

## Summary of Better Evidence Project Planning Workshop

George Mason University Center for Peacemaking Practice • February 4, 2020

Peacebuilding aims to reduce the frightful human and economic costs of armed conflict. To achieve that goal, the peacebuilding community needs better evidence of what works in order to facilitate increased effectiveness and generate more financial support for the field.

Alliance for Peacebuilding, Milt Lauenstein, and George Mason University partnered to convene an international group of 36 scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and funders to develop a plan to gather and produce better evidence. Experts described various research methodologies for developing useful evidence and examples of research that had produced such evidence. Participants identified the following two initial priority areas for research.

**Developing a shared set of core key measures describing peacebuilding success/effectiveness.** Within the first research area, participants noted the tension between differing opinions on how to develop evidence within the field. They also welcomed recent developments in terms of better mapping of peacebuilding indicators, including the February 3 launch of Alliance for Peacebuilding's Eirene Peacebuilding Database™. Participants want to develop a shared understanding of what kinds of evidence and indicators are useful across the field, and from that understanding, develop a shared set of core indicators to measure peacebuilding success. Participants envision an iterative process that generates theoretical consensus among practitioners and academics, with indicators mapped onto that consensus. Useful indicators will be inclusive, adaptable to local contexts, evidence-based, easily communicated, and not overly costly to employ.

**Learning from local peacebuilding successes and developing and communicating a stronger evidence base on the effectiveness of locally-led peacebuilding.** The second research priority area focused on the need for better determining the cost, value, and impact of locally-led peacebuilding; as well as, further harnessing the potential for local peacebuilding through cross-fertilizing across contexts and influencing donors, policymakers, and other practitioners. The group noted other related initiatives such as University of San Diego's Impact:Peace program, Peace Direct's ongoing research and upcoming reports, and One Earth Foundation's upcoming perception survey on the peacebuilding field. The need to bring voices from the Global South, was highlighted and emphasized as an important precursory step for any research initiative. The group further highlighted the need to align Western perspectives with local perspectives on understanding effectiveness, value, cost, etc. of peacebuilding work. An important component of this research initiative was a clear identification of the audience and how it could be used to change the international system, perceptions, and attitudes toward greater support for locally-led peacebuilding. The next steps in realizing this research initiative were identified as applying for funding to establish a working group, ensuring more inclusive participation, and formulating a more specific research agenda.

Participants in the workshop identified a need for an institutional hub to initiate, fund, and present on the research in an understandable and convincing way, while complementing existing platforms. Immediately after the meeting, funding to start the Better Evidence Project was arranged. Dr. Susan Allen, of the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, is already working to launch the project by creating a hub at GMU, organizing an advisory committee, engaging an executive director, initiating the research, and bringing together scholars, practitioners, donors, and policymakers seeking better evidence of peacebuilding effectiveness.