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REIMAGINING PEACEBUILDING THROUGH INNOVATION

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OVERVIEW

Technological innovation offers promising approaches to the development of more effective strategies for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This session considered the technology tools and innovation processes adopted by peacebuilders, an emerging body of practice often referred to as 'peacetech'. Case studies were presented to illustrate the different possible functions of technology in peacebuilding initiatives (information, communication, networking and mobilization) and the technology innovation processes (hackathons, innovation labs and user-centred design) that peacebuilders are adopting to develop peacetech.

Building on the case studies, the session critically reviewed the key challenges facing peacetech: (*a*) ensuring compliance with ethical principles and local ownership of technology to deepen engagement; (*b*) finding a balance between scaling solutions and trust building; and (*c*) measuring the impact of technology tools on peace processes. The key takeaways and conclusions from this session will inform further discussion at events organized by Build Up, such as the Build Peace conference on peacebuilding innovation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Ethical concerns beyond data privacy

Conflict sensitivity and do no harm are standard considerations for any peacebuilding project. Peacetech projects raise additional ethical concerns. Most of the conversations to date have focused on privacy concerns about data technologies. Discussants highlighted other equally important ethical challenges with regard to the unintended consequences of technologies for people living in conflict-affected areas. For example, a representative of Elva Community Engagement explained that some participants in its virtual reality project in the Caucasus had experienced overpowering emotions and even trauma when 'walking through' the area from which they had been forced to flee due to conflict.

Engagement and ownership

Peacetech does not by definition increase engagement in peace processes. In fact, it can be extractive and top down. Session discussions emphasized the importance of locally owned and locally driven technologies to ensuring that technology development is driven by local problems rather than external solutions, uses context-relevant technologies and does not 'reinvent the wheel'. If done well, innovation processes can serve as platforms for dialogue, becoming peacebuilding processes in their own right. For example, solutions developed at International Alert's peacehacks, which bring together practitioners and coders to develop prototype tech-based solutions, draw on the distinct skills and perspectives of different groups of professionals to adapt existing technology tools to current peacebuilding challenges.

Trust, scale and impact

Soliya's Connect Program is a virtual exchange for university students that fosters constructive conversation across political, cultural and identity lines. Initiatives like the Connect Program use technology platforms to scale connection between individuals, thereby providing avenues for participation in peacebuilding for marginalized

groups. Discussants noted that the challenge lies in finding the correct balance between scaling participation through a technology platform and ensuring that there is sufficient human contact so that trust building is not weakened. They considered ways to combine face-to-face human interaction with connections mediated by a technology platform to overcome the latter obstacle. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) mentioned its exploration of mapping technologies in support of peacebuilding.[1] When measuring impact, discussants agreed that scale should not be the only measure of success. It is critical that approaches to measuring the impact of peacetech evaluate both quantitative engagement (the number of people who interact with a tool or platform) and relationships (perceptions, attitudes and behaviour changes that are central to peace), and that they clearly distinguish between the two.

From peacetech evolution to peacetech revolution?

Diverse successful peacetech initiatives are currently being deployed to address gaps in peacebuilding processes rather than improve them or create new processes. Build Up's Fellows programme works with local peacebuilders to introduce technology into an existing initiative through a process of user-centred design that enables them to also become more effective stewards of technological innovation within their organizations. Participatory technology innovation processes like the Fellows programme are structured around consultation on an existing process to deliver effective, grounded peacetech. Session participants explored whether user-centred innovation design processes based on an alternative vision for peacebuilding rather than consultations on an existing process might be vehicles to challenge today's peacebuilding architecture and push the peacetech field even further.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop ethical principles for peacetech.
- As peacetech grows, it is critical to facilitate continuing discussions between technologists and peacebuilders regarding how to manage the introduction and application of technology tools into peace processes.
- Initiatives such as JustPeace Labs' Ethical Guidelines for Peacetech are already working towards this.

2. Invest in processes that put peacebuilders in the driving seat of technology development.
- For innovation processes to be truly locally owned, investment should focus on enabling peacebuilders to better interact with opportunities for innovation.
- Supporting peacebuilders to gain skills in technology design and product management is key to impactful peacetech.

3. Fund exploratory work on innovation to reimagine peace processes at every level.
- Peacetech initiatives currently focus on adding to existing peace processes but fall short of addressing the larger structural issues in peacebuilding. For example, despite the opportunity for greater participation through technology, track 1 peace negotiations remain largely closed-door processes.
- A space for visionary peacetech could push this field further forward.

[1] This is discussed in detail in 'Using mapping technologies and information management systems to monitor and build peace' on p. 45 of this report.