KENYA’S LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES
HOW DOES THE LOCAL REMAIN LOCALLY OWNED?

By Lisa Müller-Dormann

In the early 1990s, Local Peace Committees (LPCs) arose as a community response to protracted conflicts between different clans in Northern Kenya. In the face of their success in the region, the government exported the model of LPCs to other parts of Kenya, especially following the 2007/8 electoral violence. This ‘export’ has yielded mixed results, but can offer important lessons on how to sustain local ownership within peacebuilding activities, especially with regards to integrating a sustainable Women, Peace and Security Agenda in post-conflict efforts. International donors have supported LPCs at different stages and to varying degrees – from the time of the creation to their spread via national institutions and agendas. The national Guidelines on Preventing Crisis, Resolving Conflicts and Building Peace of the German Federal Foreign Office (Leitlinien) assess “local ownership” as a key condition for successful and sustainable international engagement. As a newly-elected non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Germany has called for an increased emphasis on prevention efforts from the United Nations and its members. In light of this, the question of how to best support local peacebuilding efforts remains pertinent. The following recommendations from the Kenyan case offer new insights.

Recommendations for International Donors

1. Trust in local needs-based initiatives and support linkages among them;
2. Flexibility and responsiveness are key;
3. Analyze and identify stakeholders as well as potential power dynamics to adapt strategies and initiatives to the local context;
4. Put emphasis on long-term activities and predictability of long-term funding, but maintain flexibility to mobilize and dispatch funds on short notice;
5. Where appropriate, use gender-sensitive analysis as a lens to identify and help counteract dynamics of marginalization;
6. Where necessary, support initiatives to make state and local administration institutions more gender- and minority friendly by hiring diverse staff and raising awareness regarding their rights;
7. Consult with women on different levels to provide legal and conflict resolution trainings to women and minority groups to make their skills more known and visible to their communities.

What is Local Ownership? – A Brief Exploration

Despite it being frequently mentioned within the peacebuilding and international development jargon, there is not one definition for local ownership among international donors, and the line between what constitutes ‘local’ as opposed to ‘national’ and ‘global’ becomes increasingly blurred. Although most donors agree that inclusivity and local ownership are part and parcel of the sustainable peace agenda and its activities, definitions of how it is achieved and to whom it refers differ. Actors often range from national governments, companies, large- or small-scale civil society organizations to even the population itself. Within the European Union, Martín de Almagro Iniesta assesses that despite a rhetoric in favor of civil society organizations, examples from the Great Lakes region reveal that within the EU engagement “[…] civil society acts only as a feedback partner engaged at the latest stages of the decision-making process.” However, in environments that lack formal state structures, identifying ‘local’ and trustworthy peacebuilders and civil society organizations may prove difficult, especially considering donor’s pressures of

1 Though already used before, local ownership gained formal recognition first from the OECD DAC in 1996, and later 2001 via UN Secretary General Kofi Annan under the UN sustainable peace architecture.
2 Youssef Mahmoud and Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, ‘With New Resolutions, Sustaining Peace Sits at Heart of UN Architecture’ (04/2016).
time, budget and results.\(^5\) Because of these constraints, researchers have emphasized the need to understand local ownership as a continuous process and overarching principle that requires flexibility and regular assessment, especially from donors.\(^5\) In Germany, peacebuilding activities are handled through different ministries, including the Ministry for Development Cooperation (BMZ), the Federal Foreign Office (AA), the Ministry of Defense (BMVg), the Ministry of Interior (BMI) and the Ministry of Justice (BMJ). Support of civil society actors and long-term peacebuilding activities have primarily been implemented by the BMZ and through its implementing partner, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). However, under the pressure of results delivery, short-term and special initiatives in peacebuilding have been funded more frequently than longer-term projects, creating a “rivalry” between the different ministries (especially AA and BMZ) and a potential “vacuum for structural and transformative peacebuilding support [...].” While the “Guidelines” established under the aegis of the Federal Foreign Office in 2017 aimed at fostering increased cooperation among these ministries, the “operationalization of the joint commitments and a cross-ministerial peacebuilding architecture remain to be seen.”\(^7\)

KENYA’S LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES – STRIKING THE BALANCE BETWEEN LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURES

Local or District Peace Committees (in the following: LPCs) were set up in the early 1990s by a group of women in the Wajir district in northeastern Kenya. This period was characterized by complex interrelated conflicts among different clans, aggravated by weak state and judicial institutions, food insecurity, ignorance of cattle and livestock rustling, an influx of refugees and the easy availability of small arms.\(^8\) LPCs thus developed as locally-owned structures “out of a need” and as a potential avenue to improve the dire economic situation.\(^9\) After the women consulted various stakeholders of the conflict (among them clans, elders and youth), they launched various mediation and peacebuilding activities, including the LPCs.\(^10\) However, they faced several challenges, rooted mainly in traditional gender roles present in local community structures and especially among elders. Despite the women’s initiative and their aim to reflect the community’s diversity in their composition of the LPCs, in many cases LPCs did not question gender roles on a structural level. In fact, the extent of women’s involvement varied greatly depending on the community and was often not sustained.\(^11\) Similarly, the involvement of youth was not guaranteed. In a series of declarations, LPCs established a semi “penal code” to deal with local conflicts.\(^12\) However, as Chopra points out, although they were more effective, these agreements often conflicted with official laws and depended on the “goodwill of the community” to be implemented.\(^13\) In addition, LPCs established rapid response teams, including early warning mechanisms. Over time, these initiatives were “formalized” under the umbrella of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee to enhance “coordination [and ensure] continued participation by people with formal authority.”\(^14\) Chaired by the district commissioner, this Committee set out the composition of the different village-level initiatives and linked them within the decision-making process of the Wajir district. The establishment of a National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in 2001 as well as the export of these LPCs beyond the Wajir districts, including the set-up of a national policy framework in 2006 are only some of the examples that illustrate the

\(^5\) Winfried Kuehne et al., ‘Peacebuilding Processes in Failed States – How to Improve Local Ownership?’ 03/2008.
\(^7\) Matthias Deneckere & Volker Hauck, ‘Supporting peacebuilding in times of change – case study Germany’ (09/2018).
\(^9\) Monica Kathina Juma, ‘Unveiling Women as Pillars of Peace: Peace Building in Communities Fractured by Conflict in Kenya’ (05/2000).
\(^12\) Tanja Chopra, ‘Reconciling Society and the Judiciary in Northern Kenya’ (12/2008).
\(^14\) Oldendaal, see reference 8.
heightened involvement of the national government and international donors. Eventually, LPCs even established linkages with regional organizations, like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Most scholars agree that LPCs managed to reduce high levels of crime and contain many of the clan-related local conflicts. As Chopra noted, “local engagement” was key to secure the implementation of the semi-judicial declarations and served as a way to increase the influence of the local population with regards to the chiefs of the districts. During the ethnic violence following the Kenyan election in 2007, districts with LPCs recorded fewer incidences of violence. While some analysts caution against the assumption of a direct correlation between LPCs and lower rates of violence, LPCs were slowly regarded as a model for efforts to prevent conflict. Their success and institutionalization on local and regional levels further increased the interest from the Kenyan national government as well as international donors. This lead to Kenya’s LPCs being identified as so-called Infrastructures of Peace (I4P) by renown practitioners in the peacebuilding field, such as Paul van Tongeren who called Kenya a “pioneer” country to establish “key elements of I4P”.

However, the ensuing hybridization between local and state actors was not without difficulties and the set-up of the national Kenyan peace architecture was a “work in progress” that was finalised only in 2015. Though stronger linkages with the national government could potentially have increased the legitimacy of the local administration among the population and led to increased financial stability and impact of the LPCs, the analysis below demonstrates that this was not the case. Instead, increased involvement of the national authorities and increased institutionalization led to initiatives that no longer put local ownership first.

I4P AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Coined by Lederdach in the 1980s, the concept Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) focuses on bottom-up processes and offers an alternative to top-down state-building agendas. While there is no single definition of I4P, Giessmann’s definition captures the understanding of several practitioners in the field. According to him, I4P encompasses a “dynamic network of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions that help build constructive relationships and enhance sustainable resilience of societies against the risks of relapse into violence.” Over time, several countries and national initiatives have demonstrated how the concept of I4P could look like in practice. However, despite the emphasis on locally-developed processes in theory, many of the formats under the umbrella of I4P (such as LPCs) have over time become institutionalized structures via national and regional levels. This illustrates that even if concepts like I4P purposefully leave room for adaptation and flexibility in line with the respective local contexts, the potential to be captured by top-down agendas remains. As Richmond puts it, “peace infrastructures bear significant potential as long as they are internally and not externally shaped”.

KENYA’S LPCS TODAY – NO LONGER FIT FOR PURPOSE?

Research regarding the dynamics of these transitions or ‘capture’ at the expense of local ownership remains sparse. This is partially because formalization at the national levels is not per se problematic. As discussed above, the institutionalization of LPCs under the Wajir Peace and Development Committee shows that it was even necessary to enhance coordination and involvement of local administrative structures. However, if pushed too far at the expense of regular assessments and flexible adaptation to local contexts, such institutionalization from state-level and international actors becomes highly problematic. The following paragraphs thus seek to analyze how and when local ownership got sidelined in the case of Kenya.

Initially, LPCs were mostly financed via local support and heavily relied on volunteers from the community.
that had an interest in conflict resolution efforts. However, as LPCs were replicated, involvement by the community on a voluntary basis was not effectively communicated and engagement became less predictable. This was especially the case for individuals that were not directly affected and had no incentive to improve the situation. As Pkalya put it, LPCs were “more vibrant if built from scratch” and if they had an engaged base of volunteers. Though additional funding was helpful in increasing the geographical scope of these initiatives, the previous reliance on volunteers and the ability to emerge ‘organically’ illustrates that peacebuilding initiatives do not necessarily require large-scale funding. Even though one would have expected funding to become more predictable in the process of state involvement and increased institutionalization, difficulties arose due to disagreement over the dispatching of funds. Similarly, the increased involvement of international donors especially following the formalization and institutionalization by the national government went hand in hand with increased professionalization of peacebuilding activities that created competition and higher incentives to serve external indicators as opposed to the local conflict dynamics. While the formalization of LPCs led to stricter rules regarding gender balance and women’s representation, participation of other marginalized groups remained highly contested.\(^\text{22}\)

The format and composition of the newly-set up LPCs often did not reflect individual conflict dynamics because they were created too quickly and lacked a comprehensive analysis of the local situation as well as engagement with affected communities. With the national government as an instigator, participation became politicized and trust among the local population was weaker than trust in LPCs that had emerged ‘organically’. Moreover, an increased institutionalization of peacebuilding and crime prevention efforts by the national government via multiple institutions (such as LPCs and community policing centers) led to an increased competition regarding responsibilities among these newly-created agencies. At the same time, the LPC model worked well in the Wajir districts because of the void of state and judicial institutions. In other areas, local officials refused to accept new responsibilities and to deal with the concerns raised by the LPCs.\(^\text{23}\) Finally, hybrid solutions, including the semi-judicial declarations and other agreements of LPCs conflicted with state and judicial structures and might thus limit long-term enforcement. In practice, this also means that structural root causes such as land rights and other resource distribution are rarely dealt with. According to Pkalya and Kioko, this hints at the complications that LPCs will ultimately have when aiming to deal with extremism and the “politicization of land and ethnic categories” in the future.\(^\text{24}\)

**Half-Hearted Inclusivity: Women, Peace and Security in Kenya – LPCs and Beyond**

The literature on role of women within the Kenyan LPCs focuses to a large extent on the importance of the women’s initiative in creating these structures. However, their impact beyond this is rarely assessed. As mentioned before, judicial structures within the Wajir district and the northeastern region of Kenya were sparse and in the case of violations of rights, achieving justice and compensation was especially difficult for women due to “male dominated communities” and a lack of “victim-centered approaches for cases of domestic violence”.\(^\text{25}\) Overall, these power structures themselves were not challenged via the LPCs despite them being originally set up by women. While there were some LPCs in which women’s involvement remained strong, in the majority of cases, “men dealt with issues of the men while women dealt with issues of women”.\(^\text{26}\) Following the formalization via the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, donors pushed to include a women quota of one-third within the LPCs. However, women’s participation and influence was limited due to practical constraints, such as the timings of meetings (colliding with household duties), questions of legitimacy or the fact that their participation was only used to please donors. Due to these constraints in legitimacy and the diversity of communities regarding women’s participation, Chopra and Ayuko argue in favor of keeping the composition of LPCs flexible and to


\(^{23}\) Pkalya, see reference 22


\(^{25}\) Ayuko & Chopra, see reference 11.

\(^{26}\) Juma, see reference 9.
focusing on efforts to make judicial and state institutions more women-friendly as well as training women to become more ‘valuable’ for the activities of the LPCs.

Overall, there is broad consensus among researchers that during the aftermath of the electoral violence in 2007/8, women’s involvement in Kenya’s vibrant civil society via public consultations as well as buy-in from the key mediators of the process led to increased women’s representation among the different Commissions that were set up following the inception of the peace and mediation efforts. Throughout the negotiations, women presented a memorandum of their concerns via their own consultative body and consulted with the mediators on multiple occasions. While Commissions like the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission featured gender issues in their reports, language of gender-based violence was not mentioned in the report of the Commission of Post-Election Violence. This stands in stark contrast to some of the statistics regarding gender-based violence that occurred throughout the electoral violence, including 650 cases that were registered at Nairobi Hospital, and women making up 60% of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Kenya. Researchers point to civil society organizations not speaking with a unified voice on some issues, constraints of time and access to some negotiations and commissions as well as key negotiators putting parties’ issues above those of women, as potential reasons for this. Up until today, the record of women’s involvement in peacemaking in Kenya remains mixed. In 2015, Kenya presented its national action plan to implement the UN Security Resolution 1325. While women have taken up key government positions, representation of women in the national assembly remains below the constitutional requirement of 33% and LPC leadership positions are rarely occupied by women.

The case of the Kenyan LPCs serves as a reminder that ‘local ownership’ is not a box to be ticked, but rather an overarching principle that needs continuous assessment. As they spread via different levels and actors, LPCs underline the opportunities as well as the limitations for successful sustainable donor engagement with national and local stakeholders. The case of women’s engagement in LPCs and beyond illustrates this further: On the one hand, donor engagement facilitated increased gender equality in LPCs. On the other, simply equating gender-sensitive measures with women’s inclusion led to a lack of addressing root causes.

Ultimately, this demands flexibility, increased scrutiny as well as innovation in relation to funding schemes, long-term engagement and coordination from donors. In practice this could mean connecting local peacebuilding NGOs in networks, facilitating knowledge exchange or investing in structures that facilitate representation and access of the most marginalized via training and mentoring opportunities. As Germany pledged to put prevention efforts first within its UN Security Council engagement, such commitment should translate into supporting locally-driven peacebuilding efforts as well as offering reliable, sustainable and long-term funding mechanisms that close funding gaps and offer visible alternatives to domestic interest-driven foreign policy agendas.

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This brief was inspired by a Teatime of Polis180 with Dr. Tecla Wanjala in July 2018. Dr. Wanjala shared her wide-ranging experience with local peacebuilding efforts and spoke about lessons learned from the Kenyan experience with women’s participation in peace processes.

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