

# Issue Brief

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Cohort 2: Promoting local ownership and building capacities for conflict prevention

## Reflections on Measuring National Ownership in Conflict Prevention Interventions

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### Introduction

The new framework of development policies entrenched in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 and the ‘Sustaining Peace’ resolutions of the United Nations (UN) call for a renewed interest in national ownership in development and peace consolidation. Even though not a new issue, the challenge of delineating responsibilities and involvement between local actors, foreign partners and donors, is heightened in the context of the Agenda 2030 implementation. For many African countries where the improvement of governance practices could be perceived as a prerequisite for any attempt to achieve the 17 goals set in Agenda 2030, the issue of ownership points first and foremost to the question of inclusivity – in itself the cornerstone of any genuine achievement of that new global policy agenda, given that economic, political and social exclusions have been identified as the main drivers of conflicts. For this reason, inclusion could be a point of departure and the ultimate goal of Agenda 2030, illustrated in the principle that “nobody should be left behind”.

Complementary to Agenda 2030, the Sustaining Peace resolutions of the UN, based on the pre-eminence of prevention, places preventive diplomacy and local conflict prevention initiatives at the core of its approach. This agenda also invokes the challenge of building capacities for conflict prevention in countries where the causes of such conflicts are deeply-rooted. As a contribution to the global effort to ‘leave nobody behind’, this Issues Brief attempts to identify possible principles and ways of assessing national ownership of programmes and projects aimed at strengthening national capacities for conflict prevention. This is done through a careful analysis of their typologies, their differing capacity needs and processes, according to the commonalities and differences of the political-economies of the countries of implementation. Initially, the concepts of ownership and

inclusivity and their intersection with external actors’ interventions are discussed before considering how to measure national ownership, utilizing examples from field experience including from Guinea-Bissau.

### Inclusivity as a Prerequisite of National Ownership

#### 1. On National Ownership

National (not sub-national) ownership can be understood as the measurable level of “perception of belonging to them” – a representative group of citizens of a particular country may have of a process, an initiative or a project they have been involved in. This perspective confirms the 2005 Paris Declaration which established “country ownership” as key, adding that “government operational strategy coupled by donor alignment on this strategy had to be considered the measure of ownership”.<sup>1</sup>

The use of the concept of ownership seems to hide a kind of paradox. The concept of ownership can refer to initiatives and projects that explicitly involve external actors, be they technical or financial. Often, where initiatives are genuinely and exclusively national, the issue of ownership is not the subject of the discussion, and, where external actors are involved, the question of how much of the project or the process can be considered as belonging to the nationals arises.

However, the ultimate “test of validity” of ownership of any kind of project or process (particularly peace related projects where outcomes are expected in the medium to long term), should always be its sustainability.

If full national ownership appears as an unachievable objective, the question of how to measure the level of ownership becomes important when conflict prevention or peace processes are the subject. National ownership should incorporate

<sup>1</sup> See Paris Declaration: <http://www.mfdr.org/sourcebook/2-1-paris.pdf>.

the element of inclusivity in keeping with the emphasis on sustaining peace.

## II. Inclusivity

Even though the UN Secretary General highlighted inclusivity as a priority and called on the international community to identify entry points for it, inclusivity is often approached through its quantitative dimension, that is on how many of the relevant groups of stakeholders have been involved in a project or in a process.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is very difficult to achieve a rigorously acceptable and representative 'sample' of the various relevant groups of stakeholders for specific national projects or processes. However, when limited to the issue of numbers of persons and relevant groups, the conversation on inclusivity may fail to question other key aspects, specifically when the subject is conflict prevention or peace processes.

The traditional methodologies of 'stakeholders' analysis' differentiates between three types of stakeholders (understood as a sample of all the interested groups which should be represented in the initiative – a challenge in itself). These should consider, at any stage of a project cycle, the following questions in order to avoid bias while fostering inclusivity: Who to think with?; Who to work with?; and, Who to keep informed? In addition to these three questions, the following questions suggest further principles to observe when striving for inclusivity: Who is able to add value to what?; Who has the comparative advantage at each step of a process?; How to make all stakeholders feel involved in what we are doing together? This suggestion seems to conform with the ideas Sarah Helmuller and Martini Santischi propose, when they emphasize partnership, plurality and each actor's comparative advantages.<sup>3</sup>

## III. Inclusivity, Ownership and External Actor Interventions

From the point of view of a Peace and Development Adviser (PDA), thinking about the relationship between inclusion and ownership in projects and processes of capacity building for conflict prevention or peace consolidation means questioning the involvement of external actors in such initiatives. Often, involvement of external actors in such national initiatives, has been because support has been requested, suggested or encouraged by national counterparts. In other cases, external actors initiate such projects and processes themselves. Depending on the different origins of external involvement, national ownership can, more or less, be achieved, while inclusivity might have a chance to be optimized if stakeholders professionally commit to it, whatever the origin of external actors' involvement is.

In post-conflict or fragile and politically complex countries where external actors operate, a certain number of valid reasons can explain their involvement in national political/democratic processes and other capacity building for conflict

prevention activities, including: a) lack of capacities or a lack of a critical mass of citizens to launch and deliver on those domains; b) high levels of mistrust between national actors that hampers initiative from any one of them; c) polarization and ethnic politics that make it unacceptable for each of the groups to originate ideas acceptable to other groups; d) and, lack of financial resources to carry out such initiatives. This last reason could, in some cases, induce the involvement of donors as well as the UN and the national counterparts who automatically become 'players' in the process. In such cases there would be more complexity in the assessment of national ownership and sustainability (as a dimension of ownership).

## Operational Issues: The case of UN support to Guinea-Bissau

In 2010, further to a demand by the President Malam Bacai Sanha of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, after decades of political instability marked by military coups, a civil war and many political assassinations, the National Assembly issued a bill on the organization of a National Reconciliation Process, and made the Speaker of the Assembly the Chairman of such an initiative. When the latter requested support from the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for the implementation of the initiative, the PDA and a colleague from the political section of the Guinea-Bissau UN mission met the Speaker. The Speaker's first request was to help him better understand what a National Reconciliation Process means and what it could look like in practice. In this case he acknowledged that his knowledge of the issue was limited to what he heard on the South-African and the Rwandese processes.

We suggested establishing a kind of steering committee involving a maximum of 20 persons (from the relevant state institutions, religious groups, the military, academia, women and youth group leaders, as well as other relevant civil society groups). We then facilitated a workshop to present as many as five initiatives similar to those held in other countries such as Rwanda and South Africa, as well as summaries and end-results of three previous national initiatives. That exercise allowed the steering committee to decide on what the process they needed in Guinea-Bissau should look like. The UN then supported the drafting of the first concept note or Terms of Reference (ToRs) by the committee, organized several other workshops for the design process and planning, assisted in the identification of the participants for the 11 regional consultations and the training of the facilitators they nominated. Furthermore, it organized preparatory workshops for women leaders of different urban and rural groups and associations to help make their contributions more substantive. Later it accompanied the steering committee chair to convince opposition leaders to join the process and supported it to mobilize resources and deliver 11 consultations, draft reports and plan and deliver the national concluding phase of a consultative process known as the National Conference towards Peace and Development.

<sup>2</sup> UN Secretary General; report 2012: *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict*.

<sup>3</sup> From the Review of the Literature prepared by Eli Starnes, NUPI; Sara Helmuller and Martina Santischi (eds.) *Is Local Beautiful?: Peacebuilding between International Interventions and Locally Led Initiatives* (Springer, 2014).

Conforming with the analytical framework of the concepts of inclusivity and ownership presented above, the context-specific questions below are useful to ask when trying to find out the level of inclusion and how national ownership could be measured:

- Did our clarification to the Speaker bring needed clarification to the Speaker enhance or weaken national ownership?
- Was support to train the facilitators they selected, based on criteria suggested by external parties, a fact that weakened or strengthened national ownership?
- Does the presence of external actors and active coaching of the facilitators on the ground weaken or strengthen national ownership?
- How does the resources brought in by foreign partners affect the levels of national ownership?
- What was the outcome of the process and how sustainable were its results?
- Did the steering committee's composition reflect or sufficiently represent the diversity of groups in the country?
- Did the number of participants and their diversity sufficiently represent the diversity of the groups in the country?
- Does the presence of a number of women leaders translate into real gender inclusion?
- Do communication campaigns through community radio, national radio and television positively impact on national ownership?
- Would the outcome have been more locally owned if external actors were not involved?
- Would the processes have been more locally owned, e.g. grounded in local traditions and culture, if they were not modelled on examples from other contexts/international best practice?

### Measuring National Ownership

As mentioned earlier, sustainability might be considered the ultimate test of ownership where conflict prevention processes and capacity building activities are concerned. It is important to emphasize here that sustainability in this context relates to change. Indeed, it is clear that conflict prevention capacity building and other peace consolidation intervention take time for results to be visible. In addition, sustainability should not be linked only with the capacity to "survive" after the donors and other technical partners depart. It should also be linked to observable changes at the four following levels: individual, relational, institutional and cultural. Yet, there is not a strong agreement between Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) specialists on how to evaluate conflict prevention or peace consolidation projects, even if the approach proposed by OECD targeting the following four criteria provides a relevant enough framework:

1. **Relevance**, as the criterion used to assess the extent to which the objectives and activities of the intervention(s) respond to the needs of beneficiaries and the peacebuilding process;
2. **Effectiveness**, used to evaluate whether an intervention

has met its intended objectives with respect to its immediate peacebuilding environment, or is likely to do so;

3. **Impact**, which refers to the wider effects produced by an intervention. Such effects may be positive or negative, and may be produced directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally; and

4. **Sustainability**, defined as the continuation of benefits at the end of assistance.

### Typology of Conflict Prevention Capacity Building Interventions

Capacity building encompasses the range of different activities aimed at strengthening technical and operational abilities, the knowledge of people working in the field of peacebuilding, the efforts to enhance the different functions of their organizations and systems as well as activities intended to make their environment more conducive for them to achieve their specific objectives. In this Issue Brief the various processes leading to reductions in conflicts and consolidating peace in societies are considered. These capacity building interventions may constitute 'learning by doing' opportunities, whether they benefit from the technical accompaniment of partners like the UN or not.

In dealing with the complex issue of measuring national ownership of conflict prevention and capacity building interventions, the following four broad categories are suggested:

1. Interventions delivered through traditional workshop formats;
2. Interventions delivered in support (facilitation) of mediation or negotiation processes or specific problems solving;
3. Interventions in support of wider (national) dialogue or consultative processes; and
4. Infrastructures, platforms and forums setting.

### Suggested Principles in Measuring National Ownership

In attempts to measure national ownership of conflict prevention capacity building and interventions, it is important to think about the various components of each of the four different categories proposed above as processes.

This principle aligns with the suggestion made by Jerry McCann that "[t]here are several important reasons a process rather than project orientation is critical in peacebuilding interventions: (i) in order to truly understand both the capacities and limitations of target groups, sufficient time and resources must be dedicated; (ii) ownership requires trust, trust requires relationship, and relationships need time and cooperation to develop; and (iii) flexibility is essential, so as to adjust the course of action through the unpredictable tangle of challenges that emerge as change begins to take place. How each of these issues is handled has consequences for the quality of the peacebuilding intervention and the sustained results it will generate." It is important to think of conflict prevention interventions as processes – that is, as successive, well planned and coordinated set of steps with specific outputs leading to a clearly identified objective.

This applies to traditional conflict prevention capacity building intervention in the form of workshops, mediations or negotiations, or wider consultative processes. Indeed, when approached or conceived as such, any type of the above interventions allows a focus on each step and the possibility to ask the relevant questions (see the Matrix on next page) in relation to the identification of relevant indicators.

### Conclusion

How to measure national ownership in conflict prevention interventions and capacity building is at the same time a critical question to answer and a complex process to undertake

and achieve. Firstly there exist difficult questions on how to operationalize concepts like ownership, inclusivity and sustainability. In addition, the diversity of real settings where interventions take place with national and external actors in specific power relations, brings more complexity to any attempt to set a 'scientific' (that is a general, rigorous, systematic and replicable) methodology and produce relevant tools for the measurement of ownership at national level. The questions proposed in the matrix below suggest some key pointers that could inform the future design of an approach for measuring national ownership.

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
<b>INTERVENTION TYPES</b> <b>STEPS NEEDED</b> <b>For EACH TYPE</b>	Seminars, Courses and workshops	Mediation Negotiation Political parties' dialogue	National Dialogue National Consultative Processes	Infrastructures for Peace National Platforms Forums
<b>PREPARATION PHASE</b>	-Who first expressed the need to undertake the initiative? - Does it meet a real need? -Participants selection? - Agenda setting? -How external actors were involved?	-Origin of external actors' involvement? -Acceptance of protagonists? -Who convened? -Where? -Agenda setting?	-Origin of the initiative? -Who were consulted for agreement? -Who decided objectives? -Who set methodology?	-Originally existing structures? who evaluated their functioning and effectiveness? Who proposed formalization? How existing structures were integrated in the new structure
<b>RESOURCE MOBILIZATION</b>	-Who provided? -Who managed? -Who controlled	-Who provided? -Who managed? -Who controlled	-Who provided? -Who managed? -Who controlled	-Who provided? -Who managed? -Who controlled
	-Who facilitated? -Content adapted to needs & context? - Was methodology	-Where the initiative originated from? -How did external actors got in? What role for them?	-Specific role of the external actors? -How national actors appreciate their specific roles during the process?	-How roles were shared? Who designated leadership? How is it composed? How functional relationships decided

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