

OD PEER- LEARNING EVENT

NOVEMBER 2022



PEACENEXUS
FOUNDATION



1.INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES



ABOUT PEACENEXUS ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (OD) SUPPORT

Since 2009, the [PeaceNexus Foundation©](#) has been providing multi-year organisational strengthening support to peacebuilding organisations, with the objective of making their contributions to peace even more effective and impactful.

Committed to an inclusive, locally-led approach to peacebuilding, PeaceNexus framed its 2020 Call for proposals as an opportunity for international peacebuilding organisations to more fully “walk the talk” of their mission. The OD support was to help them reflect on their internal practices as well as their relationship to local actors, so as to ensure both were congruent with their values and disrupted rather than re-enforced unequal power structures. Two years into their respective change processes, it was a good time for our selected partners to reflect on what they have learned through this process.

ABOUT OUR PEER-LEARNING

PeaceNexus regularly convenes its partners and consultants for peer-learning events. Organisational change processes are challenging by their very nature, rarely unfolding as planned and often resting disproportionately on the shoulders of one or a few committed staff. These internal change champions take on that role in addition to their regular duties and they greatly benefit from being offered a space where they can reflect on their experience with peers involved in similar processes.

These exchanges provide moral support while also contributing to their organisation as they come back with renewed courage and inspiration. The event usually takes place in a setting that is conducive to reflection, networking and self-care, such as the [Chateau de Bossey](#). The last one hosted by the international OD programme took place in September 2019 and focused on Strategy Development – its discussions then informing our [Practice Paper on Organisational Development and Peacebuilding](#).



ABOUT THIS EVENT AND THE PARTICIPANTS

The 2022 event took place from the evening of October 31st to mid-day on November 2nd. It brought together representatives from six of PeaceNexus' international OD partners, together with five consultants and six of PeaceNexus' staff, altogether nineteen participants.

At the onset of the workshop, it was acknowledged that participants brought into the room their multiple identities and their own understanding of their meaning. They also represented an organisation, with its unique history, driving force, expertise and challenges – all of it constituting a mosaic of experiences and perspectives.



More specifically, the six organisational change processes that were reflected on by the group were:

- **Build Up**'s on-going institutionalisation of collective leadership, based on a mantra of practical solidarity and fearless integrity.
- **Conciliation Resources**' journey of deepening the integration of gender into its peacebuilding practice and developing its first ever Gender Strategy, building on the work done as part of the gender integration dialogue co-hosted with PeaceNexus and CMI Martti Ahtusaari Peace Foundation.
- **International Alert**'s commitment to have Gender, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion underpin all its strategic objectives.
- The **OSCE Mission to Serbia**'s effort to mainstream youth participation in its programmatic work and internal processes.
- **Peace Direct**'s work to operationalise a decolonised Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning practice.
- The **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom**'s future WILPF process through which it developed a new organisation-wide plan to guide the movement as a whole and ensure a feminist governance model.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

The event's agenda was defined by the participants themselves. Based on their shared focus on change processes that seek to redress power imbalances, **five key Learning Questions** were identified and then fine-tuned through consultations (*see below*).

Participants were also asked to select the Learning Question that resonated with them the most and PeaceNexus then facilitated calls for each session with those interested in shaping it. As a result, they all contributed directly to one session, either by facilitating it or by sharing their case-study. PeaceNexus' role was then limited to leading the opening and the closing sessions.



WELCOME

Introduction game - why are we here – anchoring this conversation in context – mapping out unique peacebuilding lens, expertise and key challenges of participating organisations – building a safe container

LEARNING QUESTION 1

What are we learning about generating buy-in and overcoming resistance: building our respective change process eco-systems with toys and arts supplies to represent their different actors and elements – plenary story-telling and debrief

LEARNING QUESTION 2

What are we learning about accompanying change processes? : fishbowl interviews of two contrasting case-studies to reflect on the role, benefit and pitfalls of external support

LEARNING QUESTION 3

What are we learning about combining different change agendas ?: listing all change agendas – how do we manage multi-strand change processes (e.g. youth and gender mainstreaming?) – how do we create organisational space for debate and decision-making when faced with difficult ethical choices ? – small group reflections and plenary debrief

LEARNING QUESTION 4

How do we operationalise gender integration in peacebuilding? : exploring the gender integration spectrum tool – individual and organisational positioning – plenary feedback and debrief

LEARNING QUESTION 5

What does a decolonised MEL look like?: presentation on Peace Direct work on a bottom-up MEL framework – exploring the different components of a decolonised MEL approach – plenary debrief

CLOSING

Identifying main lessons – personal insights – continuing on as a peer-learning and support community – acknowledgements.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This short report provides a synthesis of the insights generated by the group as it reflected on the event's five Learning Questions, citing some of the examples and practical tips that emerged while respecting the confidentiality of the proceedings. It is meant to be helpful to both the participants as they continue to facilitate internal conversations about change and for peers in other peacebuilding organisations engaged in similar transformative efforts.

2.SHARED INSIGHTS



The event started with a trust-building individual introduction exercise that enabled the upfront naming of power dynamics and contributed to an immediate connection between participants ([*see box below*](#)). After also giving a short introduction of their respective organisations, participants were asked to build their own change process eco-system, using toys and arts supplies to represent the different stakeholders involved, their respective roles and their attitudes towards the change agenda. The debrief enabled participants to reflect on the key elements of their organisational journey but also on their choices on how to best represent it symbolically. This story-telling also meant participants had essentially briefed one another on the efforts they were leading, which allowed for easy references and a shared understanding in the following sessions.

The process followed to develop the agenda ensured it reflected participants' key interrogations. It created shared ownership and modeled collective leadership with participants directly facilitating and contributing to different parts of the programme. Each session built on the previous one so that it felt like a multi-dimensional single conversation, with new insights and nuances gained along the way.

BOX 1. INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE

The aim of this exercise is to reflect on our multiple identities and have an opportunity to share our own experience and meaning of each one, beyond stereotypes and cultural norms:

1

Step 1

Put participants in a circle and launch the exercise by introducing yourself. Then ask participants' turn to introduce themselves "normally", each stating their name, the organisation they represent and their role in it.

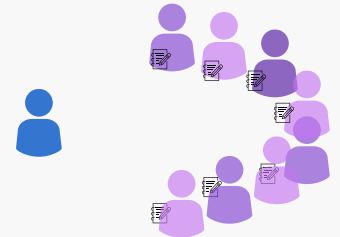


2

Step 2

Remind participants that they are more than just their professional role and while individuals may choose to keep parts of themselves to their private sphere, we are shaped by our multiple identities.

After modeling it about yourself, ask participants to write down their own list of identities - specifying this list will not be shared. Ex: peacebuilder, woman, wife, mother, daughter, Swiss, White, dancer



3

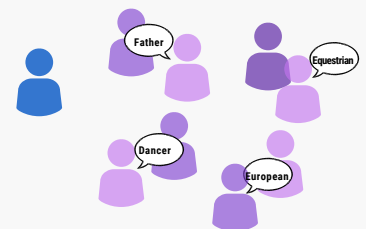
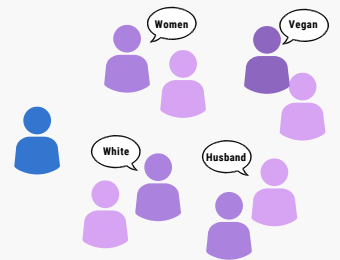
Step 3

Explain that when mentioning identities, people jump to shortcuts- stereotypes, prejudices, filters associated with that identity. We rarely have an opportunity to define our own experience and understanding of these identities. As an example: the way I am a wife may not correspond to the cultural norm, the way I understand my Swiss identity will differ from how a right-wing patriot will define it. Also, the meaning of these identities as well as their respective importance will change over time: how I define myself as a daughter was not a key identity for several decades, then it changed as a result of becoming my mother's care-taker. Finally, we may have given a lot of thought to one identity, usually one that comes with discrimination, for instance what it means to me to be a woman, when we rarely think about the identities we hold that come with power and privileges unless challenged to.

Tell participants they are to go around the room, find a partner and introduce themselves under one identity on their list. They will have 2-3 minutes to speak about what that identity means to them, after that a bell will ring and their partner will do the same, not necessarily choosing the corresponding identity, just picking any from his/her list. Once both have spoken, participants will be invited to thank their partner and go looking for another partner to repeat the exercise, but each time introducing themselves under a different identity. They can skip identities they do not want to speak about.

Facilitate 5 rounds of introductions, each time announcing when it is time to switch between partners and then thank your partner and go looking for another one. For the last round, invite participants to choose the identity that is the most joyful to them.

Debrief the exercise, asking how participants felt having to introduce themselves 5 times in a different way, what they learned, etc. When used as an ice-breaker to build trust, this can be kept relatively light while making the point of the importance of welcoming all identities and not jumping to conclusions about their meaning. But this exercise can also be used for powerful discussions around diversity and inclusion.



WHAT WE LEARNED...

The organisational change processes PeaceNexus supports are highly participatory, aiming to model a collectively defined desirable culture. Participants unpacked their respective experiences in leading such processes and identified what makes such efforts successful.

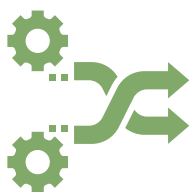
The shared and most inspirational insight was the power of asking Learning Questions.

Framing inclusion objectives as learning conversations will increase the chance that it is the experience of belonging, rather than the one of exclusion and irrelevance, that spreads to all groups. Questions open up space for diverse points of views, for different paces of personal change within organisation-wide initiatives, for resistance and dissent to be held collectively rather than rest heavily on a few shoulders.

When grounded in an authentic commitment to change yet framed as exploration, questions increase safety for what must be a courageous conversation: How do we ensure all members of staff feel equally valued despite differences in labour laws and contracting modalities across the different countries we operate in? How can our performance review process be an empowering, safe one for all parties? How can our governance model truly reflect our core values? Learning Questions can acknowledge complexity while giving permission to challenge the status quo and demand better responses. Most importantly, they expand our horizon, they are by nature generative and invitational.

Thus our shared insights are also framed as the most important questions we should ask ourselves when planning an organisational change process.

HOW DO WE BUILD BUY-IN FOR OUR CHANGE AGENDA ?



“Release the pressure of chasing results and go back to questions that move us forward.”

The change process will be served by being demystified through concrete examples and a clear vision, devoid of jargon. It should be informed by and contribute to the organisational story, resting on inspiring narratives, not just a negative framing centered on problems. Branding thoughtfully the change process - as WILPF did with the FUTURE WILPF process - can help mobilise support and orient staff when reporting back on progress. Consistent messaging will go far over time, persistently communicating the objectives of the change process, acknowledging every win and maintaining on-going forums to unpack its implications.

HOW DO WE ENSURE WE HAVE A CLEAR MANDATE ?



“Externals can help us “see” by framing what’s happening - but internal ownership is key.”

The original mandate for a power-shifting change process can come from different sources. It may be given by the leadership or come as a result of staff demands. It may be triggered by an internal incident/crisis or external pressure such as the Black Lives Matter, the #MeToo movement or calls to Decolonise Aid.

However urgent the change may be, it is important to clarify the objectives and scope of the change we have a mandate for, probing until we get to a shared understanding of what the problem is and what success will look like. Securing a mandate may require a mapping of current inequalities. For example, a review of human resources can identify discriminatory practices and reveal the costs of the status quo. Mapping these hidden costs can help secure a change mandate and participatory processes that are well designed and facilitated are key to maintaining change energy.

HOW DO WE ENGAGE OUR LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVELY ?



“It is not because you are not where you want to be that great work isn’t happening RIGHT NOW”

Who the change champion is matters, with a key role for the leadership to play but also for the power holders more broadly to use their position and privilege to support reform. For instance anti-racism work needs also White champions.

The role of the governance structure came back again and again with a shared sense that traditional governance structures need to be reimagined. More exchanges – based on the success of PeaceNexus' board-level peer-learning group – are needed across peacebuilding organisations to ensure Boards are engaged and part of the change process.

Finally, a change agenda will require courageous leadership from all parts of the organisation – so that all internal processes and policies are reviewed in light of the commitments made. For instance International Alert has representatives of all departments in its Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (GDEI) Steering Committee.

WHAT DOES OUR FRAMING INDICATE ?



“All change processes are multi-strands.”

The exclusion of one group – for instance women - cannot be addressed without looking at how it interacts with other discriminatory practices – for instance racism or ageism.

The OSCE Mission to Serbia found that gender and youth mainstreaming, while potentially competing for resources, could be implemented as complementary efforts. Yet acknowledging intersectionality can lead to an over-laying of bureaucratic responses (multiple inclusion check-lists), exclusionary jargon and difficult trade-offs.

Build Up’s organisational model was welcomed as an inspiring example of a structure that acknowledges the overlaying of multiple oppressive structures and creates space for ethical decision-making.

Participants noted that a constant focus on the excluded reinforces a victim-based narrative. The extent to which organisational and programmatic practices reinforce rather than disrupt privilege and unequal power structures could be a more powerful measure of progress. In all cases, it will be important to pay attention to framing at the onset of the process.

HOW CAN WE DO MEL DIFFERENTLY ?



“Impact takes time so value progress.”

Current Monitoring Evaluation and Learning frameworks are not only often imposed by donors in a top-down manner, they are also based on – and further contribute to - distrust. Peace Direct presented its reflection and emerging practice in the development of a framework designed around the questions the partners and different teams have on how to improve their work and impact. It is an approach that focuses on learning – for now as a complement to project-based data gathering, yet also an entry door to greater donor engagement and education.

Our MEL practice is key in our engagement with local actors, it sets the tone for the partnership and needs to be thought through as a value-driven exercise.

HOW DO WE PRACTICE MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY ?



“Solidarity means taking the same (financial) risks.”

How can the change process model the desired organisational culture? It is of utmost importance that it does and is therefore led by a body that is credible and truly representative of staff – and not overly tilted towards headquarters.

Transparency will also be key for the process to be considered legitimate by the majority of the stakeholders. Not all staff can or should be involved in every decision but they must understand what the process is about, what the implications for the organisation (and themselves) may be and when/how they can provide their input.

Behaviours that are not congruent with the professed values of the process will become that much more problematic – yet sometimes inadvertently serving the change agenda through their increased visibility.

HOW DO WE SUSTAIN OURSELVES ?



“How do we create space for healing for those leading the change?”

One evident commonality was the burden carried by change champions. Those taking responsibility for leading the process usually volunteer for the role and end up dedicating unanticipated amounts of time to it, on top of an already heavy workload. This may be exacerbated by guilt that their investment, limited by other duties, does not match their commitment and interest.

The sacrifices required clearly take a heavy toll, yet also lead to personal growth and a powerful bonding journey for those involved. It is common to forget to include one's own needs when driving inclusion efforts. As their additional load will regrettably rarely be fully compensated, regular reflections on what people are learning and gaining from their role in the change process, as well as opportunities to increase or decrease their level of participation to make it more manageable will be helpful.

3. WHAT COMES NEXT ?

All participants declared that the event had met their own definition of success – asking that it would be longer next time. They welcomed the mix of participants: to have two representatives of participating organisations to allow for joint reflection and to also bring in consultants and PeaceNexus' staff supporting them. They also appreciated the full and frank participation of PeaceNexus, as its staff reflected on the foundation's own internal challenges.

By definition, a learning conversation is an on-going, evolving one. Some of our partners have already publicly shared some of what they have developed and learned, which can be consulted on [our Resources page](#).

The OSCE Mission to Serbia, for instance, has published [Guidelines on how to work with and for youth](#). It has also just gathered Practical Ideas to foster youth engagement in policies, processes and programs from across the OSCE and beyond. Their [Practice Paper](#) captures the learning of a series of digital roundtables focused on Enabling a youth inclusive environment, Including youth voices in policy-making and strategic processes and Integrating youth into the programming of organisations.

Another useful resource is the report that came out of a [peer-learning dialogue](#) among thirteen peacebuilding organisations on Integrating Gender into the DNA of Peacebuilding in 2021.



The report reflects on a number of challenges in mainstreaming gender, including a tendency to resist the inherently political nature of gender work and the need to engage leadership in the process. It presents a gender integration spectrum designed to support organisations in measuring and setting ambitions ranging from being gender unaware and gender sensitive through to gender transformative.

The peer-learning dialogue is continuing as other participants use the spectrum and adapt it to their own needs, context and priorities.

One of the co-host of this dialogue, [Conciliation Resources](#), has further adapted and tested the gender integration spectrum with its programme teams in Pakistan and Central African Republic. This forms part of its new, and first ever, Gender Strategy, which places a strong focus on how gender interacts with other forms of identity and systems of oppression. In operationalising the Strategy, CR has designed and piloted a 'Gender Integration Cycle' which involves five steps, done in close collaboration with local partners: carrying out a tailored gendered conflict analysis; defining what gender responsive and transformative objectives might look like (based on specific contexts), producing gender action plans, facilitating cross-programme learning sessions to see what gender responsive and transformative peacebuilding looks like across different contexts, and reflecting on objectives in annual outcome harvesting sessions.

Some of our partners have reflected on their change journey so far, such as [Build Up](#) or [Partners Network](#). Others will share their journey once they have fully implemented what they have committed to change and reflected on it.

The group agreed to share its key insights through this document and expressed a desire to continue their exchanges, both on specific topics such as MEL and governance, and as a peer-learning and support space. Participants take turns in hosting a monthly call where each can bring their latest learning question – or just moral support and re-inspiration.

For updates and opportunities to join the dialogue, just follow [PeaceNexus' LinkedIn page](#).



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report fails to capture the generosity of the exchanges and the strong connections they generated. PeaceNexus would like to extend its gratitude to all participants, for their enthusiasm, trust and strong involvement, in this event, in their partnership with us and in their deep commitment to a just, equitable peace.



KEY CONTACT

**FONDATION
PEACENEXUS**



Carole Frampton-de Tscharner

Organisational Development Lead
International Partnerships Manager

carole.frampton@peacenexus.org

+ 41 22 365 15 00