REVITALIZING A GLOBAL NETWORK FOR DEMOCRACY & PEACE

REFLECTIONS FROM THE PARTNERS NETWORK

PARTNERS
NETWORK

Acknowledgements

It has been a pleasure for the authors to work together – and with the PeaceNexus Foundation - to produce this learning piece, sharing our own special journey as colleagues to support each other in becoming better leaders and conscientious *network-weavers.* We came from two different cultural perspectives, different roles with distinct histories within our special network; and yet have been working together side-by-side for several years now to help each other shepherd in a new era for the ***Partners Way*** to meet the challenges of a new era. We believe that change in society is based on the relationships that we forge and strengthen, and we will always be grateful that being in this network brought us together at this moment.

FOREWORD BY PEACENEXUS FOUNDATION

The PeaceNexus Foundation supports the organizational strengthening of peace actors. Many donors only focus on funding short-term projects, expecting sustainable results without giving their partners the means to think and act with a long-term view. At PeaceNexus Foundation, we believe that giving space to worthy organizations to address their internal issues and their ability to adapt to context changes enables them to make more relevant and impactful contributions to peace.

Such change processes are usually transformational. They are growth journeys that rarely unfold as planned, nor without multiple challenges along the way. While we always encourage our partners to document and share their learning, it is quite rare they choose to include personal reflections as it is the case here from **Partners** Global. Yet organizational change demands considerable courage and personal investment from those charged with leading it, or it will fail to confront the deeper issues at hand.

Sometimes the first step is the hardest – to acknowledge what is not working and why. For the **Partners** Network, the diversity of their members' needs and priorities presented them with the challenge of finding the right governance model. They admitted to being drained by discussions on decision-making and cost-sharing that would come back year after year, yet not provide the hoped-for clarity on what was lying just below the surface – the network's purpose. They asked for an opportunity to revisit why they were together and "press the reset button".

The greatest, mostly invisible, threat to organizations is a reluctance to have difficult conversations. The **Partners** Network members demonstrated their willingness to reflect honestly on their thirty years of collaboration, which gave them the space to make a clear choice on whether and how to write the next chapter of their story. It is their commitment to asking difficult questions of themselves that enabled them to unleash their full potential as a collective.

We were aware of the important role The **Partners** Network plays in civil societies around the world, which amounts to more than its members' aggregate contributions. And we were present for their commitment to a continued shared future. We did not, however, expect to witness such a revival. Rather than being centrally planned, collaborations and partnerships are emerging organically as members engage one another to learn. Most importantly, a new generation of leaders has taken its place at the table with the inauguration of the Young Professionals Group. The Network has grown beyond its common past to partner on what building a more peaceful democratic future requires.

So, the authors are right to be speaking about Revitalizing the Network. Beyond the very practical insights on what it takes to strengthen a diverse, complex membership organization, they provide us with a masterful lesson on what genuine dialogue generates. We are grateful that Ana and Julia took the time to share their wisdom as we know many other network leaders and coordinators that grapple with similar challenges. We trust this paper will be of great help and comfort to them, as it is to us.

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Introduction to the Partners Network: Our Latest Steps on a Long Journey

The **Partners** Network is one of the longest-standing global civil society networks in the world that focuses on the intersection of democracy and conflict transformation. After more than 30 years together, there is so much water under the bridge with our group that it would take a doctoral thesis to unpack all the twists and turns the network has taken throughout these many decades. But it is our most recent history that is the subject of this learning paper – how a long-standing network like **Partners** was able to reinvent and revitalize itself. A core group of network leaders has been working with the PeaceNexus Foundation for almost three years on a network strengthening initiative, and the following reflections capture the perspective of that small team. We do not represent the opinions of the entire **Partners** Network. Our intention is to share our personal insights on all the mistakes, breakthroughs, and personal ah-ha moments that we experienced along the way, to help other leaders re-think how to shepherd change and re-channel their energies for greater impact.

We often say that the **Partners** Network is a "strange animal in the zoo" because we have unique attributes that are particular to our history. These characteristics are important to mention because they impact how we function, the challenges we have faced, and how we have been able to overcome them on this network-strengthening journey.

The network was initially the vision of one man. Raymond (Ray) Shonholtz established the first Partners' Centers in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s/early 1990s as independent, local civil society organizations (CSOs) that all share the Partners' brand. The US-based organization Ray led - Partners for Democratic Change, now **Partners**Global - continued to be the sole engine of growth of the **Partners** Network for the next 25 years. Its central mission was originally to invest in new CSOs around the world to carry on the work of democracy promotion and conflict transformation in their own countries and regions.[1] Member organizations, while all autonomous local CSOs, did not make a proactive choice to join the Partners Network based on a common agenda or cause, rather they were all "born" into the network. Additionally, each network member has evolved over the years to respond to the different needs in their country contexts, their own niche in their local CSO "market," and based on the passions and expertise of their local staff.

However, irrespective of the technical focus of each Center, the unifying factor is a commitment to the use of conflict sensitive approaches to promoting peaceful and democratic communities. The Centers were all launched using a comprehensive New Center Start-Up Manual and accompaniment process that built administrative, financial and programmatic skills of Network member teams, as well as technical skills in the shared areas of facilitation, dialogue, and cooperative advocacy. These techniques centered decision-making directly in the hands of the local partners and communities served by each Center. Within the broad umbrella of peacebuilding and democratic change therefore, each member organization of the **Partners** Network from Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and West Africa contributes to a diverse range of programmatic specializations and priorities. It may appear that the **Partners** Network does a little bit of everything, with substantive and technical areas ranging from security sector reform, women's leadership and inclusion, facilitating natural resource management dialogue, civil society strengthening, local governance, anti-corruption – the list goes on. What unites the network is not necessarily what we do, but how we do it. We are a network of process experts,

trainers, facilitators and coalition-builders with many different paths and priorities to achieving democracy and peace.

The **Partners** Network is a long-standing network linked together through the shared commitment to using recognized conflict sensitive and inclusive approaches to facilitation, mediation, and dialogue processes to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. As a result, we have always been at the forefront of adapting collaboration and collective action in our work. **Partners** has been conscientiously functioning as a kind of "network laboratory" for almost four decades, learning our own hard lessons over the years. It's not easy for an established network to revitalize itself, but we have been successful in the past years in accomplishing just that – thanks to the organizational development support of the PeaceNexus Foundation. This paper captures that journey in hopes of helping other networks navigate this age of upheaval and adaptation. We describe how we disrupted long-standing practices, what conventional network wisdom was ultimately useful (or not), and how we were able to revise our personal leadership practices to create a new culture of distributive leadership.

What unites the Network is not necessarily what we do, but how we do it.

Diversity As Strength! But What's the Connective Tissue of our "Network"??

This beautiful diversity of contexts, programs and expertise throughout the **Partners** Network has always been seen as one of our biggest strengths; yet, we also experienced it as a heavy roadblock to our effective collaboration over the years. We were often operating from different definitions of what it means to be a network, which manifested as conflicting expectations we put on each other and on our collective spaces. One of the truisms of network science is that for a group of organizations to operate as a successful network, there needs to be a clearly defined, common objective or goal.[2] If a well-defined common agenda that all members agree to is supposedly necessary to be a functional network, what did it mean that the **Partners** Network never had this level of commonality? We struggled for years to force a common programmatic agenda upon ourselves, trying to fit all our different areas of work under "buckets" of common programming; negotiating what should be a more "fair" and inclusive fundraising plan for those buckets that benefited all members equally; and, trying to determine an outreach or advocacy agenda that everyone could get behind and represented the **Partners** brand across the board. This required extensive navigation with many differences and priorities and led to distrust and resentment amongst our members as the years passed.

What finally removed this roadblock was allowing ourselves to live outside that truism of what a successful network looks like – and acknowledging that we didn't need to have such a clearly defined common programmatic agenda after all. We agreed that we wanted to be together to learn from each other, to find inspiration in each other's work and perspectives, to be in a multi-cultural global community who shared each other's values. And that is enough for us.

This might not look like other networks, but this realization has unlocked so much energy within our group that the common programs and fundraising we previously sought has since come into being as a natural outgrowth of our renewed inspiration and energy.

Applying Organizational Structures and Leaderships Practices to a Network

Many of us who lead non-profit organizations participate in networks and therefore, we bring with us a mindset of working within well-governed organizational structures, with proactive leadership approaches that we believe are needed in our network spaces. What makes us successful in our individual organizations, however, often does not translate well to the best structures or leadership needed for a diverse global network (especially now in this social age). This was another hard-earned lesson within the **Partners** Network.

As we "matured" in our second decade, we became more and more formalized with our network structure. We registered as a legal entity, with all the governance requirements this entailed. Each member had to pay dues to the secretariat to be in good standing as a member of this formal network, and we struggled to find the right business model to maintain the appropriate infrastructure. We threw our collective muscle behind making this structure work, with hundreds of hours spent on governance discussions, assembly meetings, and addressing challenges to the way decisions were taken – or worse, forgotten and re-negotiated over and over. While we were all supposedly equals as "voting" network members, the structure forced us into uncomfortable command and control leadership styles to navigate this legalistic governance relationship we had created.

Looking back, trying to structure our network like we structured our organizations was a mistake, but that's what our group of very professional non-profit leaders knew best. What we didn't know how to do – was how to break this cycle, even though we all realized we were expending a lot of energy on the wrong things.

Letting Go to Come Back Together

This feeling of spinning our wheels amongst the network leadership triggered a drastic move; it was a painful moment when it was recommended – and eventually voted on – to terminate the legal registration of the network. We determined we would just be together as organizations "informally." This turned out to be an important moment of pause for our network, giving us breathing space to reflect on how (or whether) we wanted to be together in the future. The personal relationships continued of course, and we were tied together by our common Partners brand, but there was no "business" conducted during this period – no workplans, no meeting minutes, no joint decisions to be taken. PeaceNexus came into the picture at this time. After almost two years of experiencing this pause, the Network decided we were finally in a place to take advantage of PeaceNexus's organizational development support. For a year, we worked with an external facilitator who gathered inputs from each member, synthesized areas of blockage, as well as our expectations, and then convened a three-day decision-making retreat.

The facilitator was able to hold up a metaphorical mirror to our long-standing network, to help us face hard truths about a dynamic that was no longer working for us. This hard look was complemented with some frank, heavy-handed facilitation, which turned out to be exactly what the **Partners** Network needed at that moment. When the question was squarely put to us if we even wanted to continue as a network, it was unimaginable to any of the members that we would not continue to be together. This was a key success factor in our journey. For a network made up of individuals and organizations who never had to make a proactive choice to join the **Partners** Network, the act of deciding to be together was legitimating of the network's value. The decision was empowering to all of us

to work harder for something precious that we almost lost. But we had to name what gave us that sense of value and had to precisely define what being a network should mean for us going forward.

After almost a year of reflection, we agreed that the overarching goal of peace and democracy writ large was enough to keep us together. What gave – and continues to give – us the most energy is our deep sharing across cultural and regional differences; spaces to learn from each other about our experiences and expertise; supporting each other as individuals and organizations in the (oftentimes) draining work of maintaining resilient non-profits in difficult contexts; and the ability to foster a strong sense of belonging to a network "family" that gives us strength and an identity beyond any one organization. We all agreed that The **Partners** Way stands for something important in representing our values and the process of achieving change no matter the issue; and we wanted to make sure to pass this on to the next generation within our organizations. The **Partners** Way represents a collective commitment to locally-driven development that brings together people, communities and institutions to jointly reach decisions and build actions that resolve or reduce conflict and discord and promote inclusion, justice and accountability. It represents the values of local first, accountability, resiliency, justice, and collective voice.

The Partners "Family"

Because the members of the Network share the same origin story, being "birthed" by the US-based organization, we have had a very intense feeling of being a "family." This is a

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strong metaphor within our network's culture, and we have used language that refers to the organizational life-cycle of member Centers as "infants" "adolescents" or "fully matured grown-ups," including references to parent-child analogies throughout the years. "Once a member of the **Partners** family, always a member..." is a phrase we often repeat at going-away parties, even as some members have closed their doors or decided to leave the network. While we were trying to govern ourselves as a formally registered network with financial expectations for business development and common programmatic goals, this family metaphor was extremely problematic. The challenge was largely due to the social impact investment model that was used to launch new centers. Since the seed capital was raised by **Partners**Global on behalf of each new center, there was an element of dependency upon the Washington, DC office for fundraising on behalf of Network members.

Naturally, as Centers matured and expanded their range of funders, the DC Center (founder, **Partners**Global) was expected to continue to provide the fundraising engine. In hindsight, a more explicit contract or memorandum defining limits and expectations on both sides would likely have reduced the misaligned expectations more consistently and perhaps avoided some of the challenges. In recent years, MOUs have been put into place with some of the newer Centers and the alignment of expectations has improved. However, for many years the family metaphor subtly perpetuated unequal power dynamics and strained our professional interactions.

Once we let go of those toxic dynamics and mismatched expectations tied up in our financial relationship, however, we reaffirmed that the

purpose of the Network was to find joy in being together to learn, share and build each other up as professionals and organizations. Since this shift, the "family" metaphor has become one of our biggest assets again and helps foster a sense of belonging to all who come through the doors of the **Partners** member organizations. We also no longer take these close ties for granted, especially since we came close to losing that family during our "pause."

We Had It In Us All Along

After we successfully redefined our purpose and scaled-down network structure, we continued to work with PeaceNexus to consolidate those gains when the whole world was hit with COVID-19. Like everyone else, the **Partners** Network had to adapt to the reality of only meeting virtually. We started recruiting for another consulting firm to support the Network's transition to more intentional online collaboration, believing we needed external expertise to inject our network culture with new virtual operating norms.

Our small leadership team interviewed many network experts, eventually hiring a team of consultants to work with us to integrate new rituals and convert our annual in-person meeting to an online gathering. The process of interviewing all those network experts was a wonderful learning experience, but also made us realize that, in fact, the **Partners** Network already had many of the attributes of a strong network and that technology wasn't necessarily going to be the answer. Rather, as facilitators and process experts, we needed to channel our own creative energy to maintain and expand that sense of belonging and excitement to share with each other; the technological solutions were merely a vehicle to express that creativity for our gatherings.

In the end, we stopped working with the new team of "network experts" and instead hired a virtual facilitation firm that complemented our vision for a network gathering full of fun, sharing and solidarity during a historic global pandemic.

Our previous decision-making process with the great help of an external facilitator had triggered the energy that we need to promote and facilitate our own way of building belonging and sharing. We realized that we didn't need more "network expertise" to analyze our group and create new "norms" – rather, we had it in us all along to build on what we already had established.

Instead of Getting Things Done – Letting Things Grow

We have now held several of these annual gatherings online, enjoying the benefit of many more network staff being able to attend so we can strengthen relationships beyond the directors and senior leadership. As the majority of our professional lives have moved to Zoom, we made a conscious decision that our network spaces should be a refuge from this exhausting new virtual grind. Our annual three-day gatherings start with a now-beloved "speed greeting," where we meet in small groups of 3-4 for several rotations, just to be able to say hello to each other as we start our sessions, just like if we were grabbing coffee before the start of a conference. During these annual gatherings, we play games together in the virtual space, dance to world music, write collective poetry, don crazy hats, pre-record silly videos, hear from inspiring external speakers, and share our personal and organizational struggles and triumphs. Seeds of program priorities and snippets of successful innovations come out during these gatherings but are not the main focus.

To be clear, the network meetings are not all fun and games – but the interactive, interpersonal focus acts as a means of loosening up the creative flow of ideas that eventually expand into more tactical business decisions in the subsequent more structured portions of the agenda. The heightened focus on sharing and mixing of conversations between team members from multiple Centers at various levels of experience and expertise also creates the conditions for dynamic and honest discussions and decision-making.

*Over the many decades of being together, the **Partners** Network has shown that our relationships are resilient.*

Perhaps the most highly praised aspect of this approach is the elevation of diverse voices within the network as equals – as opposed to exclusive meetings between Directors. One of the biggest lessons of the past few years is to reiterate for ourselves that a strong network is made up of human relationships and interactions. Over the many decades of being together, the **Partners** Network has shown that our relationships are resilient. We can be sad, we can fight, we can deal with loss and difficult moments, but the fact is that we have stayed together because of our bonds and a special relationship that transcends any of us as individuals. This sense of belonging has been transferred to several new generations throughout the years and sustains our network culture.

As an outgrowth of this culture, member organizations are coming together all around the world to collaborate on different aspects of conflict transformation and democracy – on country-specific projects, regional initiatives, and global campaigns. But we have been slightly surprised that when we have focused less on getting things done, but rather on letting things grow the network leadership is in fact providing the fertile soil necessary for that collaboration to occur. For example, during the more centrally structured years, collaboration was largely tied to revenue generation goals on joint projects. The recent decentralization has produced a more dynamic result reflected in such things as: formation of a network liaison group with representatives from each region; an early professionals' group to provide peer mentorship and support to younger or less experienced colleagues; and a communications committee that has worked painstakingly to coordinate and generate an online sharing space to harness the resources and materials of the network's collective products and learning tools.[3]

Updating Our Vision of Network "Leadership"

What it takes to "lead" a network is probably one of the areas with the most needed reconsideration and adaption within our sector in 2022. In the case of the **Partners** Network, we were able to put into practice a new form of leadership the moment we left behind a sense of responsibility to "control" the network's functioning within our formal legal structure. Instead, we began focusing our energies on network relationships and re-establishing trust amongst us.

We learned (again) that trust is indeed the most important currency in our Network, and that trusting relationships can't be achieved through governance structures. Rather, trust is built and nurtured through behaviors and transparency. We have succeeded in rebuilding trusting relationships after more than 30 years of history, but how exactly did that come about? Part of rebuilding trust was jointly accepting

there were dynamics we wanted to leave in the past and we all recommitted to establishing a new dynamic for our shared future. The fact that we gave up financial expectations for joint fundraising as one of the goals of the network was an important aspect that helped us break down previous sentiments of competition, suspicion, and resentment over unequal funding opportunities. As established centers "graduated" to be able to generate their own funds, the **Partners**Global team continued to develop joint project proposals with the newest group of what we termed "investment centers." The model involved raising joint funds for centers in start-up phase for a period of up to four years, after which the level of joint fundraising gradually decreased and new centers were identified and became the target of the fundraising and organizational capacity-building support. We were also able to stay dedicated to learning from each other and supporting each other – willingly - to be strong, healthy, resilient local CSOs.

Part of rebuilding trust is showing up for each other, prioritizing the network and making those who coordinate our activities at all levels feel appreciated. Participation in network initiatives has increased since we reoriented our energies to building belonging; and yet we also learned that participation doesn't always have to be equal or reciprocal. Sometimes members of the network "go quiet" for a little while, and that's OK. Other members get more involved at certain moments and take up the network's mantle when needed. This experience of creating space and flexibility for network members to fluctuate their level of active engagement in network activities and sharing can be compared with the concept of a Fishnet Organizational structure. This agile and permeable structure begins with the needed flexibility and temporary hierarchies that allows for "flow" within the network. As Jon Husbands defines it:

"The fishnet is flexible; it can form and re-form

varied patterns of connection. The middle manager may at one time be at the apex, at another in the middle. The fishnet organization rearranges itself quickly while retaining its inherent strength."[4]

We are collectively resistant to any winds blowing because the connections of our metaphorical fishnet are strong, even if the far reaches of the net get lost for a little while. One of the points of conventional wisdom about strong networks is that the flow of "information" is an all-important network currency. Therefore, network leaders should supposedly ensure there are well-established communication channels so that everyone feels included and knows what everyone else is doing. This is a network truism that we have let go of within the **Partners** Network, leading to a new, healthier dynamic of distributive leadership.[5] Distributed leadership occurs when the responsibilities are shared among multiple leaders. The model involves the intentional encouragement of existing leaders to mentor and grow new leaders to perpetuate the shared structure of the organization. When this occurs, leadership is reflected as a quality or skill that is contributed as opposed to a position within the organization. The examples provided earlier of the young professionals and liaison group are two examples of this practice.

Additionally, the introduction of virtual annual meetings in which all members of network centers an participate, as opposed to Directors exclusively reflects this shift. Within a large global network working on so many diverse issues, there are many initiatives unfolding all over the network; we've stopped expecting any one centralized source to coordinate or act as a gatekeeper to gather information or knowledge to feed back to the whole. Letting go of this responsibility helps both the network leadership and the members to trust that work is unfolding, knowing there will be opportunities to proactively share and learn at key moments. But we all don't have to be "in the know" for us to be a strong, healthy network. In fact, it is

because we no longer expect any centralized communication, that all members of the network feel empowered to create their own spaces of connection and collaboration where they feel inspired and there is natural energy found with their colleagues.

This isn't to say that designated leadership roles aren't necessary. As referenced earlier, in our new network structure, we devolved coordination roles to each of the regions and appointed a "Liaison Group" with one member from each region to coordinate the interactions and agenda-setting amongst their regional colleagues. This has been a positive adaptation to our network dynamic, allowing for each region to operate in distinct ways that accommodates cultural differences, priorities and relationships. We also created an Early Professionals Working Group, where young people come together globally to drive network-wide priorities for mentoring, professional development and other learning spaces. Also, a network-wide Communications Committee drives global campaigns and helps coordinate internal communication to connect network members. All of these groups and committees have created opportunities for leadership to be shared by many throughout the network. Some rise to the occasion and find energy in these roles; some participate for a while and then drop off; some clearly have a vision for the network as a whole and want to work with others to create that vision; and some are focused on their own programmatic priorities and/or sub-region. There is space for all this difference in energy and commitment levels within the **Partners** Network.

While **Partners**Global in DC maintains the official "coordination" role, a large part of that function is to ensure the rituals and cultural markers within our network support this distributive leadership model. This designation resulted from a vote taken by Network Centers. The Network decided that (for the time being)

PartnersGlobal is the best situated to provide a level of gentle coordination because of our distinctive role as founding member. However, we are fulfilling this role in close collaboration with the Executive Director of Fundacion Cambio Democratico (aka **Partners** Argentina) and key members of the DC team. The responsibilities include organizing the annual and bi-annual meetings; connecting the dots between the various committees; providing a moderate level of administrative support for the platform and promoting the lessons of the Network within the DC-based NGO community. Based on the re-established levels of trust, we collectively feel secure in the fact that each network member is empowered to "follow the energy" when it sparks. Political leadership on the other hand, the ability to drive a global "agenda" is no longer considered a centralized function of a coordinator or a secretariat. Rather, agenda setting is shared by all the members and implemented throughout the year and throughout the network at all levels.

Following the Energy and Rituals of Belonging

Partners has a very active sub-group within the Network involved in a global program to increase civil society resiliency to address shifts in civic space. The ResiliencysPlus Framework and this new cohort of Resiliency Coaches is one example of a source of renewed energy, learning and collaboration. Another source of energy is the multi-generational collaboration that has unfolded because of the assertive Early Professionals Group and commitment to the network within a new generation of young people. And we definitely get energy from sharing spaces with those from other countries who are so well-respected and experienced with peacebuilding, conflict transformation and democratic governance in their own contexts. Being together in multicultural settings, with

the ability to share deeply about our work, our values, our hopes and our worries is incredibly empowering for those in the social change field. The fact that we share our organizational challenges, as well as technical and substantive areas of work, is another special aspect of our Network. It can be lonely and exhausting to keep a non-profit afloat, manage stages in our organizational life-cycle and weather political and social changes; having a caring "family" of like-minded professionals to rant to, share tensions with, and receive moral support can make the world of difference to keep going in this hard work.

We have many examples of rituals of belonging within our Network that have developed throughout our many years together. Regionally, we attend each other's organizational anniversaries, or mark special occasions together. We have posters of our bigger gatherings that hang on almost everyone's walls. We prepare short videos of our work to share with each other and attend each other's conferences and events. We design campaigns of solidarity when a particular tragedy befalls one country (such as the explosion in Lebanon). We share small gifts imprinted with our shared logo (little boxes, cookies, book bags or otherwise.) We celebrate when new members join us, like the newest member **Partners** Iraq, which brings excitement and new energy to the collective group. This sense of belonging is indeed the secret sauce of the **Partners** Network, and what allows us to continue to do the good work to build peace and work for democracy throughout the world.

Final Reflections

So, how does this all add up? What is the ultimate result of 32 years of learning how to be a network? The lessons of our organizational lifecycle are simple and yet the application of the lessons have been transformational. Our centers evolved in a time in Eastern and Central Europe where mediation and conflict sensitive approaches were critical and timely. The investment in individuals with a passion to build structures to safeguard democratic principles then expanded to other parts of the world where diverse examples of issues that destabilize communities emerged and the triggers of conflict differed but the need for strong civil society structures and skills were a unifying commonality. Today's **Partners**Network is more dynamic, involves multi-generational leadership and represents a new way of thriving. For some, affiliation is the hope to cling to in times of organizational stresses, for others the ability to draw upon each other as peer mentors and coaches is the most prized aspect of membership. While for others, the ability to learn from the vast experience implementing peacebuilding and accountable governance and justice projects adds a level of capacity and confidence that drives participation. The health of the network is seen through the bilateral relationships that now exist among staff members at all levels of the organizational structures across more than 20 countries. Individual staff members are more connected than ever before. Younger staff are more actively contributing ideas and skills in spaces once reserved for only Directors and senior leadership. We continue to explore new ways of distributing leadership and sharing decision-making within the network. We have enjoyed watching regional Centers rediscover each other and pursue regional coordination and fundraising independent of any centralized role. This is what inclusive and locally-driven development looks like. This is The Partners Way!

Notes

1 The central mission of **Partners**Global has since changed to help sustain existing CSOs through the delivery of resiliency services, instead of investing in establishing new organizations. https://www.partnersglobal.org/who-we-are/signature-approaches/resiliency/

2 https://hbr.org/2007/01/how-leaders-create-and-use-networks

3 Additional examples include:

* Network Townhall Meetings: We held two full network townhall meetings with 85% participation of the Network members. This is a dramatic increase from our norm of 20-30% participation in previous years.

* Joint programming: The Sub-Saharan Africa region are planning to launch a Women, Peace & Security Research Fellowship with **Partners**Global, in honor of the founding board member of **Partners** West Africa-Senegal, General Lamine Cisse.

* Sharing human resources: **Partners**Lebanon and **Partners** Jordan (PJ) came to a decision to combine administrative/managerial resources and while PJ didn't have a formal director, the director of **Partners**Lebanon became interim director for both Centers for the next six months. Also, one of the senior facilitators from **Partners** Colombia consulted for the **Partners** in Mexico (CCC) virtually to fill in for a senior staff person that has had to take time off during the COVID pandemic.

* Joint business-development: **Partners**Global, **Partners** in Slovakia (PDCS), together with **Partners** in Hungary submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to expand the Resiliency+ Framework into CEE (proposal was requested by the donor)

* Learning opportunities: Lebanon and Argentina conducted a Virtual Learning Exchange on Art, Culture, and Conflict Transformation with our colleagues from Brandeis University and IMPACT – Imagining Together: Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation

* Learning opportunities: Network members from the Latin American Centers and the West African Centers met to discuss common challenges and approaches to extractive industry conflicts, security sector reform, and women, peace and security

* Joint Communications: the entire network came together on a campaign to demonstrate the leadership of women during the COVID19 through individual storytelling (Senegal, El Salvador, Lebanon, Nigeria, Iraq, Yemen)

* Participation in International Platforms: Both Argentina and Senegal are participating actively in the +Peace Coalition, and attended the communicators retreat in London in January – and are now linking the +Peace Coalition work with the rest of the Network. (**Partners** Colombia was instrumental in securing the participation of Cali in the #PeaceInOurCities Campaign of +Peace)

* Network-wide campaigning: The entire network came together to support **Partners**Lebanon after the blast in Beirut and raised a total of $6000 through a global crowd-funding campaign.

4 http://wirearchy.com/2010/02/04/fishnet-organizations-temporary-and-flexible-hierarchies/

5 In the network's early days, each member wrote up monthly reports and emailed them to all the other members. We gave up this practice in our second decade when the number of members and reports became unmanageable (and a little boring!)