

Key Findings and Policy Recommendations¹

The contributions to this Collection all conclude that local agreements deserve greater attention as a peacemaking tool. They also demonstrate variation in how local agreements are used within and across contexts, and indicate significant involvement of international actors in many contexts. Below are key findings from the study and what we suggest are important policy implications for engaging with local agreement-making.

Key Findings

- Local agreements have the potential to reduce levels of conflict for sustained periods, where national peace processes are not possible or have stalled.
- Local agreements can provide key security functions at critical moments:
 - o They can help create a climate in which other local or national peace settlements become possible.
 - o They may ensure that breakdown of the national peace settlement is not triggered by unresolved local violence, or local violence used as an excuse to ignite national conflict.
 - o They may deal with vestigial or even unrelated violence that threatens the implementation of measures such as elections.
 - o Or they may simply ‘except’ significant cities or populations from wider conflict, creating ‘islands’ of peace.
- Local agreements have different modalities: they may reflect particular local initiatives, be driven by peacebuilding projects, or may be part of the ongoing business of indigenous/tribal informal justice systems.
- Local agreements are not all focused exclusively on peace, but may also aim at conflict. For example, where an agreement for peace between two groups or communities, also focuses on how they can clamp down on a third group or community.
- Local agreements often involve broad constituencies, such as community representatives, influential local elders, faith-based groups, women’s organisations, armed actors, social

¹ This note was written by Professor Christine Bell FBA and Laura Wise, Research Associate with the DFID-funded Political Settlements Research Programme. Both are members of the team behind the PA-X Peace Agreements Database. This note is based on a series of ASPR, PSRP and British Academy Joint Analysis Workshops on Local Peace Processes.

workers, and pastoralists or farmers. They can often bring together armed actors that cannot be brought together at the national level.

- However, exclusive practices including gender discrimination or the prioritization of expert participation over victims or survivors of conflict also take place at this scale.

- Local agreements are often reached opportunistically, by creative locally-trusted individuals, who have strong local knowledge and mediation capacity, but are often not ‘the usual suspects’ of mediation. They can be treated with a degree of suspicion and scepticism, and be uncomfortable for international actors to work with. Where international actors, they may be mavericks within the system whose commitment to local politics has seen them build up an unusual network and level of trust locally.

- There are also risks to understanding local agreements as a substitute for failing or stalled national peace processes.
 - ‘Scaling up’ or ‘scaling out’ a successful local peace process to tackle national conflict can be difficult and if internationally driven can negate the local legitimacy, accountability, and (in some contexts) inclusion that local agreement-making practices offer.
 - Local peace processes can operate to alleviate some forms of intergroup conflict, but in so doing can aggravate or displace conflict with other actors or in other areas.

- International supporters of local agreements may encounter areas where local solutions are based on cultural practices which clash with their idea of how norms apply (for example, amnesty and collective punishment).

Recommendations

Drawing from these findings we suggest that *Local Peace Processes* and the wider workshops which supported it point to the following policy recommendations:

1. Local deals have the capacity to create new local social contracts, which can in turn create space for political settlements elsewhere, including at the national level, and where this capacity exists they should be supported.

2. It is important that international actors seeking to support local peace processes have good local knowledge of local dynamics, and capacity to engage with local populations in local conflict analysis before designing programme support.

3. Where local ceasefire agreements focus on detaining or quartering one side’s population to a specific area, they should be treated with extreme caution. This is particularly important in contexts where militarily strong opponents have shown no commitment to a national peace process to end conflict, or little concern about targeting civilians.

4. There is often no easy way to support a causal line from local agreement to national peace process. Where a local process has capacity to reduce violence, mechanisms of support may be useful that accept local peacemaking initiatives on their own terms, rather than requiring that existing local processes feed into a simple national theory of change.
5. Mediators of national peace processes, could nonetheless consider whether a country-wide mechanism of support to local peace initiatives in any national settlement could lend useful support to local processes that are likely to be necessary to embed a national peace agreement at the local level.
6. In particular, nationwide military and political activities should be coordinated to ensure that these do not undermine local commitments to, and risks for, peace. For example, military offensives or counter terror operations may jeopardise locally brokered agreements by undermining security commitments made between local armed groups.
7. Support for local agreement-making should treat written and oral local agreements as being equally significant and binding in contexts where oral traditions take precedent, whilst remaining open to supporting requests or efforts from local communities to better document and communicate agreement contents, processes, and outcomes.
8. Support should acknowledge and build on the practice of creative local and international brokers with depth of local knowledge, existing personal connections, and who are locally trusted.
9. International actors should understand that labelling local agreements with the term 'peace' can put communities at risk of being targeted by armed actors who view peace efforts as disempowering to their control, and work with local communities' own terminology.
10. International donors should work to find ways to support the development outcomes of local agreements punctually, being realistic about the State's central government capacity and will for support.

Resources

Below is an indicative list of open-access resources and reports on local agreements and peace processes:

- o Political Settlements Research Programme
 - o [PA-X Local Peace Agreements Database](#): PA-X Local is the first open-access database of written local peace agreements from across a global set of conflict-affected contexts. The local peace agreements included are publicly available written agreements between locally-based and other actors, which address local conflict-

generating grievances only within a part of the wider conflict-affected area. PA-X Local offers a glimpse into the processes and outcomes of local peacemaking, including information on how it relates to any national peace process.

- o [Jan Pospisil, Laura Wise, & Christine Bell \(2020\) Untangling Conflict: Local Peace Agreements in Contemporary Armed Violence \(ASPR Report No. 5\). Stadtschlaining, Austria: Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution.](#)
- o [Laura Wise, Robert Forster, & Christine Bell \(2019\) Local Peace Processes: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Engagement \(PA-X Report, Spotlight Series\). Edinburgh: Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh.](#)

- o [*Conflict Research Programme*](#): The Conflict Research Programme at the London School of Economics (LSE) has produced numerous reports and policy papers focussing on local agreements in multiple case studies.
- o [Claude Iguma Wakenge & Koen Vlassenroot \(2020\) Do Local Agreements Forge Peace? The Case of Eastern DRC](#)
- o [Nisar Majid \(2020\) Local agreements: a case study of Galkaio, Somalia](#)
- o Rim Turkmani, Mary Kaldor, Wisam Elhamwi, Joan Ayo, Nael Hariri (2014) Hungry for peace: positives and pitfalls of local truces and ceasefires in Syria
- o [Martin Ochaya Lino \(2020\) Local Peace Agreement in Abyei: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities](#)

- *International Peace Institute*: [Arthur Boutellis, Delphine Mechoulan, and Marie-Joelle Zahar \(2020\) Parallel Tracks or Connected Pieces? UN Peace Operations, Local Mediation, and Peace Processes](#)

- *United Nations*:
 - o [United Nations \(Mediation Support Unit, Policy and Mediation Division\) \(2020\) UN Support to Local Mediation: Challenges and Opportunities](#)
 - o [Hanan Tabbara and Garrett Rubin \(2018\) Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution: Community Voices from Syria, Iraq and Yemen \(UN Women academic paper\)](#)

- [*Everyday Peace Indicators*](#): The Everyday Peace Indicators research approach investigates alternative, bottom-up indicators of peace and how such bottom-up information can be meaningfully integrated into policy processes.