

Peacebuilding in the Age of Corona: What it Means and Why it Matters

A Global Solutions Exchange Workshop

Concept Note

Summary:

As the Coronavirus pandemic sweeps across conflict affected and fragile states, women-led peacebuilding organizations have been the first responders in their communities and among the most marginalized sectors of society. They were the first to call for ceasefires and support the UN Secretary General call for global ceasefires. They have been providing food rations and hygiene supplies. They are dealing with the pandemic of gender violence and leading prevention and response efforts where governments are absent. With rising xenophobia and extremism, they are also among the most trusted local groups to challenge the message of extremists and promote social cohesion. Despite their essential role, this sector and the social capital it encapsulates, is at great risk given the prospect of reduced foreign aid funding and allocation of existing resources to health services.

The LSE Centre for Women, Peace, and Security and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) will host a virtual Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) meeting in two parts. It will be an invitation- only convening of policy makers, community practitioners and researchers as well as other key stakeholders who are actively engaged at this nexus of peacebuilding and COVID-19 in fragile and conflict affected settings to discuss why and how peacebuilding practices globally and locally are necessary for a successful recovery from this pandemic.

With a focus on real time activities on the ground in conflict zones, the discussions will provide in-depth analysis of the emerging trends, highlight the contributions of community based, particularly women-led peacebuilding organizations and generate practical guidance to inform donors' and development organizations' aid policies

Context

As the Coronavirus pandemic reaches every village and mountain around the world, it is leaving social and economic wreckage in its wake. We know that overcoming the crisis requires a level of human collaboration and multilateral unity that is unprecedented. Yet as global powers and the world's leading industrial countries struggle to uphold their own social safety nets and economies, attention to and the allocation of resources to the rest of the world is disjointed and scant.

The negative trends cannot be ignored. Powerful states laying the blame on each other is giving rise to xenophobia and attacks on minority communities. Racism is flaring up, fueled by a mix of fear and uncertainty. Throughout the world, authoritarian tendencies are gaining ground among government and local state actors, as well as security forces. Meanwhile in the absence of state services, extremist ethno-national and religious forces, and divisive political parties are gaining ground especially in among poor, rural and marginalized communities, by providing food to the needy. They are promoting this community-based activity on social media, with the aim of co-opting a new cohort of supporters.

On a positive note, the UN Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire is an important development that must be sustained and built upon, to ensure that with the violence stopped, inclusive political solutions are found in countries affected by years of warfare. The investments in healthcare and humanitarian provisions are also necessary and urgent. The immediate emergence of local women-led peacebuilding organizations and other community systems as first responders, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, deserve recognition.

Peacebuilding organizations continue their work online, exchange information, build bridges across sectors, advocate for funding to ensure that donor's responses are conflict and gender sensitive, and counter xenophobia and divisive rhetoric. Women peacebuilders are leading the charge against the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities. Women's organizations and the UN Secretary General have issued calls for ceasefires and the release of prisoners and detainees. They have responded to food insecurity by providing food rations and hygiene supplies as well as developed targeted messaging to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable members of their communities. They have provided psychosocial support and created a hotline for survivors of domestic violence. Women peacebuilders are critical in the response to COVID-19: they know how to integrate a conflict and gender sensitive approach in addressing this pandemic and can adapt their peacebuilding work to persevere through this crisis.

Given this complexity and multifaceted dimensions of the pandemic, the social capital that does exist locally, must be sustained, supported and strengthened for the mitigation and recovery from this crisis. But there is a high risk that the economic crises in richer nations will result in cuts in foreign and development aid and a significant shift to healthcare, so just when the skills and expertise of peacebuilders is most needed, they may be deprioritized.

Civil society organizations have pivoted their work to adapt to working virtually and optimizing online platforms. Peacebuilding organizations specifically understand the impact of this crisis on the world's conflicts and find their work more relevant now than ever.

Workshop Design

ICAN and the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security will convene a virtual Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) event in a two-part roundtable format held over two consecutive weeks, on Tuesday, May 26 at 14:30 – 16:45 BST / 9:30 – 11:45 EST and Monday, June 1 at 14:30 – 16:45 BST / 9:30 – 11:45 EST.

It is an invitation-only mechanism that brings policymakers from state and international organizations, scholars and civil society practitioners, particularly women peacebuilders from different sectors and perspectives together to share knowledge and advance solutions to key challenges in a highly interactive manner. ICAN and the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security will convene key stakeholders who are actively engaged in at this nexus of peacebuilding and COVID-19 in fragile and conflict affected settings to enable in-depth analysis of the emerging trends, highlight innovative and adaptable solutions and generate guidance for donors and development organizations on why and how sustaining peacebuilding globally and locally is integral and necessary for a successful recovery from this pandemic.

The GSX was launched by the Government of Norway and ICAN at the High Level UN General Assembly side events in 2016.