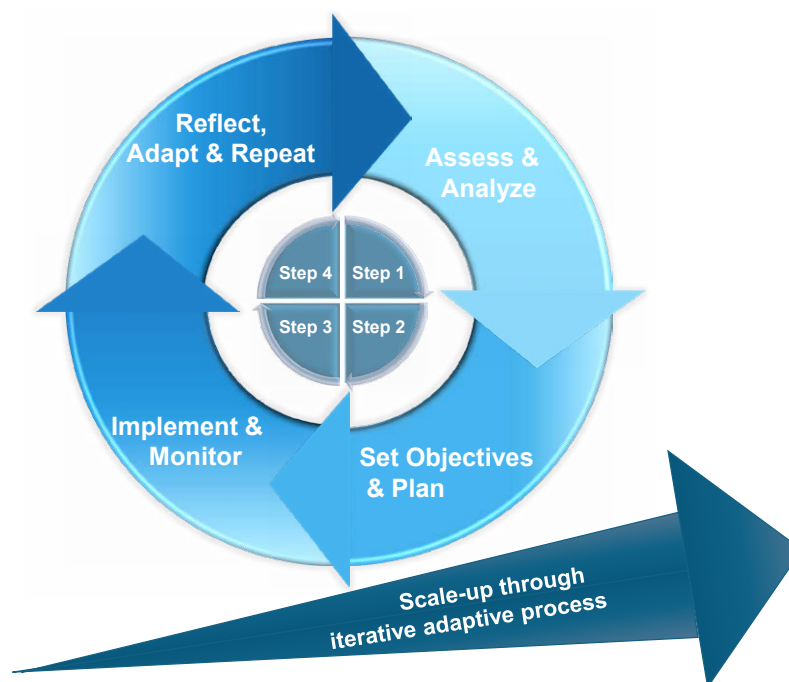
The “Do No Harm” (DNH) principle is a conflict-sensitivity approach aimed at ensuring that aid programmes positively impact peace and avoid worsening conflicts. It recognises that assistance efforts, whether for humanitarian, peacebuilding, or development purposes, can affect local tensions. The approach encourages organisations to understand the context, analyse how their interventions interact with the context, and adjust their actions to minimise harm while fostering peace.

A key component of DNH is distinguishing between “Dividers” and “Connectors” in communities. Dividers are elements that cause tension, while Connectors encourage unity. By identifying these factors, organisations can design interventions that reduce divisive impacts and promote cohesion. This principle emphasises accountability and responsiveness to local needs, allowing for more tailored and effective interventions.

For further reading, refer to the following information sheet from the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA): <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf>

Table 2: The Adaptive Peacebuilding Method: Four Steps

STEPS	
1. Assess and analyse	• Clarify what people affected want to achieve, i.e., the intent of the peacebuilding or development initiative. • The actions taken to influence the sustainability of a specific peace process have to be time- and context-specific, and they must emerge from a process that engages society itself. • To assist affected people in understanding their own situation, and what to do about it, peacebuilders facilitate inclusive participatory processes that help communities and stakeholders to assess, analyse and set goals and objectives.
2. Set objectives and plan	• Identify, together with the society in question, what the peacebuilding project should aim to achieve. • Adaptive peacebuilding is a goal-oriented or problem-solving approach. One key element of the adaptive approach is variety; as the outcome is uncertain, one must experiment with a variety of initiatives across a spectrum of probabilities. • The theory of change that informs each alternative needs to be clearly understood so that one can assess and learn from the effects it generates in each time- and context-specific iteration. This will enable learning by reviewing the effects of each intervention.
3. Implement and monitor	• Simultaneously implement several interventions to introduce variation in programming. • Carefully monitor the effects that each intervention generates. This will enable learning when reviewing (in Step 4) the effects of each intervention.
4. Reflect, Adapt, and Repeat	• Evaluate each intervention based on data collected through the monitoring process (in Step 3). • Each intervention is reviewed based on the outcomes it generates, and decisions are made, together with affected people, regarding which adaptations are necessary. • Reflect on each intervention and the effects it has generated, stopping those initiatives that perform poorly or have negative side effects. Those that show greater promise can be further adapted to introduce more variety, or can be scaled up to have greater impact. • If needed, review the original assessment, analysis, goals, and objectives. Capture lessons and reflect on overall trends and progress. • The cycle then starts over again. Adaptive Peacebuilding is an iterative process learning from our own experience. It is repeated continuously because in highly complex contexts, adaptations are only relevant for a relatively short period before new dynamics come into play.

Figure 3: Iterative process of four steps

Source: created by the authors

Conclusion

In this chapter, we introduced the core elements of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process that can be used to guide our peacebuilding and development work across different contexts and scales. These five elements create a comprehensive and adaptable framework for peacebuilding, grounded in community empowerment and resilience, thereby increasing the chances of sustaining peace. These elements encourage practitioners to shift from a role of implementers—focused on delivering predefined solutions—to that of learners and facilitators who support self-organisation and locally driven peace efforts.

We also introduced how adaptive peacebuilding should be used in each stage of project or programme design, implementation, and evaluation. The four steps of the Adaptive Peacebuilding method mark a departure from conventional, linear peacebuilding models by promoting a flexible, iterative, and adaptive approach that should help practitioners work effectively in complex environments.

In the next chapters, we discuss how these elements and the Adaptive Peacebuilding method can be applied to all aspects of the peacebuilding and development project cycle, including assessment and analysis; planning and design; implementation, coordination and management, and monitoring and evaluation. The following four chapters each address one of the four steps of Adaptive Peacebuilding: assess and analyse, set objectives and plan, implement and monitor, reflect, adapt, and repeat. The case studies placed at the end of each chapter have been newly selected for this guidebook based on the findings of the volume *Adaptive Peacebuilding: A New Approach for the 21st Century* and their strong relevance to each step.



Step 1: Assess and Analyse

Step 1:

Assess and Analyse

Introduction

In this chapter, we look at the first step in any peacebuilding or development project: assessment and analysis. Before starting a new project or a new phase of an existing one, we need to understand the needs of the community or society that the project aims to assist.

In Adaptive Peacebuilding, the assessment process identifies needs, context, stakeholders, and their resilience—the capacities to prevent, manage, and recover from stress and shocks—in ways that meet their needs in a conflict-affected environment, or one that is vulnerable to potential conflict. This helps to design projects that fit local realities and respond to the specific challenges of the community. Assessing the resilience of affected communities enables the identification of local capacities and adaptive strategies used to deal with and recover from conflict or related stressors such as climate change, natural disasters, and displacement. Conflict analysis examines the causes, actors, and dynamics of conflict. Assessment and analysis involve gathering and interpreting foundational information to guide adaptive and flexible peacebuilding interventions.

Core Principles of Adaptive Peacebuilding that Guide Assessment and Analysis

Context-specific

- The assessment and analysis tools used should be tailored or adjusted to fit the specific purpose of the assessment, as opposed to using an off-the-shelf tool.
- The tools also need to be appropriate for the historical, political, social, economic, and cultural context in which they will be used.
- Adapting tools to the context requires the participation of people with local knowledge and experience.
- It is important to maintain an adaptive process that allows for the modification of tools in response to contextual factors and dynamics.
- A context-specific approach ensures that assessment and analysis reflect real-time changes, engage local stakeholders, integrate Indigenous knowledge, and enable flexible, responsive, and sustainable peacebuilding and related development strategies.

- Context in this guidebook is broadly defined as the history, culture, and lived experience of the people affected by the conflict or crisis.
- Assessment and analysis should help project designers to understand the context, needs, and resilience of the affected people.
- An analysis will typically include a section providing a brief history, a description of the cultural context, and the recent and current lived experiences of the affected people.
- In a conflict situation, there will typically be different narratives and interpretations of key historical facts and trends.
- The lived experiences of those affected by the conflict will also vary depending on their position in society, and therefore it is important that assessment and analysis reflect the diversity of worldviews, beliefs, attitudes, positions, experiences, and behaviours that exist within affected communities.
- An assessment does not have to be a consensus document; it can contain conflicting accounts of the context to recognise the diversity of the people being supported.

Participatory

- The Adaptive Peacebuilding approach is fundamentally participatory, recognising that affected people are crucial knowledge holders of their own context; their involvement in assessment and analysis is critical for ensuring accuracy, shared ownership and joint learning.
- This participation extends to all four steps of the process, beginning with identifying key stakeholders, such as community leaders and interest groups, through transparent methods.
- Where full participation is not feasible, advisory groups and other methods of indirect involvement can help guide the process.
- Data collection should be comprehensive—considering gender, religion, ethnicity, and language—and engage local stakeholders to strengthen ownership and avoid bias.
- Capacity building for local institutions can enhance their role in data collection and analysis, contributing to long-term sustainability.
- Stakeholders include anyone affected by a crisis or with a stake in the outcome, from community members to local and regional organisations.
- Stakeholder assessment involves mapping actors by category or scale and analysing their networks—including relationships, influence, and resource flows—to identify key partners, allies, and potential obstacles for effective project design.
- Because dynamics, actors, and influence can shift unexpectedly, it is essential to maintain flexibility by regularly reassessing networks and mapping informal ties to identify hidden agendas.
- Incorporating multiple perspectives reduces blind spots and enhances systemic understanding.

Adaptive

- Adaptation, which occurs at two levels—process and substance—is key in assessment and analysis, requiring flexibility in tools and continuous updating of information and analysis.
- Stakeholder involvement must evolve, and data and analysis must be regularly updated.
- Assessment and analysis should function as living documents, integrating real-time updates and insights from iterative learning to remain relevant, responsive, and aligned with evolving conflict dynamics and local needs.

- It is crucial to empower those responsible for assessment and analysis to flexibly adapt tools, integrate different knowledge systems, and respond to changing local dynamics without being constrained by rigid methods.

Iterative

- The assessment and analysis process must be iterative, incorporating regular cycles of reflection and structured feedback from stakeholders so that adjustments can be made as needed.
- The assessment and analysis process should be designed to elicit and process feedback from stakeholders, ensuring that this vital element of learning and adaptation is not left to chance.
- For assessment and analysis to be truly iterative, they must move beyond procedural adjustments and be deliberately designed to integrate structured reflection, informed by community-driven and stakeholder feedback.
- Assessment and analysis also need to remain responsive to complex realities on the ground while maintaining analytical rigour.

Holistic

- Assessment and analysis should be situated within a holistic system because societies and communities in conflict are interconnected. Many issues cannot be addressed effectively without considering these interconnections and how addressing one issue may affect others.
- Assessment and analysis need to meaningfully engage stakeholders to help ensure that structural, relational and psychological dimensions are identified and considered, so that interventions do not inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities or tensions.
- Assessment and analysis also facilitate multi-sectoral collaboration, bridging peacebuilding with governance, development and security efforts to foster systemic resilience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the first step of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process cycle: assess and analyse. We emphasised shifting from rigid, externally driven tools to adaptive, participatory processes that capture lived realities, local power dynamics, and stakeholder resilience. This approach ensures that assessments function as living processes, identifying the underlying structures and capacities needed to inform contextually grounded peacebuilding strategies. It requires the use of appropriate tools and methods to understand the systems of societies and communities in conflict as comprehensively as possible. Assessment and analysis should not be limited to traditional tools pre-determined by an organisation but should remain flexible to incorporate diverse and locally relevant approaches.

Case Study 1

Support across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir

Conciliation Resources



Kashmiri village women sit in boats filled with water chestnuts, in the waters of Wular Lake at Bandipora

© Shuaib Masoodi

Conciliation Resources (CR) is an international NGO with over 30 years of experience in preventing and resolving violent conflict through work with conflict-affected communities. CR has worked in Kashmir since 2006 and is one of the few organisations engaging directly with Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) to reduce violence and promote peacebuilding at regional and cross-LoC levels.

Context-specific

Central to CR's approach is the recognition that sustainable bilateral peace efforts must acknowledge the issue of Kashmir and must enable Kashmiri participation. India-Pakistan relations remain stagnant, with no resumption of formal peace talks, increasing the importance of informal peacebuilding initiatives.

CR's initial engagement in Kashmir involved a comprehensive mapping exercise through research and extensive consultations with a cross-section of civil society and the strategic community on both sides of the LoC, as well as in India and Pakistan. The mapping identified the lack of opportunities for Kashmiris to influence and complement the peace dialogue as a major obstacle. A subsequent joint workshop with around two dozen civil society activists from diverse regional, religious, ethnic and political backgrounds identified

entry points for cross-community dialogue across regions and cross-LoC confidence-building initiatives to build peace from the ground up and complement official negotiations.

Furthermore, CR's context-specific approaches could develop spaces that centre Kashmiri participation while addressing thematic issues in response to openings within the context. For example, CR has commissioned local research into trade and shared environmental issues, such as air pollution, to inform formal dialogue processes and provide space for discussion of confidence-building measures (CBMs).

Holistic

CR works closely with the Kashmir Initiative Group (KIG), comprising thought leaders from both Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Together, they launched the Sulah Dialogue in 2015—the only high-level India–Pakistan initiative centred on Kashmir that places Kashmiris at its core. Sulah bridges community-level realities with national-level policy discussions. In the absence of a formal peace process, Sulah has sustained discreet dialogue, fed ideas into both capitals, and maintained engagement with key actors during periods of crisis. Insights from community-level initiatives inform Sulah discussions, reinforcing local ownership and responsiveness to ground realities. Given resistance to external mediation in the context, Sulah has focused on insider mediation, creating a resilient internal platform for dialogue during moments of heightened tension.

Participatory

CR and partners supported the development of infrastructure to support trade across the Line of Control. Activities included establishing a Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (J&K-JCCI), which brought together business leaders and representatives across the Line of Control. CR worked with diverse groups, including local networks of businesspersons, journalists, labourers, transporters, academics, trade facilitation authorities and civil society, including former combatants, to ensure inclusive structures and active civic participation. This inspired cooperation in areas such as academia, media, disaster management, youth, and women's networks. These processes demonstrated how participation could gradually rebalance power relations within the conflict system.

Adaptive

As the first cross-LoC institution uniting major business chambers and trade associations from both sides, J&K-JCCI supported cross-LoC trade and served as an informal peacebuilding mechanism. It was sustained through personal relationships and barter systems in the absence of formal banking channels. Trust-based “emotional capital” enabled large-scale trade and dispute resolution, contributing to relative calm along the LoC between 2008 and 2016 and allowing border communities to rebuild livelihoods and homes. Over time, CR's support adapted to support emerging opportunities. For example, CR overcame resistance from the influential Chambers of Commerce in the capital cities and enabled the inclusion of traditionally marginalised LoC traders from the border areas into the Joint Chamber through the formation of cross-LoC traders' associations. Additionally, CR worked with local journalists and researchers who generated economic data and analysis on the peace dividend from trade for local communities through perception surveys. These adaptive practices helped navigate political sensitivities while maintaining local ownership.

Iterative

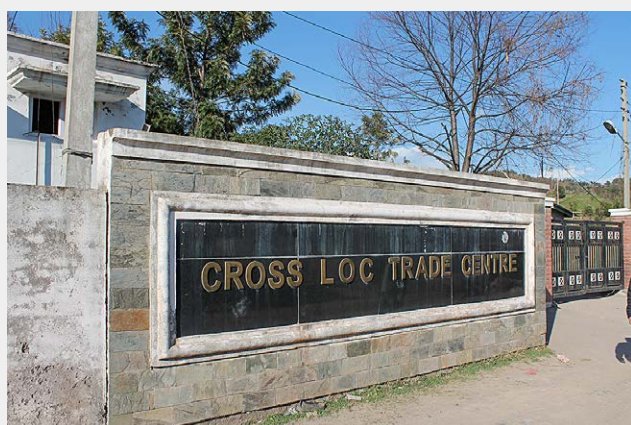
CR has continually adapted its approach to CBMs in response to shifting political conditions, particularly after 2019, when cross-LoC trade was suspended. Rather than halting engagement, CR reassessed strategies while preserving networks and institutional memory built over many years. One response was to support research on the impact of the suspension of trade. Despite the suspension, the initiative regained public attention in 2021 through national debates on India–Pakistan trade, and the research findings could be used to inform partners’ policy advocacy. CR also continued to support research and advocacy through establishing a technical taskforce to assess local impacts and promote trade resumption. This included commissioning gendered research on dry dates trade and the impact of the suspension of cross-LoC trade. This analysis was fed into strategic-level discussions as part of wider dialogue processes. This iterative approach ensures that learning from past initiatives informs future engagement and policy advocacy.

Achievements

This case study highlights two interrelated dimensions of CR’s peacebuilding practice. Firstly, CR supported confidence-building through cross-LoC and intra-Kashmir dialogue and cooperation, particularly via cross-LoC trade. Secondly, it facilitated high-level engagement among influential interlocutors from India, Pakistan, and Kashmir, creating space for insider mediation and enabling an environment for sustained civil society-led peacebuilding and CBMs across Kashmir. By supporting multi-level engagement—spanning policy, civil society, and community levels—CR has enabled insights from civil society-led initiatives, including those led by younger individuals, to inform higher-level dialogue and political spaces.

Jammu and Kashmir: the conflict in focus | Conciliation Resources

<https://www.c-r.org/programme/south-asia/jammu-and-kashmir-conflict-focus>



Sign showing Cross LoC Trade Centre

© Conciliation Resources

Case Study 2

Inclusive and Transparent Local Governance in Iraq

Folke Bernadotte Academy and Iraqi Research Foundation for Analysis and Development



The Community Participation Team in Muthanna facilitates dialogue between community groups and the local government to identify local needs and priorities.

The Inclusive and Transparent Local Governance project, launched in 2020 by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) in partnership with the Iraqi CSO Irfad, illustrates how adaptive peacebuilding has been applied in practice. The overarching objective is inclusive governance, but the central focus has been on assessment and analysis as a continuous and participatory process that has shaped the project's design, implementation, and learning.

Adaptive

Going into the project, FBA intentionally had not developed a “final” problem analysis or theory of change. Instead, the adaptive approach became a method for dealing with the complexity of the challenges, which in practice meant continuously developing and revising the problem analysis and the theory of change based on joint analysis and learning with partners and participants. Following an initial desk analysis of general rule of

law challenges in Iraq, FBA conducted two consultative workshops with Iraqi CSOs, which laid the foundation for further deliberations with Irfad.

In parallel, the team conducted a conflict system analysis of the broader Iraqi dynamics. This helped the project relate to the context with a deeper, more holistic understanding and to situate its work within the larger system, increasing its ability to work adaptively and “listen to the system.” A focus on relationship-building was a key factor in successfully employing the adaptive approach. To carry out the joint, continuous analysis and assessment, and make shared decisions, it was vital to create an environment in which the participants and partners felt free to express their diverse opinions. This was achieved using a dialogue approach as the basis for meetings, workshops and the team’s own communication.

Participatory

The assessment of context, need and partners was highly participatory. Open questions in the workshops allowed the CSOs to lead the conversation and minimise external influence. Through this process, Irfad was identified as a local partner deeply familiar with the context. For its part, Irfad conducted its own internal assessment of FBA as a partner, focusing on whether FBA’s approach to development cooperation aligned with Irfad’s guiding principles of working from, with, and for the community. Based on a jointly developed questionnaire, Irfad subsequently interviewed local government and civil society representatives to strengthen the joint problem analysis of the specific local context, in addition to identifying participants (change agents).

Later, local working groups consisting of 10 local government and CSO representatives emerged and became formalised. Relationship- and trust-building allowed members to engage in joint analysis and learning throughout the process, which increasingly became the engine for generating new initiatives and shaping the direction of the project. A participatory approach to decision-making was also employed, taking time to involve all parties in discussions before making decisions on project priorities and ensuring that decisions were taken at the appropriate level—i.e., the FBA and Irfad did not make top-down decisions.

Iterative

The phased assessment and analysis fed into a gradually emerging theory of change, with participants selecting focus areas and target institutions. The work with partners and participants was frequently characterised by pauses to take stock of “what do we know now?” and “what do we need to find out?” At each bi-annual gathering, components of the theory of change were followed up, tested and adjusted together.

For example, the key target institution was shifted into a different role within the theory of change as participants increasingly understood its function and challenges. In another example, project participants changed slightly halfway through the project to include additional change agents from within local government. This iterative cycle also extended to monitoring, where some ideas tested were surprisingly successful and built upon, while others had less impact and were not prioritised.

Context-specific

The initial CSO consultations indicated that major rule of law (ROL) challenges included a lack of accountability and transparency, conflict-ridden relations between the government and citizens, and limited opportunities

for civil society and the population to influence decision-making. Accountability and transparency were seen as central but too sensitive, while participation and dialogue were more feasible and posed less risk. These conclusions shaped the entry point for the project. Locating the work in provinces where Irfad had long-standing relationships ensured contextual sensitivity, while the conflict systems analysis linked local findings to national dynamics of decentralisation, mistrust, and fragile governance. Continuous analysis of political developments in the provinces and their effects on the project was also a key component, which enabled the project to adapt and engage with political developments rather than trying to avoid them.

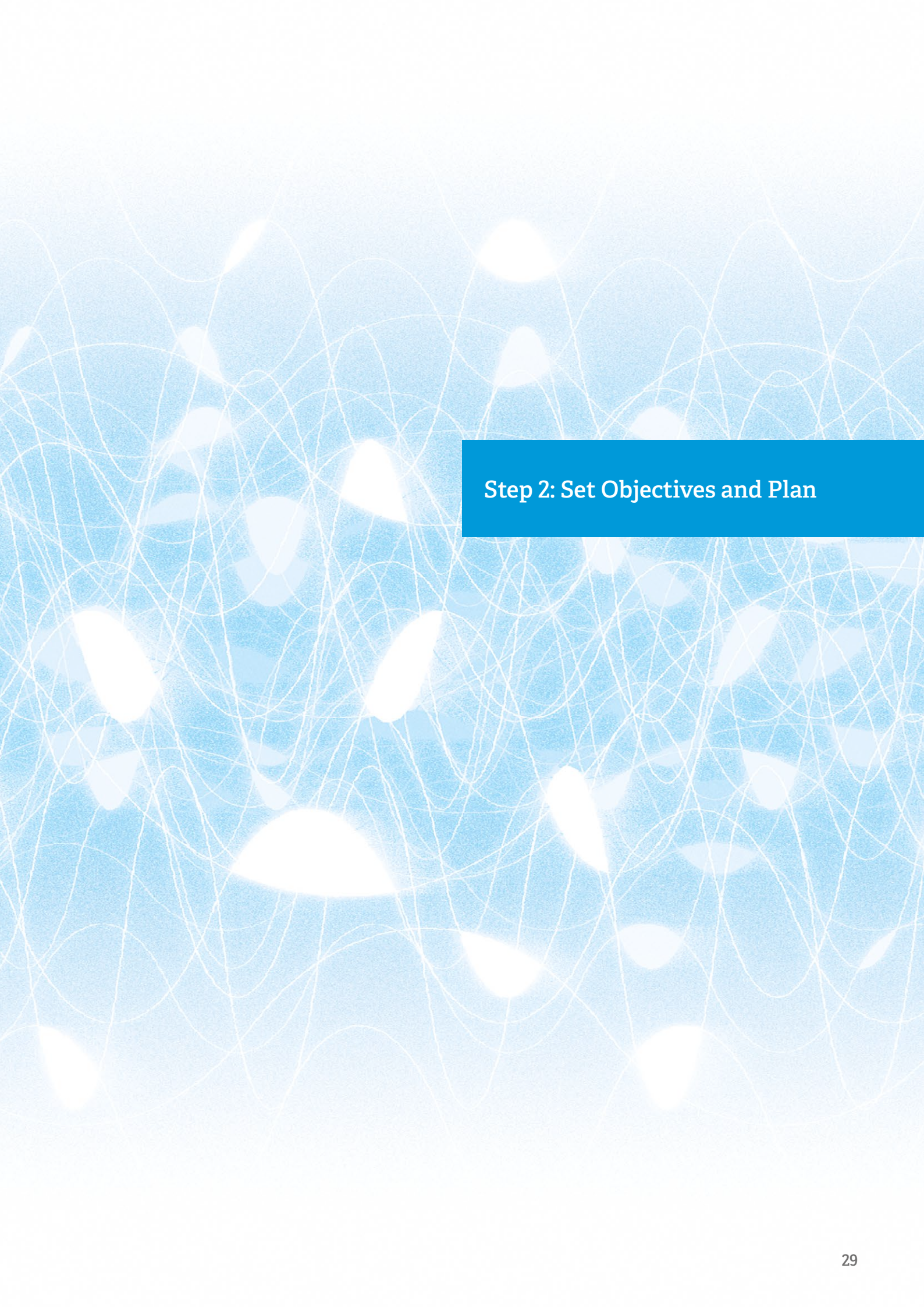
Holistic

The analysis process was holistic, combining structural, relational, and institutional dimensions. It considered not only legal and technical reforms but also trust, dialogue, and participation. By embedding conflict systems analysis alongside local consultations, the project connected immediate governance challenges with the larger Iraqi system of conflict and resilience. This holistic foundation guided activities ranging from training in participation and dialogue to piloting initiatives and institutionalising new mechanisms such as the Community Participation Teams (CPTs) under provincial planning councils.

Conclusion

In this project, assessment and analysis became the backbone of adaptive peacebuilding. Each of the five elements—adaptive, participatory, iterative, context-specific, and holistic—was visible in how problems were identified, revisited, and reframed. By treating assessment not as a fixed starting point but as a continuous, co-owned process, the project fostered trust, allowed participants to drive solutions, and created institutionalised platforms for inclusive governance in Iraq.



The background of the slide features a complex, abstract pattern of overlapping, wavy lines in various shades of blue and white, creating a textured, organic feel. A solid blue horizontal bar is positioned across the middle of the slide, containing the text 'Step 2: Set Objectives and Plan' in white.

Step 2: Set Objectives and Plan

Step 2:

Set Objectives and Plan

Introduction

In this chapter, we look at the second step in the Adaptive Peacebuilding method: setting objectives and planning. As a goal-oriented, problem-solving approach, it is important to identify, together with affected people and key stakeholders, what the project should aim to achieve based on the initial assessment and analysis. While a plan is developed, it reflects our expectations and assumptions, but we recognise that the plan and even the objectives must be adapted as we learn from experience and as the social system continues to evolve. To deal with uncertainty, this approach involves exploring a number of options to learn which actions have the most desirable effects, allowing us to purposefully pursue our objectives even when the path is uncertain. The aim is to influence stakeholders' behaviours by using positive and negative feedback to incentivise actions that sustain peace, such as tolerance and respect, and disincentivise those that lead to violence, such as hate speech. The ultimate goal is to foster self-sustainable peace by facilitating the emergence of social institutions and networks—including formal and informal state and local community groups—that proactively promote social cohesion and trust.

Core Principles of Adaptive Peacebuilding that Guide Setting Objectives and Planning

Context-specific

- Objective setting and planning should be informed by a context that encompasses ecosystem factors such as weather variability and social factors such as the key stakeholders who need to be involved. Even where organisational goals are pre-determined and serve as parameters that shape what is permissible and possible from an organisational or donor perspective, they should not lead to pre-determined objectives.
- The objectives need to be determined, together with the community, society or institution that the project aims to support, based on the context-specific needs assessment and analysis undertaken in Step 1.
- Planning should include the development of a results framework with indicators to help the implementation team monitor the effects of each action and the project's overall effect. These indicators need to be context-specific. In other words, they should not be taken from a menu

developed by the organisation elsewhere or from a broader programme. They need to be developed for this specific purpose and by the people involved in this specific project.

- Those involved in objective setting and planning should be aware of context and take ownership of the various decisions taken during the process to produce a specific set of objectives, as well as a broad plan for achieving those objectives and a related results framework.

Participatory

- Peacebuilders are expected to develop the project's objectives collaboratively with the community, society, or institution they aim to support. They can facilitate or support the process, but the decisions shaping the objectives and planning should reflect the agency of those affected by the conflict or risk of insecurity.
- Objectives need to be framed in a narrative that the community, society or institution relates to, and that reflects their needs and analysis as developed during Step 1 of the process.
- The group should similarly participate in the planning process that generates the specific actions that will be taken, as well as in the process that identifies and refines the indicators that will be used to monitor progress.
- Not every individual in a community, society or institution can participate in the objective-setting and detailed planning process, so there needs to be a process that identifies a few members of the group who will represent them in the planning process. The participatory process needs to be acceptable to the group and needs to generate an inclusive number of representatives that reflect gender, age and other considerations. There needs to be a process for taking the draft objectives and plan back to the wider group for validation and approval.

Adaptive

- The objectives need to be captured in a results framework that articulates them as intended outcomes, and the planning process needs to generate the outputs and inputs needed to achieve these outcomes, as well as the indicators needed to monitor outputs and outcomes.
- The adaptive approach to planning recognises uncertainties and responds by simultaneously exploring multiple options. The aim is to deliver outputs that efficiently and effectively influence the desired outcomes.
- In order to learn from each output action, it needs to be clear what that action is intended to achieve. This means that during the planning process, the theory of change needs to be clearly defined, i.e., an explanation of the assumptions as to why this particular action should contribute to achieving one or more objectives.

Iterative

- The objective setting and planning process is designed to be iterative and adaptive. In other words, the process of developing and agreeing on objectives should also involve a process for generating ideas, refining them, drafting options, and adapting drafts until a final set of objectives is agreed upon.
- The planning process will be consultative and participatory, with various iterative steps leading to the approval of a plan. Neither objectives nor plans are set in stone, and they will continue to be reviewed and adapted throughout the lifetime of the project.

- While objective setting and planning is a specific step in the process, the overall process should remain iterative. It should be designed to provide regular opportunities to revisit and reflect on objectives, as well as on how they are articulated in plans as outcomes and outputs. Whilst outputs will be reviewed and adapted during every project cycle iteration, outcomes and objectives can be reviewed at set intervals, for example, once a year or when circumstances require.

Holistic

- Both objective setting and planning need to be informed by an understanding of the project as embedded in a larger socio-ecological system, which implies that there are many causal factors that simultaneously influence all aspects of the project. The Adaptive Peacebuilding approach is designed to deal with this complexity, uncertainty, and unpredictability. It does so by using this planning step to generate a variety of output actions that all seek to contribute to the same outcomes. Peacebuilders can then actively learn from the effects generated by these output activities to make judgements about which outputs perform better than others and use that process to select some outputs for further development, while discontinuing others.
- A sensitivity to the holistic nature of the socio-ecological environment within which the project is undertaken also implies the need to ensure that the process is designed to be as inclusive as possible, including gender, age groups, minorities, different religions, and ethnicities.
- The project needs to be climate- and environmentally sensitive, both in terms of anticipating climate variability and shocks or setbacks caused by extreme weather events or slow-onset climatic and environmental developments. More broadly, the project should consider its overall environmental effects.
- A commitment to a holistic approach also implies recognising the important role of self-organisation in complex systems. No one can control or influence the whole system, but the system itself is self-organising, and peacebuilders can contribute to this process by sharing information and coordinating with others working broadly towards the same aims, so that together they can have a more holistic effect on the system.
- Peacebuilders can nudge or influence the system by taking actions and continuously learning and adapting these actions based on what can be learned from how the system responds, including how the people respond and how their choices ripple out and influence their communities, societies and institutions.
- In this way, peacebuilding efforts can work with and amplify the self-organising dynamics of the system and enable the system to factor in and process the various influences in a holistic way.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the second step of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process cycle: set objectives and plan. We recognise that even as we plan, we cannot know from the outset exactly how objectives will materialise or which actions will be most effective. An adaptive process involves navigating the uncertainty of complex systems by learning from experience and adjusting future actions based on system feedback. Facilitating this requires articulating clear objectives and theories of change while simultaneously experimenting with various interventions. The process should be sufficiently participatory for the community or institutions involved to co-own the process and its outcomes.

Case Study 3

Empowering Learning from Just and Peaceful Societies: Colombia Co-Inspira Peacebuilding Programme

Adapt Peacebuilding



Members of the Co-Inspira co-researchers group during one of the departmental map analysis sessions.

Adapt Peacebuilding in 2020 proposed a pilot project to strengthen peace councils in conflict-affected municipalities in Colombia. Government agencies wanted to promote social dialogue and explore a way forward in implementing the peace agreement. The Development Programmes with Territorial Focus had been participatory in design, but their implementation had been much more top-down.

The pilot began as a Systemic Action Research (SAR) in El Tambo, one of the municipalities most affected by armed conflict in Colombia. From 2022 to 2025, the project was implemented in this municipality, and expanded to include new peace counsellors from 11 municipalities in the same department: Cauca. Local peace counsellors formed the initial participant group and, through the SAR methodology, became co-researchers, naming the initiative *Co-Inspira*.

Context-specific

Co-Inspira focused on municipalities in Cauca with specific local conflict and peace dynamics. The co-researchers from the territories defined a genuine question they wanted to answer and address, which

oriented the process. They mapped more than 200 life stories and listened to their communities to understand how they build peace at the local level. Through a SAR approach, they identified challenges and opportunities based on the patterns and multicausal dynamics that emerged from the realities and experiences of those who live in the territory.

From this bottom-up process, the co-researchers identified opportunities for change and generated initiatives aligned with their priorities and capabilities to promote peace in line with their specific local dynamics. They organised the pace and rhythm of the meetings, and once they understood the general structure, they decided the dates and proposed adjustments to the schedule.

Participatory

The methodology blends systems mapping with participatory action research. In this process, the co-researchers—community members, in this case mostly municipal peace counsellors—sought to understand how peace was being built. To answer this question, they collected life stories from community members and analysed them to map causal dynamics, generating multi-causal loops that explain how the system functions. They then identified patterns and opportunities that emerged from the map (system dynamics). The group of participants, initially composed of peace counsellors, decided to keep the process as an open-door project: allowing new citizens and leaders to join (not necessarily as peace counsellors), provided they respected the agreements already established.

Adaptive

Once the maps were completed, co-researchers—organised in smaller action research groups—generated theories of change based on the prioritised leverage points and developed work plans aligned with the following thematic priorities: women's empowerment, youth leadership, water and environmental protection, local small business, strengthening of civil society organisations, and gender-based violence prevention.

Each action research group planned actions to be implemented within a specific number of months, and after this period, took time to reflect and learn from their experience before adapting the theory of change and beginning the cycle again.

Iterative

The action research groups conducted several rounds of action-research cycles, meeting periodically to plan, take action, and learn in relation to the change they were working towards. These actions involved thousands of participants over a five-year period. The project involved continuous learning and internal communication across headquarters, local facilitators, and co-researchers to regularly reassess and realign actions with evolving conditions.

Holistic

As the co-researchers understood the dynamics that build peace in their territories from a systemic perspective, they developed actions to work at different interrelated levels of the subsystem they prioritised. These complexity-aware understandings prompted them to consider the impact of small everyday actions, so they created agreements on how to make decisions and how to take care of each other during workshops and meetings. This, in turn, led them to replicate those autonomous governance patterns in the actions they planned. For example, they consistently checked if mothers and caregivers needed to bring their kids or elders, so they could participate. Food and transportation costs were adjusted accordingly. The steps taken by co-researchers were holistic and involved a broad range of stakeholders in the target communities.

Achievements

This initiative has achieved a number of important results, including creating a micro-credit and savings group with tailor-made bylaws that has been replicated in six rural areas. It also supported a culture and peace festival led by young leaders from three regions, secured legal protection for a water ecosystem threatened by mining companies, and conducted several workshops on gender-based violence. Furthermore, it supported the development of branding for small businesses, facilitated knowledge exchanges among civil society organisations, built a Self-Organised Learning Environment (SOLE) laboratory managed by diverse local leaders, and empowered co-researchers' leadership by strengthening their visibility and relationships across the territory.

Colombia Coinspira – Adapt Peacebuilding

<https://coinspira.estudiovastago.com/>

Case Study 4

Rehabilitation and Reintegration Support Programme for Former Child Soldiers and War-Affected Persons in Northern Uganda

Terra Renaissance



Since 2005, Terra Renaissance has implemented the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Support Programme for former child soldiers and war-affected persons in Gulu District, Northern Uganda. The programme is a response to the long legacy of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict, which led to the abduction of an estimated 38,000 children over several decades of violence. Rooted in the mission of Terra Renaissance to “realise a society where all lives can live safely without fear and want,” the programme combines humanitarian care, livelihood training, psychosocial healing, and reconciliation, reflecting the principles of adaptive peacebuilding.

Adaptive

The programme reflects adaptive peacebuilding through a phased and flexible structure designed to respond to participants' evolving needs. It operates on a three-year cycle, emphasising self-reliance. The first 18 months focus on providing Basic Human Needs (BHN) support: food and medical coupons, rent assistance, and school fees for children so that participants can focus on recovery and training. This phase transitions into part-time training and income-generating activities outside the facility, where BHN assistance is replaced by microcredit to encourage independence. The programme also adapts to regional developments. Since 2023, Terra Renaissance has been supporting the repatriation of former child soldiers held captive by the LRA in the Central African Republic, in collaboration with The Congolese NGO Action pour la Promotion Rurale (APRu). In 2023, 141 individuals returned, including children. Of these, Terra Renaissance completed the reintegration of fifty-five adults who had formerly been child soldiers. Furthermore, since 2024, it has facilitated the return of 131 child soldiers who had been held in the Central African Republic and Sudan's Darfur region, of whom eight have completed their reintegration.

Participatory

The programme involves both former child soldiers and community members. Vulnerable residents in areas where former child soldiers return also receive support, which helps foster reconciliation and reduce potential friction. Weekly peace education classes are open to both former child soldiers and local residents and explore traditional Acholi reconciliation methods. In these sessions, traditional music and dance are incorporated into class activities, creating opportunities for collective participation and understanding. This community-based approach ensures that reintegration is not limited to individual rehabilitation but extends to rebuilding relationships and restoring trust among residents.

Furthermore, former child soldiers who have successfully reintegrated into society after completing their training play a crucial role in encouraging the return of other LRA soldiers. They send messages to these remaining soldiers—their former comrades—encouraging demobilisation and return by sharing their own success stories.

Iterative

Lessons from peace education and other activities are continuously integrated into subsequent training and counselling approaches. The programme regularly reviews participant feedback to refine business training, microcredit guidance, and psychosocial care, ensuring learning and improvement throughout the process. This iterative learning is exemplified by the expansion of vocational training to Faradje in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Rather than simple replication, the organisation applied specific lessons from Uganda—such as the necessity of pairing technical training with intensive mental health support—to tailor the DRC intervention. By treating each expansion as a learning loop, the project ensures continuous improvement throughout the process.

Context-specific

The programme is deeply rooted in the post-conflict Acholi cultural and social context of Northern Uganda. Recognising that former child soldiers face distinct challenges based on age, gender, and duration of captivity, Terra Renaissance provides individualised support tailored to their specific circumstances. Psychosocial care incorporates traditional Acholi music and dance alongside counselling, which helps participants confront trauma in culturally meaningful ways. Training in literacy, numeracy, and basic healthcare also addresses the high illiteracy and health vulnerabilities prevalent in the region. Furthermore, the organisation's collaboration with local authorities, communities, and Ugandan staff ensures that interventions align with local realities, maintaining legitimacy and trust.

Holistic

The four components—BHN support, capacity building, psychosocial care, and microcredit—are interlinked to create a sustainable reintegration pathway. Education in literacy, numeracy, and health complements vocational skills such as tailoring, carpentry, and handicrafts. Group counselling sessions help beneficiaries confront trauma, while peace education and reconciliation activities strengthen community cohesion. The holistic nature of the programme also bridges emergency aid and long-term development. Immediate food and medical assistance are provided alongside vocational training and business startup support.

Achievements

The programme has supported 415 individuals, including 251 former child soldiers and 164 vulnerable residents. Participants' average monthly income increased from around USD 1 to nearly USD 50, accompanied by a 70% rise in self-esteem. The correlation between economic stability and psychological recovery has become a key learning point, informing subsequent programme adjustments. Social reintegration has improved dramatically: 84% of participants now report living without discrimination, compared to 26% before joining. Several alumni have become local leaders, sharing their skills to support others.



Step 3: Implement and Monitor

Step 3:

Implement and Monitor

Introduction

In this chapter, we look at project implementation and monitoring, the third step in the Adaptive Peacebuilding approach. We explore how to apply a truly adaptive approach to these core processes, and how that differs from traditional project implementation and monitoring.

In Adaptive Peacebuilding, implementation involves putting the plan into effect; when challenges arise, it calls not only for flexible adjustments but also for identifying their underlying causes to inform the response. In this context, management, another important element of implementation, involves leading and steering teams, focusing on creating an environment that encourages staff to be adaptive and effectively guides participatory processes.

Monitoring, as covered here, is a specific aspect of M&E and is distinct from the evaluation that takes place in Step 4. It refers to the continuous gathering of data against indicators from the results framework. This data—such as tracking the number of violent incidents or hate speech occurrences—provides the necessary feedback for real-time adjustments and is essential for informing the critical reflection and evaluation in Step 4.

Core Principles of Adaptive Peacebuilding that Guide Implementation and Monitoring

Context-specific

- The project's design, informed by prior steps, must guide its implementation. Those leading the project at all levels need to ensure that staff, partners and stakeholders—including those who provide funding and other resources, especially those who did not participate in the assessment, analysis and planning phases—understand the context specificity in the project design and implement it in a context-specific manner.
- At the same time, recognising that the context is dynamic and can always change, it is important to actively and continuously monitor these changes and adjust to them, including social, political, cultural,

economic, and environmental factors, throughout the implementation period.

- To ensure effective project management, communication about implementation, progress, and challenges must be tailored to local stakeholders, using culturally appropriate language and formats that foster genuine dialogue.
- Implementation practices must align with local laws, norms, and partner plans. Any fundamental differences between stakeholders or requirements should be identified and resolved to ensure transparency and shared understanding of the chosen approach.
- The way in which specific actions and the overall project are assessed and monitored needs to be context-specific, while also taking into account broader considerations such as national, regional, or global goals that the peacebuilding organisations or funders may have.

Participatory

- The high level of community and institutional participation established during the assessment and planning steps must be maintained throughout implementation and monitoring. In practice, this means community or institutional representatives should be involved in all key decision-making that affects them. This deep involvement ensures projects reflect local needs and priorities, thereby building ownership and promoting the self-sustainability of outcomes. The project's role is to facilitate and support the community's or institution's own peace processes, recognising that their guidance is critical for success.
- Participation should be strengthened through initiatives such as training, information sharing, and capacity building that enable communities to engage effectively in decision-making, monitoring, advocacy, and other project activities. These efforts enhance the quality and meaningfulness of participation.
- Management will entail both internal peacebuilding organisational matters as well as partnerships with the community, local implementing partners, the government, and others. The way management is conducted can facilitate or hinder participation and partnership.
- Many rules, regulations, and policies on finance, reporting, or security and other areas have been made at the international headquarters level. Country-level managers need to navigate how to implement such rules whilst maximising participation and partnership at the implementation level and inform headquarters where these rules, regulations and policies hinder participation, localisation, and partnerships. They must also judge which decisions should remain internal and which require consultation with external stakeholders.
- Community and institutional representatives should also participate in monitoring. Their involvement strengthens ownership of the process and enriches reflection and adaptation. It can also generate insights that peacebuilding organisations and their implementing partners could not produce on their own. In principle, monitoring, like all other steps, should therefore be as participatory as possible, though the specific roles will depend on context.

Adaptive

- Adaptation is a daily implementation practice, not just a project cycle feature. Management must cultivate an adaptive culture and provide tools that incentivise staff to learn and adapt collaboratively. Leaders should actively reward adaptive actions and discourage rigid adherence to plans that hinder

effectiveness or cause harm.

- The Adaptive Peacebuilding method at this step encourages experimenting with a variety of actions in order to learn from experience: which ones produce better results and under what conditions. During the implementation phase, multiple actions are designed and implemented, and their effects are monitored and recorded. These adaptations need to be explicit and recorded so that when the actions are evaluated in the following step, they are assessed against the adapted theories of change and other planning adjustments, not against the original plan.
- As strategies and activities evolve, mechanisms should be integrated to allow resource allocation—including budget, human resources, and materials—to be flexibly reviewed and adapted accordingly.
- Where monitoring during the implementation of an activity reveals that initial assumptions were fundamentally flawed, adjustments should be considered, including modifying or suspending the activity.

Iterative

- The overall project cycle is iterative, as are everyday project implementation and monitoring activities. Those responsible for implementing actions will typically meet with their teams and partners on a weekly basis to reflect on progress, and at this level of project management, iterative learning and adaptation can also take place.
- When activities are interlinked, learnings from prior implementations should guide the detailed planning and execution of subsequent ones, making them iterative refinements informed by experience.
- Instead of implementing large-scale activities all at once, they can be divided into several distinct phases. After completing each phase, there is an opportunity to pause to review progress, effectiveness, participant reactions, and unexpected outcomes up to that point, derive lessons, and adapt plans and approaches for subsequent phases.
- The iterative improvement of specific methods, communication messages, and/or tools—such as facilitation guides and informational materials used in daily activities—should be actively promoted.

Holistic

- Implementation and monitoring should be guided by a comprehensive perspective that takes into account the overall holistic system. Specific actions must be understood in relation to the broader peacebuilding or transition process, both spatially and temporally.
- While activities are carried out in the present, their intended effects often unfold in the medium to long term and require sustained commitment. This perspective clarifies the purpose of monitoring, encourages realistic expectations, and emphasises the importance of quality relationships and lasting impact over meeting short-term organisational demands.
- The interaction of project activities with other relevant sectors (e.g., governance, development, environment, human rights, and gender) and cross-cutting themes should be actively monitored and managed from a comprehensive perspective within this holistic system.
- Monitoring should also capture the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including different social groups, those in positions of power, marginalised groups, and those indirectly affected, not just direct beneficiaries.

- Community-level interventions and outcomes relate to, mutually influence, and are shaped by larger system-level factors, and need to be continuously analysed and reflected upon.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the third step of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process cycle: implement and monitor. We explored how to navigate unpredictability by cultivating an adaptive management culture, maintaining deep community and stakeholder participation in decision-making, and using continuous monitoring data to iteratively refine actions. This step treats adaptation as a daily practice, recording adjustments against theories of change to ensure interventions remain responsive to the dynamic local context. Furthermore, it is imperative to establish an environment conducive to open dialogue with project members and beneficiary representatives, enabling effective decision-making even in challenging circumstances during implementation.

Case Study 5

Support for Peace Process in Mindanao, the Philippines

Japan International Cooperation Agency



Workshop on the formulation of Human Resource Development Plan by the Development Academy of Bangsamoro (under the Bangsamoro Transition Authority)

Armed struggle had persisted on Mindanao Island in the southern Philippines since the 1970s. This led to the conclusion of a peace agreement between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Philippine government in 1996. However, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which had split from the MNLF, continued its armed resistance. This prolonged conflict culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro between the MILF and the Philippine government in 2014. Japan has been actively engaged in cooperation efforts and has consistently supported the peace process in Mindanao since the 2000s, including the period before the peace agreement was signed.

Context-specific

Following the Peace Agreement in 1996, Japan began directly supporting the development of administrative capacity in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), established by the Government of the Philippines in the 2000s. In 2006, when the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the MILF gained momentum, the Japanese government launched the Japan-Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development (J-BIRD). Under this framework, JICA and the Japanese government became fully engaged in peacebuilding efforts through development. JICA assisted in developing the institutional

capacity of the Bangsamoro Development Agency (BDA), established under the agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the MILF to lead and manage rehabilitation and development in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao, through community development. This assistance was jointly implemented with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and commenced prior to the signing of the peace agreement. Following the peace agreement in 2014, Japan's assistance was geared toward supporting the transition to the Bangsamoro Transitional Authority (BTA) and, subsequently, the Bangsamoro Government.

Participatory

Japan's assistance to the transition included facilitating the drafting process of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which aimed to establish a new political entity and define its basic governmental structure. The participatory process, including public hearings organised with other partners and the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society, consolidated the views of 3,016 participants, and the BBL draft was subsequently submitted to the Philippine Congress. At the same time, assistance in formulating Bangsamoro Development Plan for the BTA continued despite the stagnation in the peace process, creating a platform for MILF affiliated organisations, regional offices of the Philippines' central government, local governments, and universities to jointly discuss future development directions. Inclusive development emerged as a guiding principle for the Bangsamoro Development Plan.

Adaptive

Over the decades, Japan has adapted its support in line with the evolving context of the Philippines. Even during the renewed outbreak of violence in 2008, Japan maintained its presence and deployed an additional JICA official to the International Monitoring Team while other countries withdrew, thereby consolidating trust among local stakeholders. Following a breakthrough in the peace process, Japan increased its assistance, notably supporting both the ARMM Government and the transition process to the new autonomous government.

In fluid political transition, insufficient information sharing and consultation can deepen mistrust and limit the peacebuilding leverage of aid agencies. Effective peacebuilding therefore requires transparent decision-making, information sharing, and a neutral stance to maintain trust with all parties. Moreover, networking with local stakeholders is key to adaptive peacebuilding. The donor's ability to respond flexibly was largely enabled



Strategic planning workshop conducted by the Bangsamoro Local Government Academy (under the Bangsamoro Transition Authority)



Skills training for decommissioned combatants (coconut farming, production, and processing)

by an extensive network of relationships cultivated through years of cooperation, extending beyond direct counterparts. This network allowed JICA to have contextual insights and strategic perspectives regarding the direction and adaptation of its cooperation.

Iterative

Even after a peace agreement is signed, the peace process may stall. JICA shifted its intervention to strengthening local governmental revenue-generating capacity under the ARMM government, less affected by the peace process. By applying the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach, JICA strengthened the capacity of entities that were less disruptive to the fluid political transition, allowing for iterative refinement and tangible results, such as behavioural changes among local entities. Furthermore, these results were later carried over to the transitional government, which continued drafting and operationalising new manuals, as well as building capacity through workshops. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the PDIA approach.

Holistic

Support for Mindanao remains holistic. It includes peacekeeping activities conducted by the International Monitoring Team, comprising Malaysia, Japan, Norway, the EU, Brunei, and Indonesia; peacemaking by the International Contact Group, composed of the UK, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Japan, along with four international NGOs; and peacebuilding through J-BIRD, as previously elaborated. Japan also supports comprehensive human resource development, economic recovery, local industry promotion, agriculture, healthcare, infrastructure (including roads, electricity, and irrigation), and mapping. While not all cooperation efforts are fully integrated, they collectively constitute an approach to a holistic system of society aimed at fostering Mindanao's self-reliance and organisational capacity.

A comprehensive perspective with flexible scenario adjustments was crucial for supporting the transition. Since political processes often progress nonlinearly, with both advances and setbacks, flexibility and timely scenario adjustments were essential when political developments did not unfold as expected.

Achievement

The case study is part of a broader support programme implemented by Japan and JICA over two decades of sustained engagement for the Mindanao peace process. Overall, the programme has contributed to advancing a locally rooted and peaceful conflict resolution and to ongoing peacebuilding by enhancing local capacities and building trust among conflict parties, across local stakeholders, and between government institutions and citizens through a multifaceted and long-term approach.

Where We Work - JICA

<https://www.jica.go.jp/english/overseas/philippine/mindanao/index.html>

Case Study 6

Women's empowerment in Libya

Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Karama, and Libyan Women's Platform for Peace



Workshop highlights

In 2011, over 35 women from diverse regions and backgrounds in Libya formed the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace (LWPP) in partnership with Karama, an international NGO active in the Arab countries and Africa. Even after the Gaddafi regime collapsed that same year, Libya has faced a complex and fragmented political landscape characterised by protracted conflict, social polarisation and fragile governance. Against such challenges, platform members have played vital roles as peacebuilders, community leaders, and agents of reconciliation. They have contributed, for example, to establishing ceasefires, promoting dialogue, and bridging divides among parties to the conflict and people on the ground. However, their efforts are often confined to the grassroots level. Their formal participation in political peace processes, negotiations, and decision-making remains limited and largely symbolic compared to their actual roles. To address this gap, Norad funded a capacity-building programme for women leaders from 2023 to 2025. This three-year initiative aimed to strengthen their leadership in mediation and peace processes while addressing community-led issues in Libya, aligning directly with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)," adopted in 2000, which calls for the increased participation and protection of women in peace and security efforts.

Context-specific

The programme dynamically adapted its programme to the evolving political and social contexts over its duration. In 2024, the second year, the programme addressed localised issues alongside core themes such as peacebuilding, mediation, negotiation, and WPS advocacy. For example, a legal workshop focused on clearing up misunderstandings regarding the legal status of bank accounts and social security pensions, facilitating prompt access to these accounts by pension recipients and their families following the account holder's death. Another workshop on protecting women and children from the dangers of domestic weapons and sexual exploitation invited mothers of young men who keep weapons at home and female officers from local security forces. Further, a workshop was held to promote women's political participation through sharing successful experiences of former and current municipal councilwomen. Then, in 2025, the programme shifted gears to reflect the advancement of the political peace process at the national level and concentrated on promoting women's formal participation in the process.

Participatory

The programme encouraged the voluntary engagement and participation among women working within Libya's complex political landscape. All the trainers were women from Libya, representing a wide range of professional fields, including law, academia, civil society, and local leadership with expertise in mediation, peacebuilding, human rights, and community engagement. The participants also consisted of women engaged in diverse local activities from a broad spectrum of sectors, including local governance structures, municipal councils, civil society organisations, grassroots women's groups, youth initiatives, and independent activists. Considering the difficulties with physical travel, the 2024 and 2025 programmes combined in-person and online participation. Each year, over 100 women participated to share valuable information, learn knowledge and facilitation skills, expanding the reach of women's networks in their respective communities while building networks among the training programme participants themselves. The programme contributes to the growth of multi-layered women's networks, ranging from the local to the national level, linking to the international level.

Adaptive

Given Libya's fragmented political landscape, the programme adapted to different contexts in 2024 and 2025. Addressing community-led issues, the 2024 programme consisted of multiple phases: online training, in-person workshops at different sites across Libya, and designing and implementing practical initiatives at each of the different workshop sites. Based on the two years of its experience, the programme in 2025 aligned the political peace process. With the goal of building a platform for women from across Libya to contribute to formal mediation and peace process, intensive hybrid (in-person and online) workshops were conducted at the same locations as in 2024. This flexibility allowed the programme to continuously adjust to evolving local conditions and priorities in Libya.

Iterative

The programme was operated flexibly to reflect participants' experiences and political developments. In the 2024 multi-phase programme, the first phase of online training deepened women's understanding of WPS and its four pillars (prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery), as well as topics such as peacebuilding, mediation, and security. The second phase workshops, designed as Training of Trainers (ToT), were held in person in different sites. Building on the knowledge gained from online training, participants explored strategies for applying WPS principles in accordance with the specific circumstances of their respective regions. The final phase of implementation involved a wide range of stakeholders from each region. Building on this experience, online participation in intensive workshops across different sites became possible in 2025, promoting women's formal participation in political peace process.

Holistic

The three-year programme involved diverse male and female stakeholders across Libya depending on the themes of the workshops: representatives of security, justice, and social sectors including related ministries and authorities, academics and education sector, sectors supporting families of martyrs and addressing sexual exploitation. They also invited legal professionals, mothers and staff from the women and child protection center, financial and legal staff from commercial bank and the Social Security Fund, current and former municipal councilwomen, and professionals in healthcare, architecture, education, and business. The Norad-funded programme reached appropriate stakeholders when necessary and contributed to enhancing resilience and self-organisation of the holistic system in Libya.

Home

<https://www.lwpp.org/>

Karama

elkara.ma



Step 4: Reflect, Adapt, and Repeat

Step 4:

Reflect, Adapt, and Repeat

Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on the fourth step of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process, where we reflect on the effects of our past actions to inform adaptation choices for the next cycle. Our plans, developed collaboratively with stakeholders, represent a theory of change—a premise that certain actions can encourage positive behaviours such as tolerance and discourage those that lead to conflict. Because we cannot know for certain which theories of change will be effective, the approach navigates this uncertainty by experimenting with several parallel interventions simultaneously. This allows us to learn which actions are most effective and continuously adapt our strategy within a dynamic social context. This reflection is driven by data collected through monitoring and utilises existing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems.

Evaluation, as covered here, is a specific aspect of M&E and is distinct from the monitoring that takes place in Step 3. It refers to the assessment of adaptive peacebuilding interventions across all previous steps. The evaluation process covers key elements of interventions, including inputs, activities, expected and unexpected outcomes, results, and lessons learned, and helps identify causality or the factors that enable observed changes. Through evaluation, decisions about future project actions are made.⁶

The MEL process in this step is typically an internal one, involving staff and stakeholders in analysing the data to make judgements about what worked and why. Based on this reflection, we make critical adaptation choices: to stop ineffective or harmful actions, continue others with new variations to refine our understanding, or scale up those identified as most successful.

Core Principles of Adaptive Peacebuilding that Guide Reflection, Adaptation, and Repetition

Context-specific

- MEL tools and methods should be tailored to the local context, taking into account cultural, social, and economic factors. Existing tools and methods need to make sense to the communities and institutions

⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Evaluating Development Cooperation* (Paris: OECD, 2023). https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2021/03/development-co-operation-tips-tools-insights-practices_d307b396/evaluating-development-co-operation_0b086a36/5602e1f7-en.pdf.

we partner with and support, which implies that we need to adapt them to the context. This may mean adjusting concepts and narratives to better align with local worldviews and cultures, without weakening the methodological rigour of the tools.

- Peacebuilders should be transparent and sensitive to the affected people about how such decisions are made in the local context and work through representatives of communities, societies, and institutions in the decision-making processes to share this information with their respective networks.
- The selection of individuals involved in the process, as well as those who validate the decisions made, should be conducted in a manner that ensures contextual and cultural relevance and legitimacy. At the same time, these processes need to be inclusive, representing all those affected, including those in local contexts who may not normally participate in such decision-making processes, such as women, youth, widows, the elderly, and minority groups.
- It is important to ensure a balance between the old and the new, between existing practices and those that need to be introduced to adapt to new realities and dynamics, and this must be a context-specific and participatory process.

Participatory

- Reflection and adaptation frameworks and processes should be co-created with the communities, institutions, and stakeholders to ensure they benefit from local customs and culture. Affected people need to be involved in each step so their voices are heard and they can co-produce learning and participate in decision-making processes. This level of participation is essential for local ownership; without it, decisions are unlikely to be implemented or sustained. It also enables self-organising and emergent processes, helping local institutions build the capacity needed to sustain peace. This is what localisation means in practice.
- Establish feedback mechanisms that create clear, accessible channels for communities to provide feedback on the findings from monitoring activities and raise concerns or share their own observations. This fosters accountability and ensures that their voices are heard and considered.
- In practice, the process of selection or nomination identifies a few people who can represent their communities and institutions for evaluation activities, reflection, and decision-making, but the same individuals do not need to be part of all of these processes. For example, members of the community and local civil society can support the evaluation process, while others—perhaps more senior in community and institutional structures—can participate in decision-making processes.

Adaptive

- The design of the results framework and evaluation process will most likely need to be adapted based on experience. Some indicators that were originally identified may prove to be less useful because the data is difficult to obtain or unreliable, or they may have less explanatory value than originally assumed.
- Once the evaluation process produces a report capturing its analysis and learning, a joint group of implementers and stakeholders should reflect on its implications for the next cycle. The aim is to decide how actions should be managed: some may need to be halted due to ineffectiveness or negative side-effects; others may need to be adapted to avoid potential harm. Actions showing promising effects may be improved by introducing more variety. Those performing well can be scaled up or expanded. Some that were effective before may now be stagnating or causing perverse effects and may need further adaptation.

- The evaluation process may also trigger the need to adapt assessment, analysis, design, planning, or management approaches. For example, the evaluation may reveal that a key stakeholder group, such as youth, is not sufficiently engaged. Adaptations are therefore not only about programming, but also about stakeholders, resources, and organisational learning.
- Once these decisions are made, they will trigger a new adaptive cycle of assessment, analysis, planning, and implementation.
- A culture should be cultivated where failures are seen as learning opportunities and not as something to be hidden. Honest reflection on what worked, what did not, and why should be encouraged.

Iterative

- The iterative nature of the Adaptive Peacebuilding approach involves regular reviews and learning cycles that continuously and cumulatively improve and adapt the initiative based on learning and reflection. Adaptation should be understood as emerging from the whole process and its iterative nature, rather than from any particular iteration outputs. Success should be assessed by medium- to long-term changes in the system, local institutional resilience, and adaptations to setbacks and shocks arising from ongoing institutional learning. Adaptation occurs through both occasional hops and slow, incremental learning.
- In designing these cycles, their frequency should be determined by context, and participation of communities, institutions, and stakeholders should be ensured throughout.

Holistic

- Through holistic analysis, peacebuilders should identify key leverage points within the system where interventions could have the greatest and most positive impact.
- One indicator of effectiveness is enhanced resilience, reflected in the system's capacity to adapt to setbacks and shocks.
- The aim is thus to strengthen the resilience of the system as a whole. Improvements in one area can cause negative side effects in another area or simply shift the problem to another domain. Therefore, it is important to assess not only intended consequences but also to map the overall effects and ripples generated, so that intended and unintended, positive and negative consequences can be identified and addressed. This process could prevent the recurrence of conflict.
- Peacebuilders should reflect and adapt not just within their own organisations but also with other peacebuilding actors to foster collective learning and more coherent responses to complex challenges.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on the final step of the Adaptive Peacebuilding process cycle: reflect, adapt, and repeat. We examined how reflection on lessons learned from the previous cycle informs adaptation choices for the next iteration. This step involves making critical decisions—to stop, refine, or scale up interventions—based on system feedback and broader environmental drivers, while ensuring the process remains a participatory loop. Community and institutional representatives must play a leading role in all decisions that affect them to ensure local ownership. Serving as both an end and a beginning, this cycle ensures that our objectives and assumptions continuously co-evolve with the society we support.

Case Study 7

Rapid Assistance for Peace Consolidation and Social Stabilisation in Conflict-Affected Communities

United Nations Development Programme Central African Republic



Beneficiaries participating in Cash for Work (CfW)

The project aimed to meet urgent humanitarian and development needs in conflict-affected areas in the city of Berberati by supporting the reintegration of vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, into local communities. Berberati borders Cameroon and is characterised by its ethnic and religious diversity and has been greatly affected by violence.

Guided by the human security approach, it combined protection and empowerment strategies to ensure both immediate relief and longer-term stability. Implementation was structured through the 3x6 approach developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which provides a pathway from rapid income generation to sustainable livelihoods and inclusive recovery.

Adaptive

Implementation was adaptive, linking humanitarian assistance to long-term development. Beneficiaries first accessed short-term income through the Cash for Work (CfW) programme, which ensured their immediate subsistence and paved the way for the community's socioeconomic resilience. This entry point transitioned

into income-generating activities (IGAs) and the creation of associations, providing durable economic solutions by using savings accumulated from CfW and further financial support provided by UNDP. Importantly, participants were able to select their own livelihood activities by group, allowing adaptation based on skills, interests, and market conditions.

Participatory

The project placed strong emphasis on participation. A profiling survey of 1,000 residents in Berberati, conducted with local authorities, NGOs, and community groups, informed community-driven beneficiary selection. One thousand vulnerable individuals—equally divided between men and women—were enrolled. The objective of this participatory approach was to ensure inclusiveness and leave no one behind in a still-fragile context. Beneficiaries retained decision-making authority, from choosing community infrastructure rehabilitation for CfW to selecting IGAs. This participatory model reinforced ownership and legitimacy, leading to the formation of thirty-four associations that continued beyond the project cycle.

Iterative

The implementation was iterative, which enabled learning, flexibility, and a proof of concept for a scalable approach. Beneficiaries were not bound to one activity; they could change or restart IGAs during the project cycle. This encouraged experimentation, adjustment to challenges, and the scaling of successful initiatives. IGA training and monitoring reinforced feedback loops, enabling the gradual expansion of economic activities, and strengthening resilience against relapse into armed groups.

Context-specific

The project addressed the specific vulnerabilities that drove conflict in the local context. These included poverty affecting women and youth at risk, a lack of a sustainable income, high illiteracy, and the risk of re-recruitment. Despite an extremely high illiteracy rate among beneficiaries, the project organised eight training sessions on social cohesion and prevention of radicalisation, with fifty participants per session. These activities recognised that socio-economic isolation was a key factor driving people to join armed movements. The project's focus on these risks contributed directly to reducing violence and promoting coexistence.

Holistic

Implementation integrated multiple dimensions of stabilisation. Beyond economic recovery, it addressed employment, entrepreneurship, social cohesion, radicalisation prevention, and institutional development through association-building. Associations became platforms for collective savings, joint investments, and cooperative ventures, thereby reinforcing both economic and social stability. Immediate employment was thus linked to long-term social trust, cohesion, and the prevention of violent extremism. In this context, a holistic approach consisting of a package of responses adapted to the multidimensional nature of the problems to be solved was the most suitable.

Outcomes of Implementation

The project delivered the following key outcomes:

- ✓ One thousand vulnerable beneficiaries, including IDPs and returnees, received immediate employment and income.
- ✓ Thirty-four associations were created to manage IGAs and ensure sustainability.
- ✓ Eight training sessions enhanced awareness of cohesion and radicalisation prevention despite high illiteracy.
- ✓ Gender parity was ensured, with equal participation of men and women.
- ✓ Iterative adaptation led to the gradual expansion of IGAs and stronger resilience.

These achievements across various fields have supported peace consolidation and social stabilisation.

Reflection and Next Steps

A key lesson learned was the high demand for literacy support. Many beneficiaries struggled to fully engage in training and income-generation activities due to illiteracy. This recognition shaped the design of the next phase of programming, where literacy education for non-literate participants was incorporated. By reflecting on the lessons from this project, subsequent initiatives strengthened their capacity to address both economic and educational barriers, making reintegration efforts more inclusive and sustainable.

Based on these experiences and lessons learned, the UNDP in CAR has implemented a more structured stabilisation programme that takes past shortcomings into account. Implemented in 2023, this ongoing programme focuses on constructing literacy centres and youth and women's centres with spaces dedicated to training and learning. Better-structured markets have been built to benefit women and young people. Access to basic social services has improved through the construction of health centres and expanded availability of drinking water.

Conclusion

Through adaptive, participatory, iterative, context-specific, and holistic principles, the project successfully transformed humanitarian assistance into pathways for long-term recovery. It demonstrated how immediate income support can evolve into sustainable livelihoods, how community participation fosters ownership, and how addressing local vulnerabilities reduces the risks of conflict recurrence. By integrating economic recovery with social stabilisation, and by reflecting on lessons such as the critical need for literacy education, the project contributed to peace consolidation and provided a replicable model for reintegration of vulnerable groups, IDPs and returnees from Cameroon in CAR fragile contexts.



Women earning income through tailoring (sewing garments)

Case Study 8

Community-based Monitoring in Guatemala

United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund



In the community of La Compuerta, as part of the community-based monitoring process, young people and local stakeholders are identifying progress, challenges and opportunities to foster peaceful coexistence and territorial development.

© Conexión Guatemala

Two projects in Guatemala, supported by the United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), implemented distinct community-based monitoring and evaluation (CBM&E) approaches to promote meaningful engagement of local stakeholders throughout the project cycle.

Context-specific

The first project, titled "[Building Social Cohesion in Communities Receiving Returned Youth as a Bridge towards Peaceful and Effective Reintegration](#)" and implemented by FAO, IOM and UNESCO, was designed in response to a territorial context characterised by return migration dynamics, limited institutional presence in rural areas, and scarce opportunities for youth participation in conflict prevention and management. Within this context, the project sought to strengthen the agency of rural youth by promoting their participation in decision-making spaces and renewing community leadership through a peace-oriented approach.

The second project, titled "[Contributions to Peace: Opportunities for Youth in Rural Areas of Guatemala](#)" and implemented by the civil society organisation Conexión Guatemala, responded to local contexts marked by structural barriers that limited youth participation in territorial governance systems, as well as by gender gaps in decision-making spaces.

Participatory

In the first project, ten young people—women and men—were designated by their communities as members of the community-based monitoring committee. In their roles as community representatives, they led data collection efforts, carrying out around 488 surveys and 257 interviews in the municipalities of the department of San Marcos. The establishment of a youth-led CBM system strengthened local ownership of the project, providing returnees and host communities with transferable capacities for evidence generation and use, and consolidating their role as agents of change.

In the second project, a youth committee of 12 women and men from each community implemented CBM&E. The committee led data collection and analysis across project phases, conducting 321 surveys in five municipalities. This community-based monitoring generated evidence of the project's contribution to peacebuilding, particularly by documenting changes in relationships among youth. The community-led evaluative component took shape through participatory analysis of findings, programmatic adjustments based on community-generated evidence, and accountability processes involving CBM&E committee members, project team and PBF Secretariat in Guatemala both during implementation and at project closure. In addition, CBM&E strengthened young people's agency, enabling more informed and substantive participation in decision-making linked to diverse social, environmental, and agrarian conflict, and increasing their influence on municipal public policies for youth and women. These processes complemented other participatory monitoring efforts led by youth and reinforced peace as an everyday value, contributing to a stronger sense of community belonging.

Adaptive

In the first project, the initial monitoring exercise (June 2021) showed that 45% of young participants in decision-making spaces were women. The exercise identified both an opportunity to strengthen women's leadership and the persistence of sociocultural barriers limiting their full participation. To consolidate young women's participation in the community and strengthen their leadership, the project adjusted its implementation strategy, incorporating specific actions, including engagement with families and communities, mentoring processes, and awareness-raising actions on women's rights.

Community-based monitoring in the second project found that young people were interested in engaging in local governance structures but lacked knowledge of their functions and available advocacy mechanisms. In response, the project adjusted its strategy by introducing a targeted capacity-strengthening plan that combined workshops on civic participation, public policy formulation, and youth leadership with adaptations to existing initiatives—such as Indigenous and Rural YouTubers and TikTokers and the Hosts for Peace programme—thereby enabling youth to develop their own proposals for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Iterative

The implementation of CBM&E in both projects followed iterative cycles of planning, implementation, monitoring, and reflection, in which findings from each monitoring round informed subsequent adjustments. Evidence generated through periodic community-based monitoring exercises was analysed jointly with implementation teams and local actors, allowing lessons learned from earlier iterations to directly shape

decisions and adaptations in later phases of the projects. CBM&E functioned not only as a monitoring tool but also as an active learning mechanism that supported continuous improvement of implementation and guided decision-making in future cycles based on insights.

Holistic

The first project enabled the articulation of actions at community, institutional, and public policy levels while addressing reintegration and conflict prevention in an integrated manner. Beyond its primary objectives, this multi-agency approach strengthened coordination among institutions, enhanced trust between communities and public authorities, and contributed to local capacities for collective problem-solving, supporting community self-organisation in the face of complex social dynamics.

The second project contributed to strengthening Guatemala's Development Council system. It generated sustained interactions among youth, local authorities, and formal territorial governance structures, while reinforcing community self-organisation across governance levels. In addition, the project strengthened a community-based system for the prevention and referral of social, environmental, and territorial conflicts, producing broader social effects beyond its immediate objectives.

Achievements

Actions taken in the first project, adjusted on the basis of monitoring findings, facilitated gradual changes in family and community perceptions. The project's final evaluation identified a 77% improvement in the positive perception of youth among families and community authorities in the target areas.

In the second project, youth effectively participated in and contributed to the formulation of four municipal youth policies and four municipal gender policies with a peace focus. These policies were incorporated into the municipal Annual Operating Plans (POAs), and the equivalent of USD 900,000 was allocated for their implementation, thereby subjecting the policies to public oversight and accountability. CBM&E strengthened the role of youth as agents of change and consolidated sustained spaces for dialogue and advocacy, demonstrating how implementation was dynamically adjusted based on monitoring findings.

**PBF Guatemala newsletter story about CBM in
FAO, IOM, UNESCO project:**

[https://pbfguatemala.exposure.co/
communitybased-monitoring](https://pbfguatemala.exposure.co/communitybased-monitoring)

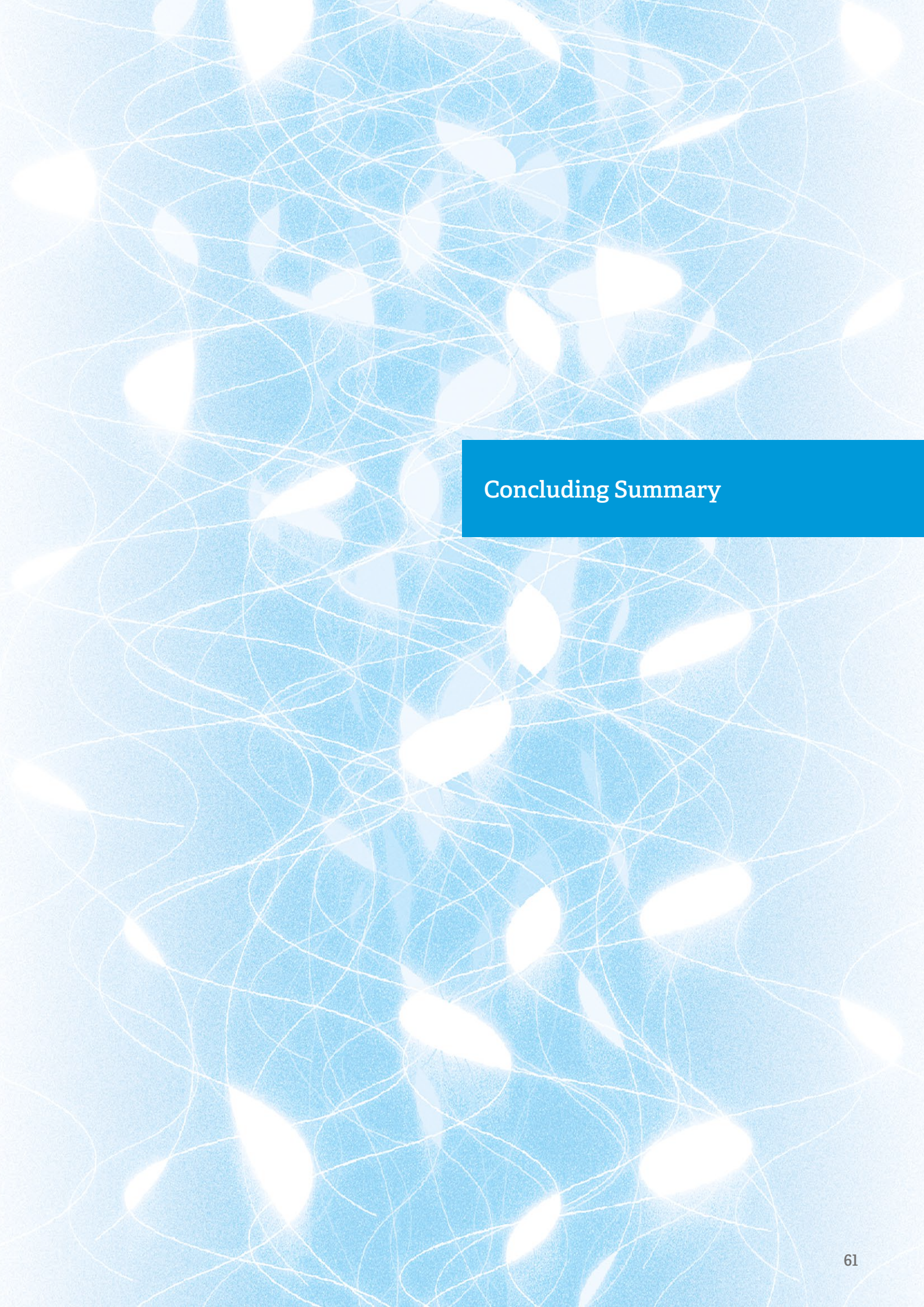
**Video from Conexión Guatemala project's
CBM&E:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKyao4V1T40>



Members of the CBM committee are conducting data collection during fieldwork in the municipality of Concepción Tutuapa, department of San Marcos.

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Concluding Summary

Concluding Summary

This guidebook has introduced Adaptive Peacebuilding, a new approach developed to address the complexity and uncertainty of helping a society move onto a more peaceful trajectory. As we have explored throughout this guidebook, the Adaptive Peacebuilding approach is grounded in several foundational principles that redefine how practitioners engage with the complexities of conflict-affected societies:

- **Contextual Emergence:** The outcome of a peacebuilding initiative cannot be pre-determined. It must emerge from the specific context and the active engagement of the people affected by the conflict.
- **Self-Organisation:** Peace is a continuously emergent process generated and sustained by a society's active participation in its own peace process. It cannot be copied from elsewhere or achieved solely by external peacebuilders; instead, it evolves as societies develop resilient social institutions that facilitate self-organisation and determine what peace means for them within their specific historical and socio-ecological context.
- **Unpredictability and Agency:** Because social systems are complex and the individuals within them possess free will, it is impossible to design interventions that produce pre-determined outcomes. Uncertainty is a fundamental characteristic of complex social systems' behaviour, rather than a result of insufficient planning or knowledge.
- **Inductive and Experiential Methodology:** Since it is impossible to pre-design a linear causal path to a desired future state, the methodology is necessarily adaptive, inductive and experiential. It is designed to learn from experience through repeated cycles of engagement, feedback, and reflection.

The scalability of Adaptive Peacebuilding lies in the application of a consistent, iterative process across all levels of intervention. Regardless of the scale—from local community programmes to international strategic frameworks—the approach functions as a recurring cycle of assessment, planning and implementation, followed by learning-based adaptation. At operational and strategic levels, this translates into a collaborative process of continuously reviewing conflict analysis and theories of change, ensuring that institutional learning and planning co-evolve with the shifting dynamics of the environment.

Adaptive Peacebuilding is not a silver bullet that can guarantee success. In fact, it reminds us that success means different things for different people, depending on their needs and interests in the overall process. However, the Adaptive Peacebuilding process provides a framework that ensures that our efforts are always guided by five core principles, namely context specificity, participation in all key decisions by representatives of the affected community and other stakeholders, adaptivity, continuous iterative cycles, and a holistic or comprehensive approach.

The Adaptive Peacebuilding process provides us with a methodology for navigating the uncertainty and unpredictability of complex socio-ecological change processes. By consciously learning from our own experiences and adapting future actions based on feedback from earlier ones, we can continuously co-evolve with the system. In the process, we develop a more holistic understanding of both the immediate developments and the longer-term patterns and dynamics of the systems we are trying to influence.

When faced with setbacks or dilemmas on the ground, Adaptive Peacebuilding encourages practitioners to move beyond the impulse to externalise blame onto local stakeholders or resort to unilateral decision-making. Instead, these moments serve as a vital signal to return to a shared space for reflection, where external actors, local communities, and other stakeholders can pause together to reassess the situation. In this approach, we listen closely to local voices and facilitate a process that genuinely devolves decision-making authority to those most affected. By maintaining a reflexive posture and fostering local agency—especially when outcomes deviate from initial expectations—Adaptive Peacebuilding ensures that interventions remain deeply grounded in the social context they seek to serve.

This guidebook is intended to support peacebuilding and development practitioners in understanding and navigating complex and uncertain contexts. Reflection on field-based practice can contribute to ongoing and iterative learning and dialogue related to adaptive approaches to peacebuilding.

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Our Partners



Note: The logos are listed in alphabetical order from left to right and top to bottom



About this Guidebook

This guidebook incorporates academic findings and field-based practice by drawing on the volume *Adaptive Peacebuilding: A New Approach to Sustaining Peace in the 21st Century* (2023). This was an output of the research project "Contextualizing International Cooperation for Sustaining Peace: Adaptive Peacebuilding Pathways," conducted by the JICA Ogata Research Institute, in close collaboration with Research Professor Cedric de Coning at the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUI).

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