



## **Eastern and Central Africa Regional Steering Group Meeting**

Held at Fairway Hotel – Kampala, Uganda

November 12-13, 2024.

Facilitated by Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng

### **Background**

Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), in partnership with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), hosted an annual Regional Steering Group (RSG) meeting, from November 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> 2024, in Kampala Uganda. It was attended by 30 focal point leaders representing 16 countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, DRC, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Occupied Palestine Territories (Middle East and North Africa), Niger (West Africa) Somalia, Somali Land, South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda. This was the first physical meeting since 2019 following the COVID 19 pandemic. The meeting provided an opportunity for the network members to come together to share country-specific experiences in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The meeting addressed a number of issues and enabled participants to share experiences and expertise and learn about new developments within the network and the region. It also enabled participants to understand the program and its key concepts better, and served as the official launch/inception of the Dutch-funded MFA program for ECA members, and other regions like West Africa and MENA that benefit from the program.

### **The Purpose of the Workshop**

The objectives of the meeting included;

- Deepening the membership's understanding of regional and national contexts, and identifying key priority areas and reflection on areas of connections and gaps
- Fostering a sense of regional community, togetherness and shared purpose around the program ;
- Introducing and launching of the Connection for *Peace: Powerful Local Peacebuilding and Policies 2024-2031*" program for Eastern and Central Africa (ECA), funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- Mapping out the national, regional and global policy landscape, for the strengthening of the network and for sustainable peace in the region.

## **Methodology**

The two-day meeting was guided by specific questions; group discussions; exercises and the use of various tools to enable bonding and connecting of participants. This process supported sharing of values and identification of gender and intergenerational gaps. This was achieved through the fish bowl and the world café tools that supported the mapping of network commonalities; and the SWOT analysis and sensemaking of the SWOT analysis, which helped participants to identify the strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats within the network. Through group work, duo conversations, interactive plenaries and brainstorming, participants were provided the opportunity to generate a collection of learning/intervention needs, reflections, identification of action points, among other outcomes. The launching of the new Dutch MFA-funded program was aimed at enabling participants to have a clear and common understanding of the program, emphasizing on the understanding the relationship between concepts organisation and network. The workshop methodology helped to align the participants with the launched program's principles of co-creation, inclusiveness, ownership and active participation.

## **Main Topics discussed**

Participants shared the regional and country-specific contexts, which highlighted diverse thematic and evolved into the topics that were discussed during the two-day meeting. These included sharing and considering the different approaches to address insecurity at country and regional levels; the continuous shrinking civic space and weakened institutions; slow implementation of the various Peace Agreements reached; lack of political will to engage in conflict resolutions; inter and intra-communal conflicts; governance challenges and the exclusion of youth, women and other marginalized groups from effective participation in peace processes; the national and regional natural resource conflicts, funding challenges and proliferation of SALWs; and challenges of climate change, refugees and internally displaced persons. The meeting also proposed to carry out a study that will guide, analyze and inform the strategic direction of the program, to address some of these challenges, through regional networking, beyond the funded ECA countries.

## **Expected Outcomes**

1. Learning and exchange between ECA members
2. Shared understanding of the Dutch MFA program and its key concepts
3. Strengthened regional network around the Dutch MFA program
4. Identification of needs, capacities, opportunities, and connections at the local, national, and regional levels
5. A strengthened network that influences peace building and conflict prevention in the region.

## **The Summary of the Workshop Proceedings**

### **Introduction**

The workshop was opened by the CECORE Executive Director Ms. Rose Othieno, who welcomed participants and thanked them for prioritizing the annual meeting, given the busy period when organisations prepare to close for the festive holidays.

Mr. Patrick Bwire, the GPPAC Regional Liaison Officer- Eastern and Central Africa, emphasized the unique good model, practices, approaches and structures that GPPAC has from local to global level, with horizontal and vertical linkages. He called upon participants to take advantage of the physical meeting to re-connect and enhance locally-led policy influencing, learning and exchanges at local, national, regional and global level. He indicated that the Eastern and Central Africa program is anchored on the slogan of locally-led and impactful peacebuilding; and is based on the design, practice, and desired outcome that the Dutch MFA program plans to apply throughout the implementation of the program.

### **Getting to Know Each Other Better**

In order to know each other and get the general pulse of what is happening in each country of the network members, participants were asked to introduce themselves, their countries of origin and say what excited them to be part of the workshop. The getting to know each other better session also involved participants sharing their personal values (who are you?). Among the shared values were love, creativity, resistance, resilience, equality, integrity, tolerance, character, respect and humanity. Participants were then divided into four groups basing on the commonalities of their values, to identify one agreed value among their self-identified values to share at the plenary. At plenary participants concluded the sharing with three values of humility, integrity and character as what interconnected them and that all the other values are eventually embedded in the value of character.

One of the stories shared in groups when presenting a value that successfully address a challenge, was the case from Cameroon – *“I was once asked to take care of an ill person who was a prisoner, but I refused to and rather decided to take care of his bills even though I kept close to him. Slowly, the patient improved and would freely get in and of hospital. The challenge came when he disappeared from the hospital. The hospital administration accused me of having had a hand in his escape and thus wanted to hold me accountable for the patient’s disappearance. Because of my character, the hospital staff including doctors and other medical workers, defended me and rather put a blame on the security team. I was then exonerated because of my character related to integrity and humanity.”*

### **Understanding of the Different Contexts**

Participants shared their different contexts and why they are part of the network. They shared the different thematic areas in their organisations. Participants from Uganda and Somalia, countries under the Dutch MFA-funded program, identified the contexts of conflict resolution and transformation and climate change; while those from other countries mentioned governance, women and youth, economic empowerment, advocacy and peer to peer learning as some of the contexts under which they operate.

The participants also shared about their areas of focus in peace building; the pressing issues in their work and their countries at large; the approaches they use to implement the activities and the areas where they need further learning. The sharing showed that participants believed that strength lies in working collectively. They shared a number of reasons why they joined the network. Some of their reasons were; exploring the potentials of collaboration which helps them to connect with other organizations, where they receive more insights in building sustainable peace. The participants found the workshop a useful space to share what is happening in their countries and learning from others how to address the challenges they face at country level. Participants also shared what inspired them to be part of the network. These include learning from one another; and sharing information, skills and experiences in problem solving. They said that such meetings continue to strengthen their organisations and the roles they play in their respective countries, with subsequent impact on the communities they serve. They observed that networking brings power of meaningful collaboration, which has provided them a feeling of security and protection. It also gives them the ability to connect to other peace builders, facilitators, policy influencers and policy makers worldwide. This way, they observed, the network continues to grow stronger as they come together to share their diverse skills, expertise and power. There is also a possibility of carrying out joint resource mobilization that builds one voice and a stronger membership. As a way of affirmation, all participants showed excitement, gratefulness and appreciation for the organizers and the resource providers for bringing together such a big number of people dedicated to peacebuilding in the region.

The workshop identified shared narratives and commonalities in what members are implementing and the gaps that the network could collectively address in future in a more strategic manner. The **Key Challenges** network members experience were identified to be in the areas of resource mobilization, inclusiveness, governance, localization, early warning and response, MHPSS/Trauma and disarmament (DDR). Other identified challenges were political and administration burdens, existing social-cultural norms, ongoing conflict/insecurity, shrinking civic space and disconnection between peacebuilding partners leading to duplication of work, lack of commitment between the political and civic leadership, information gap, criminalization and false accusations by political leadership and security organs, laws are never translated into local language. The identified **Gaps/Missing Link** were low capacity to influence policy and policy makers, and limited skills in involvement of regional actors.

### **Exclusion of Women and Youth from the Peace Architecture**

**The Fish Bowl Exercise** was carried out as part of the process of discussing this topic. It was guided by 4 key questions<sup>1</sup>. The facilitator asked the four questions regarding their participation in the peace building processes to participants below 40 years who sat within a circle formed by

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<sup>1</sup> What is it like for you as youths to be involved in peace building in your country? what challenges do you face because you are youths that you need the older peace activists to know? what untapped strength and resources do you think you have that you would like older peace activists to know?; and what would you like to ask the older peace activists to help you achieve your peace building goals.

those above 40 years. Similar questions in relation to their participation were in turn asked to the women who replaced the youth peace activists. In return the older and male peace activists, respectively, were asked two key questions in response to those asked to the youth and women activists, respectively.<sup>2</sup> This interaction enabled the intergenerational and gender discussions to happen, where a few youths and women who participated were able to air out their grievances and provide suggestions that would enhance their participation in peace building. Their suggestions were further discussed in the general SWOT analysis.

The highlights of these conversations included the youths feeling active and significant in peacebuilding work. Their belief, which was repeatedly expressed, was that their participation in peacebuilding processes would address some of the problems they experience as youth. One youth from Burundi said, *"I feel good getting involved in peacebuilding unlike when I was an armed warrior in my country. I was a perpetrator of violence against my country as I am a former combatant, I had nothing to lose, and could not understand anything but enjoyed seeing people suffering. I am now a beneficiary of DDR and I saw many youths affected by such. And so, being a youth and getting involved in peacebuilding brings out my voice to the youth not to join violence but to use nonviolent means to peace. It's an opportunity for the young generation to see that we have hope and that our children and grandchildren do not suffer like us."*

The youths pointed out the challenges they face when carrying out peace work, which includes not being listened to by the older generations; patriarchy and socialized norms that make the youth and women not to exploit their potentials fully; and limited power, financial resources and mentorship. They believe that with their energy, availability, creativity and skills they can immensely contribute to the peace architecture at both local and regional levels, if the older activists supported them by, among other things;

- Investing in them through mentorship schemes
- Providing them space to showcase their potential and gain experience in peace work
- Advocating for policies that are youth inclusive
- Advocating for education systems that suit the trends of the day.

Women on the other hand shared that they often have to push hard to be part of peacebuilding work in their communities, countries and regions and that their male counterparts usually push them out of the peace process spaces. This male orchestrated superiority and discrimination against them and the existing negative social constructs, have affected women's involvement in peace processes. Women are always excluded from peacebuilding activities such as taking up leadership of elections committees and many other peace building leadership positions, using very flimsy excuses. A young female leader from Cameroon concluded saying, *"We are denied opportunities when still breastfeeding, and yet breastfeeding a baby has nothing to do with my potential and does not affect my contribution. While there are usually enough resources to share for peace work, this is not so for women's involvement – and so women are denied participation"*

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<sup>2</sup> What are you hearing youths say to you? and what are you hearing women say to you?

*claiming the resources are not enough. For instance, during peace-talks we are undermined as women, as men say we cannot have meaningful contribution."*

Women had the following to say to their male counterparts;

- Being the gate keepers in society, women provide strategic entry points in peacebuilding work
- The women are the heart and mind of society and are committed in whatever they do for their communities
- Women are good detectors of conflicts or early warning alerts and so have a great role to play in peacebuilding work
- Men should realize the strength women have in peace building and support their efforts
- Women are intelligent and work towards seeing society alive from generation to generation, giving an example resilience of refugee women.

The Male participants reflected on the responses and suggestions provided by both the youths and women and acknowledge that;

- The older activists are not doing much to support the youths from proving their potential in peacebuilding work
- Women yield results when given chance to lead, and so there is great need for collaboration between men and women
- Youth and women are meaningful partners in peacebuilding and that all genders need each other in peace work
- Women are more resilient and resistant and have the power to change situations positively but they still need men to achieve this
- Women have the capacity to build peace and therefore have to be heard and be part of the processes.

### **The SWOT Analysis**

The group work on SWOT analysis enabled participants to critically mirror their contribution to the network; the power within the network and the gendered and intergenerational strength within the network; reflected on the weaknesses they need to work upon; opportunities the network offers the members; as well as the threats they face in their work.

#### **Strengths:**

- A creative and dynamic network of CSOs, with a long experience of years in the field of peacebuilding
- Having a strong foundation that is strategically positioned at all levels of society, conducting advocacy at local, regional and global levels

- The PBAR event proved the network's strength as it brought together diverse categories people from UN, CSOs, academia, government, private sector at national, regional and international levels.
- A strong presence at the grassroots that presents opportunity for localization through local peace structures
- Presence in the Hague and UN in New York making the network accountable and influential
- GPPAC is the biggest and widely known credible network exhibiting solidarity and access to both financial and human resources
- GPPAC holds a range of expertise, adaptability to social dynamics and effective communication
- Strong youth and women engagement for sustainability of the network.

In order to be able to build on the existing strength, participants committed to carry out the following;

- Mobilize funds for regional activities;
- Develop elaborate plans to reinforce capacity of members for conflict transformation;
- Advocate for sustainable peacebuilding work at regional level
- Support exchange programs among members from different countries for sharing good practices and experiences
- Carry out research work to increase visibility of the network activities at local and regional level.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Minimal presence of Women and Youth in the leadership of the peace processes
- Poor internal and external communications between and among network members, resulting in little or no visibility of their successes
- Limited resources
- Lack of commitment from members to activities following network calls, especially after COVID 19 pandemic
- Insensitivity to members beliefs by organizing network meetings on Fridays – a prayer day for some members
- Limited knowledge and skills by some members regarding their work
- Absence of GPPAC Action Plans
- Limited opportunities to share experiences
- Insensitivity about some members' communication challenges by sharing documents only in English
- Staff turnover and weaknesses of staff coordination at the global level
- Some local approaches not adequately addressing the issue of gender and youth inclusivity.

## **Opportunities:**

- Easier to access funding opportunities as a network
- Expertise linkages, best practices and trans-boundary challenges through the network building capacities of members organisations
- Linking the local to global networking opportunities provides a base to engage with regional and global actors such as AU, IGAD, ECOWAS, UN among others
- The possibility of influencing national and regional policies through existing frameworks at those levels
- Working towards addressing the gaps under the local policy frameworks.
- More identified opportunities are;
  - a. continental capacity building
  - b. community support for peace infrastructures
  - c. existence of regional bodies like IGAD
  - d. representation of regional members
  - e. GPPAC visibility and entry points to regional and global peace infrastructures.

To realize the above, members proposed the following approaches by GPPAC to enhance these opportunities;

- ✓ Putting more focus on Early Warning and Early Response for the prevention of violence
- ✓ Developing a locally-led, co-creation peacebuilding and evidence-based program design for impactful work
- ✓ Building on local and existing knowledge and relevant local expertise in program implementation
- ✓ Prioritizing the 'leave no one behind' approach to achieving inclusivity
- ✓ Connecting local to global as well as horizontal and vertical linkages in the design implementation of programs/projects
- ✓ Capacity strengthening of members and GPPAC in general
- ✓ Mainstreaming conflict sensitive approaches throughout the program design for impactful peacebuilding through constructive dialogue, advocacy and lobbying for policy influencing.

## **Threats:**

- Regional and global conflicts,
- Donors determining/dictating priority areas for support regardless of the local contextual needs
- Volatility of international issues, diseases and epidemics/pandemics
- Political instability in many countries resulting in competition for available funding
- Governments and intergovernmental organizations sometimes refusing to appreciate the problems in the regions
- Impact of climate change



- Youth immigrations in search for jobs leading brain drain and loss of human resource
- Families failing to educate their children due to high levels of poverty
- High population growth and scarcity of land as a resource
- High expectations by network members and beneficiaries
- Duplication of efforts
- Corruption, and dependence on donors.

The following strategies were considered to mitigate the identified threats;

- Accompany member organisations in advocating for civic space
- Conflict transformation programs for intra and interstate conflicts
- Align programing to the local context and not donor priority
- Develop climate change-adaptive programs
- Design peace connectors such as income generating innovations for peace programs involving the youth to keep them engaged as a way of creating peace
- Mainstream gender in programs

### **What Stood Out**

From the SWOT analysis participants shared the following as what stood out for them and what needs to be done to build an effective and efficient GPPAC;

- The need to develop an effective platform where members would share information, learn from one another to effect change in their communities
- The network needs to develop a vigorous collective mobilization of resources for activities across the region
- Put in place a mechanism for members to utilize their internal expertise to build the capacity of members of the network for effective and efficient growth which would contribute to visibility for the network and its members
- Hold regular meetings both virtual and physical to enhance commitment, collective resource mobilization, and sharing of ideas, experiences and best practices
- There should be an intentional plan to develop a mechanism for the network members that would develop a strategy of involving youth and women more in peace processes

### **Addressing Weaknesses and gaps**

Members were asked to suggest possible ways of dealing with identified weaknesses and gaps and among other views were;

- improving communication and information sharing across the board;
- Mapping of members' work, expertise and profiles,
- Focus and individual approaches regularly conducted and shared;
- Increased face to face meetings and specify gender representation;
- Appoint Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PMEL) expert to better manage data;

- Create possibility for systemic learning exchanges between members and regions.

### **The Take Home**

The workshop concluded with participants being asked what they benefited that they could carry back home with them, at the end of the meeting and below were their thoughts:

- Going back stronger and united in the power of networking
- Building on their organisation's local capacities for peacebuilding
- Great facilitation style, that has enabled them to internalize how to do better at organizational and country level
- Working more closely with others for easy access to locally-resourced peacebuilding funds
- Improving their visibility at global and country level
- Carry out collaborations based on the identified opportunities and strengths
- Renewed energy to do better than before and continuing to engage the regional and global secretariats
- Remaining accountable and sharing all that they are doing as members, and keeping connected
- Exploring and putting to use knowledge and organizational skills based on how the workshop was organized

### **Conclusion**

- Members identified and agreed on key approaches to mainstream the new program in their ongoing activities. These included; conflict prevention, locally-led and co-creation peacebuilding; building on local and existing knowledge; connecting local to global; capacity strengthening; and conflict sensitivity. This will be done using a learning and connection loop approach.
- Members got a clear understanding of the objectives of the program and how all members can contribute to their realization – beyond the funded countries (Uganda and Somalia).
- Members shared their understanding of the network approach of the new program in their day-day peacebuilding work.
- Members resolved to address the gender and intergenerational gaps in their respective countries and share power with youths and women in peace building leadership.
- Members committed to continue coordination and collaboration with the funded organisations in Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) – Uganda and Somalia, and Palestine, in the planning and implementation of the program.
- They called upon the Global secretariat to continue its role of linking other GPPAC members in the region to the program.