

REFLECTIONS

Karin Johanson, Gary Milante, Sigrún Rawet, Martina Selmi, Urban Sjöström

This year, the theme for the Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development was ‘[From crisis response to peacebuilding: Achieving synergies](#)’. The co-hosts, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), aimed to better understand how peacebuilders navigate the complexities of moving from the short-term challenges of ‘stabilization’ to a longer-lasting sustainable peace. In total, 21 [partner organizations](#) contributed to delivering 53 discussions and roundtables over the three-day event, including ten parallel sessions on the Open Day (May 14) and 43 roundtables, workshops and group discussions on the Focus Days (May 15–16). Over 750 people attended the Open Day, while approximately 400 participants joined by invitation over the two Focus Days. These senior practitioners and policymakers met to workshop some of the most pressing problems facing peacebuilders today and—of equal importance—reinforce the networks these peacebuilders will need to solve the problems they will face tomorrow.

Partners and participants to the Stockholm Forum grappled with the theme, engaging with how humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, stabilization and security interventions as well as peacebuilders can find lasting, sustainable peaceful solutions to complex problems. While it is impossible to summarize all 53 sessions and their [session reports](#), the sessions have been arranged below under three framing questions posed on the first day of the Forum. Links to each session report are included where relevant.

HOW CAN EXISTING SUPPORT BECOME MORE SPECIFIC AND DIRECTED TOWARDS BUILDING A TRULY INCLUSIVE PEACE? IS IT A MATTER OF VOLUME OR WAYS OF WORKING OR BOTH?

Many of the sessions focused on *how* peace is delivered peace, rather than *what* peace was delivered. For example, while security is often treated independently as a sector, peace, as conceived and discussed by Forum participants, is rarely conceived as a sector or a programmatic area, rather it was often discussed as a way of doing things ([see report 28](#)). Stabilization may be assessed by how it is done, rather than what is done ([see report 37](#)). A number of sessions discussed the importance of connecting peacebuilders to security actors

When we defer accountability, it has consequences.

([see report 21](#)) so that both could deliver on common objectives, including protection of civilians ([see report 50](#)) and reform of the security sector ([see report 47](#)). One of the many sessions on the Sahel was focused on unpacking exactly how peace is conceptualized and who defines it ([see report 43](#)). Likewise, stability and peace will be necessary if other goals in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (also known as Agenda 2030) are to be reached, like eliminating hunger ([see report 3](#)) or promoting nutrition and sustainable agriculture ([see report 25](#)).

Of course, peace is not always instrumental, it is often an objective in its own right—other sessions focused on linking governance to peacebuilding, as an objective of a lasting peace can serve as a foundation and common entry point for engaging in governance reform ([see report 20](#) and [report 30](#)). Likewise, a commitment to human rights and other global obligations can serve as a foundational entry point for engaging in delivering Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 ([see report 18](#)). Also, even where peace is the objective, human rights are fundamental—accountability cannot be deferred without consequences ([see report 14](#)) and there needs to be an awareness of false narratives that suggest that there is a trade-off between legal rights and obligations against reconstruction and stability—they are not mutually exclusive ([see report 15](#)).

The idea that peace is a process rather than a condition was framed by a plenary session on the first day, in which a panellist noted that we need to stop thinking about peace as a state, but rather to ‘...re-frame peace as a 20-year process’ ([see report 9](#)). Indeed, many participants pushed the discussion forward by considering that ‘corruption is a system’ ([see report 11](#)) and how governance reform can be undertaken even in the presence of conflict and violence ([see report 20](#)). One session underlined the role of ombudsmen in promoting reform and delivery of the Agenda 2030 ([see report 30](#)). The nature of an ever evolving policy and demographic terrain requires adaptation. This terrain was explored in sessions on the mega-trends in Africa over the next 30 years ([see report 23](#)) and recent developments in the Horn of Africa ([see report 13](#)).

The more unhappy the government is with the ombudsman institution, the better the job of the institution.

Because peace is a process, not a condition, it is fluid and evolving. Indeed, in many countries, there is no ‘normal’ to return, to—one participant noted that the concept of stabilization was unhelpful unless it was understood as a ‘redistribution of power’ reflecting a new equilibrium ([see report 32](#)). The dynamic nature of peace means that it can be difficult to understand. Bridging this gap is vital to peacebuilders since they must be inside the system in order to change it ([see report 28](#)). As a result, the full breadth of the challenges associated with peacebuilding can be daunting as demonstrated by a plenary on demographic trends in Africa ([see report 2](#)). Likewise, the challenges in adapting to ([see report 48](#)) and mitigating the effects of climate change will be particularly difficult because so many of these changes have already been set in motion ([see report 6](#)), for example in the Lake Chad Basin ([see report 12](#)).

FOR MANY DECADES, WE HAVE HAD THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS DESIGNATING THE RULES OF WAR. DO WE NEED TO DEVELOP AND ADOPT PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING PEACE?

Participants engaged with this theme by both endorsing new principles to reinforcing already existing principles. There was agreement surrounding the notion that more needs to be done delivering on these principles and that building peace only works when those who build it value it ([see report 46](#)). Many participants stressed that ownership is not just by national governments, but by civil society ([see report 36](#)); by the private sector; by local leaders ([see report 17](#)); and by international and by regional actors committed to a lasting peace ([see report 45](#)). Where peace fails, it can be because external actors intervene contrary to local peace objectives ([see report 31](#)) and/or because of a lack of buy-in by local leaders as in South Sudan ([see report 33](#)) or Cameroon ([see report 27](#)). Discussions also focused on how regional actors, like China ([see report 44](#)), can become more involved in the dialogue on principles for peacebuilding and development. Speakers in other panels cautioned that conflict in cyberspace has the potential to undermine progress made on norms, and highlighted the need to broaden the discussion to include the private sector and tech industry ([see report 10](#) and [report 52](#)).

Inclusivity is a process, it cannot be imposed from day 1.

The definition of security shifts depending on how it is interpreted ([see report 43](#)). In the same way, the quality and sustainability of peace depend on who is defines and negotiates it ([see report 7](#)). A number of sessions focused on inclusivity by asking how we know it when we see it and its value in addressing grievances ([see report 27](#)); and promoting dialogue ([see report 42](#)) for a lasting peace ([see report 24](#)). Participants were reminded that ‘who should be at the table’ should be considered an opportunity, rather than a constraint, as peacebuilders can convene actors without a voice for difficult discussions ([see report 8](#)) and can use that convening power to keep human rights at the

fore ([see report 15](#)). Some also questioned the continued centrality of ‘the table’ and its mechanisms for inclusion.

Inclusivity was further unpacked through sessions on the gendered dimensions of conflict. These sessions stressed the value of support to women’s organizations ([see report 19](#)) and how identity and

There’s a disconnect between local efforts and international dialogue on the frameworks... the real shift needs to be from local to global, not the other way around.

marginalization, including gender, ethnicity and language, are mobilized for both peace and conflict ([see report 29](#)). Women’s participation and leadership in peace efforts are of particular importance. A key finding in many of these sessions was that inclusion is not only about including certain groups but it also must be a way of thinking and acting that is owned by all. Indeed, one session used behavioural sciences to explore how peoples’ experience of conflict affects their recollection and understanding of it ([see report 38](#)).

ARE THERE SUFFICIENT MECHANISMS IN PLACE FOR BRINGING ACTORS IN CRISIS RESPONSE TOGETHER WITH PEACEBUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS? IF NOT—WHAT IS NEEDED?

The 2019 Stockholm Forum saw an increase in the number of actors beyond the development and peacebuilding space, precisely because so many actors are grappling with ways to find lasting solutions to complex problems, including in the humanitarian field. The so-called ‘triple-nexus’ of humanitarian, security/peace and development action was explored in a plenary session ([see report 5](#)). It was explored further during focus day round-table sessions on how local delivery

People who are not visible in your horizon would not be visible in your answers.

provides examples of working with a nexus approach in Somalia ([see report 22](#)); the importance of joint funding and modalities, including peace platforms, as entry points to bridge operational silos ([see report 40](#)); and by considering how academic disciplines in security and development can bridge gaps in research ([see report 16](#)).

The importance of strategic patience was highlighted, and the necessity of longer-term funding to give activities with a peacebuilding objective a chance to contribute to transformation.

One advantage of the round-table format for the Stockholm Forum is the tremendous expertise gathered around the table to discuss a given topic. While a few catalytic interventions may start the conversations, the Stockholm Forum is built around dialogue which promotes exchange and allows practitioners to share their expertise with peers. This allowed for frank and open discussion about successes and failures and the type of learning necessary for adaptation.

One critical area (central to the theme of the Stockholm Forum this year), was that of evolving mandates, mission draw-downs and changing relationships in a peacebuilding context. One session compared the situations in Mali and Somalia

Bringing actors into talks is not a reward, it is a necessity
—Annika Söder

([see report 32](#)) to discuss the implications of mission draw-downs and redefining mandates. Others explored the conditions that contribute to successful peacekeeping and recurrent challenges, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali ([see report 1](#)) and through comparison of the role of police in peace operations in multiple contexts ([see report 51](#)).

A recurrent theme was the importance of designing solutions that are context-specific and contribute to the final objective. If the objective is a lasting peace, then rushed elections that can lead to grievances and, possibly, violence, may be counterproductive ([see report 41](#)). If parliament

is no longer serving the purpose of legislation and oversight, then solutions will need to start from that context ([see report 11](#)).

Another challenge raised repeatedly was that of connecting global frameworks to local peacebuilding ([see report 26](#)). While commitment to initiatives like the SDGs ([see report 4](#)); commitments to disarmament ([see report 35](#)); and other global commitments related to health ([see report 34](#)); or climate change ([see report 6](#)) may drive attention and financing from donors, these global principles may face challenges in gaining traction locally in the Horn of Africa ([see report 13](#)); the Maghreb ([see report 39](#)); the Sahel ([see report 49](#)); or more specifically South Sudan ([see report 33](#)); Syria ([see report 15](#)); or Myanmar ([see report 4](#)) where exigencies challenge commitments to global principles.

***We need to not only look at
'invited spaces' but also to invent
our own spaces to make our
voices heard
— Fatima Shehu Imam***

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Saving lives today and building peace for tomorrow—is that possible?

This was the overall question of the Stockholm Forum this year. Humanitarian assistance, security responses, development cooperation and peacebuilding are different communities and use different terminology and approaches. However, many times they are working in the same settings, where we need to seize opportunities for synergies, while respecting different mandates in addressing immediate crises and at the same time building sustainable peace and development.

The Stockholm Forum is a reminder that humanitarian actors are not peacebuilders but humanitarian action helps to make peace possible, not least if it is shaped in a way that contributes to the creation of peace in the long run. Stabilization and security interventions are key to address immediate security threats and constitute key building blocks for sustainable peace and development, if they are part of a broad and inclusive framework.

Peace is a messy business. It is highly experimental and requires partnerships and building trust to truly explore problems and find solutions that can last. The 2019 Stockholm Forum: (a) reminded participants that peace is a process, not a state; (b) that inclusivity is key since peace is defined and owned by the ones who are involved in the process and; (c) that it is necessary to design solutions benefiting function and to create space for honest exchange and learning from those who do.

SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions highlights that the sustainable development goals in Agenda 2030 will not be achieved unless violence and fragility are addressed. Given the global nature of the challenge, there is a need for a comprehensive strategic vision that goes beyond national or sectoral approaches. All SDGs are integrated and interdependent.

So how can existing support become more specific and directed towards building a truly inclusive peace? Is it a matter of volume or ways of working or both?

It was clear in the discussions of the Forum that additional resources are needed, coupled with new ways of working. Development cooperation directed specifically towards peacebuilding is still too limited and the synergies with political dialogue processes often under-utilized. At the same time, there are opportunities to work differently with joint analysis and planning. Increasing the

***A peace where the voices of
communities, of victims, of
women have been heard – in
preparations, in
negotiations, and in
implementation – will be
more deeply rooted and has
a greater chance of lasting
longer.***

— Margot Wallström

focus on the prevention of violent conflict requires more integrated and inclusive approaches, not least by security, development and political actions. Do we need to develop and adopt principles for building inclusive and sustainable peace?

The Forum indicated that more work will be needed. While there is broad agreement on the rhetoric around inclusivity, in practice there is still a long way to go. A process to address this gap, and to highlight meaningful examples of inclusive peace processes could be an important contribution to the continued international efforts to promote long-term inclusive peace.

Are there sufficient mechanisms in place for bringing actors in crisis response together with peacebuilding and development actors? If not—what is needed?

It was apparent during the Forum that mechanisms for joint approaches exist however not always applied. It might therefore be necessary to find incentives for more combined efforts. It is important however to not push any actor outside their mandate—then there is a risk of doing harm rather than good. It was also evident that meeting places where for example a member of a peacekeeping team would exchange informally with humanitarian actors or civil society representatives are still not frequent enough. It is particularly important at the country level, that such mechanisms and meeting places are established. It was widely agreed that the Forum itself can serve a purpose in this regard in future sessions.

As Peter Eriksson, Sweden's Minister for International Development Cooperation underlined, and the discussions of the Forum confirmed, coming together is the only way of working if we are supposed to take on the challenges of today and achieve Agenda 2030 for all.

Saving lives today and building peace for tomorrow is possible—if we do it together.

