

5 Peacebuilding Principles

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It is true that each peacebuilding context is unique in its own way. Interpeace has learned however that five basic principles apply to most situations. These principles consequently underpin our operational peacebuilding strategies.

1. Peace must be locally-owned

Local ownership begins by ensuring that priorities are determined locally. It is therefore crucial that spaces and processes exist where consensus-building and dialogue can take place. If local people and groups participate in defining the problem, they can be engaged to take ownership also of the solutions.

We work on the premise that if people feel that the peace belongs to them, they are more likely to take personal responsibility for preventing its collapse. In this way, every citizen becomes a peacekeeper.

2. Inclusion of all parties in the process

By ensuring the involvement of all relevant groups in society in the dialogue and priority setting process, actors from each social group are instilled with a sense of responsibility for the rebuilding and reconciliation process. Our experiences have shown that the exclusion or marginalization of certain actors breeds resentment and sows the seeds for renewed violence.

3. The heart of the challenge is building trust

Trust cannot be imposed, imported or bought. It emerges slowly and reluctantly and is built through collective engagement on issues small and large, and through consistent daily commitment to and application of a common vision. Building trust is at the heart of peacebuilding and is the most difficult outcome to achieve. More than the revitalization of infrastructure or the presence of government, trust is the glue that keeps society together in intangible but crucial ways. These give institutions their legitimacy and help individuals and groups to remain engaged on the long path towards lasting peace.

4. Peacebuilding is a long-term commitment

Interpeace is committed to accompanying societies along the often lengthy and bumpy roads to peace. Support of local efforts must be patient, adaptable and consistent. There are no short-cuts or quick-fixes. Recognizing that the process of overcoming mistrust and deep divisions can be a difficult one, Interpeace seeks to empower local actors to establish independent peacebuilding institutions, which continue to address root causes of conflict and to promote peace over the long term.

5. Peacebuilding is as much about "how" things are done as well as about "what" is done

Strengthening the foundations of a society that has been torn apart by conflict is not business as usual. Mistrust tends to be deeply engrained. Every major issue is explosive, political and urgent. Because of this urgency, the tendency is to bring technical solutions to problems rather than to seek holistic solutions to complex problems. State-building efforts are by nature a process that produces winners and losers, often providing the spark for future conflict. It is precisely in such situations that broad consensus-building is necessary in order to root state-building in an agreed compromise between the main groups. How the process is managed and how the engagement of all sides is carried out, will determine in large part the success of the initiative. Helpful questions to ask are often: How were the priorities determined? Who was involved? How much do the main groups feel ownership of the process and its results? How broadly legitimate are the solutions?

