

Essential

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KOFF Joint Learning Processes

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The Essential Series

Through its “Essentials” series, swisspeace offers expert advice and guidance for practitioners on various topics of civilian peacebuilding. This issue draws on lessons from a carefully designed process that originated in expert exchanges on the issue of archives and Dealing with the Past processes and led to the international endorsement of guiding principles.

The Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding (KOFF)

KOFF is a platform for exchange and joint learning composed of around 40 Swiss civil society organizations and 2 state organizations engaged in the fields of peacebuilding, human rights, gender equality, and development cooperation. KOFF aims at enhancing the political relevance of civilian peacebuilding, promoting joint learning, and strengthening networks among practitioners, policy makers, and academia.

Cover picture

Nancy O'Connor/Unsplash

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1 Introduction

This Essential summarizes the key findings of an internal assessment of Joint Learning Processes (JLP), a peacebuilding methodology and practice developed by the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding - KOFF. The platform was founded in 2001 and aims at ensuring that Swiss peacebuilding policy and practice is relevant, visible, and strengthened. It does so, among others, by designing and facilitating JLPs in Switzerland and abroad, to come up with strategic alternatives, influence policy and develop concrete initiatives for peace with its member organizations.

The goal of JLPs is not only to drive innovation, but also to connect and consolidate programmatic approaches and good practices across organizational, thematic, and geographic boundaries. Moreover, JLPs aim at highlighting knowledge gaps, reflecting on what kind of knowledge is created and how, as well as paying attention to and redefining who is considered an expert. Ideally, JLPs should lead to capitalization of this knowledge and identification of synergies that enhance meaningful collaborations, comprehensive context analyses and coherent approaches to increase the positive impact of peacebuilding.

A key question for KOFF is how to support and enhance learning between KOFF member organizations, their partners, and interlocutors. To answer this question, KOFF evaluates and discusses the modalities and impact of JLPs, including questions of ownership and authorship of the knowledge that is produced in the platform.

Experience shows that learning in and among organizations is a question of resources and will. It's about recognizing the value of collective learning, un-learning, and re-learning.

A commitment to learning as an organization can encourage critical reflection about peacebuilding practice and its underpinning theories and concepts, and lead to a new understanding of the role, relevance and limitations of peacebuilding organizations.

In its 2021 – 24 strategy KOFF puts an accent on establishing JLPs as an effective and inclusive practice and ensuring that they are known among KOFF members and beyond. Hence, the objective of this Essential is to identify and capitalize on the lessons learnt from previous JLPs to improve the accessibility, relevance, and impact of joint learning in the platform, as well as to share KOFF's experiences with this methodology with a wider audience. The Essential can be understood as a handbook for practitioners while also contributing to theoretical knowledge about the meaning of collective learning for peace.

2 Situating KOFF JLPs within broader debates

1 Louise Wilson and Toby Lowe, *The Learning Communities Handbook. Collective Improvement in Complex Environments* (Newcastle: Newcastle University, 2016).

2 Etienne Wenger and William Snyder, "Communities of Practice: the organisational frontier", *Harvard Business Review*, (January-February 2000). Accessed February 1, 2023.

Achieving fundamental and long-lasting societal change through peacebuilding initiatives remains a challenge, despite a long history of peacebuilding efforts around the world. The field of peacebuilding is under a lot of pressure to deliver results in a predetermined, timely and measurable way, thereby ignoring the reality of changing contexts, the need for long-term commitment and the difficulty to measure qualitative change, hence peacebuilding impact. In this context, opportunities to pause, reflect, share, and discuss our approaches and challenges with other peacebuilders are rare – and highly relevant.

Therefore, creating designated spaces for peacebuilders to talk about how they deal with realities, and learn from each other has become a core area of engagement of the KOFF platform. While KOFF has made its own experiences with joint learning formats, this work is embedded in a broader debate about the value and need for practitioners and policymakers to learn from their professional and personal experiences. Moreover, it draws from feminist approaches to knowledge, as well as debates on how to enhance and protect the space for civil society.

Learning communities and communities of practice

The method of joint learning and communities of practice have been researched and used elsewhere. For instance, Lowe & Wilson speak about learning communities as “a group of peers who come together in a safe space to reflect and share their judgements and uncertainties about their practice and to share ideas or experiences to collectively improve.”¹ In the same vein, communities of practice are “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise”.² Lowe & Wilson (2019) emphasize the need for creating and facilitating learning communities, as a kind of support to people and organizations who operate within complex and sometimes chaotic settings.

It is important to create alternative spaces for them to simply reflect on their work and adapt to changing contexts, rather than always focusing on delivering results and measuring impact.³

Moreover, there is real value in group reflection because “it is more akin to critical analysis”.⁴ Learning is thus an individual, as well as a group activity.⁵ As an informal, self-organized, voluntary space that focuses on problems related to the work of the respective practitioners, communities of practice also offer room to effectively share best-practice, develop innovative approaches, and to solve problems.⁶ Thus, communities of practice enable community building, sharing of knowledge and joint learning (ibid.)⁷

After all, KOFF is not the first to use the concept of a JLP in the international sphere of peacebuilding and development cooperation. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (n.d.) for example used joint learning as “an innovative method for sharing knowledge on key policy issues [...]”.⁸ This helped to assess progress, to create policy recommendations and to foster dialogue. Further, LEI – the Agricultural Economic Research Institute in The Hague engages in joint learning as a form of participatory research as a way to assess needs, problems, and priorities of the communities involved in their work in

3 Wilson and Lowe, *Learning Communities Handbook*.

4 ibid.

5 John Paul Lederach, Reina Neufeldt, and Hal Culbertson, *Reflective Peacebuilding. A planning, monitoring and learning toolkit* (Mindanao: The Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2007). Accessed February 1, 2023.

6 Wenger and Snyder, “Communities of Practice”.

7 ibid.

8 “OECD Joint Learning Studies”, OECD. Accessed February 1, 2023.

9 Mirjam A. F. Ros-Tonen, *Joint Learning in Applied Development Research*, ed. Jolanda van den Berg and Gerdien Meijerink (The Hague: LEI Agricultural Economics Research Institute, 2005).

10 Ben Ramalingam, *Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations* (London: Research and Policy

- in Development Programme, [Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\), 2006](#). Accessed February 1, 2023.
- 11 [Robert Ricigliano, "Networks of Effective Action: Implementing an Integrated Approach to Peacebuilding," SAGE Publications 34, no. 4 \(2003\): 445-462.](#)
- 12 [Norbert Ropers and Mathus Anuvatudom. "A Joint Learning Process for Stakeholders and Insider Peacebuilders: A Case Study from Southern Thailand," Asian Journal of Peacebuilding 2, no. 2 \(2014\): 277-296.](#)
- 13 [Megan Greeley, "Cultivating a Virtual Community of Practice: A Case Study of Peacebuilders in East/North African Warzones," The Chronicles of Mentoring & Coaching 1, no. 13 \(2020\): 382-388.](#)
- 14 see [Kristin Perry and Khogir Wirya, Youth Community of Practice in Peacebuilding \(Search for Common Ground, 2020\)](#). Accessed February 1, 2023.
- 15 [Lederach, Neufeldt, and Culbertson, Reflective Peacebuilding; Wilson and Low, Learning Communities Handbook.](#)
- 16 see [Ingie Hovland, Successful Communication – A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations \(London: Research and Policy in Development Programme, Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\), 2005\)](#). Accessed February 1, 2023.
- 17 [Fred Selnes and James Sallis, "Promoting Relationship Learning," Journal of Marketing 67 \(2003\): 80-95.](#)
- 18 see [Britta Wigginton and Michelle N Lafrance. "Learning critical feminist research: A brief introduction to feminist epistemologies and methodologies." Feminism &](#)

rural development projects.⁹ Similarly, Ramalingam describes the use of communities of practice by the UN Office in India to share knowledge and expertise.¹⁰ The creation of a free and impartial space helped to build trust and to generate knowledge for more efficient development. Ricigliano proposes "Networks for Effective Action" (NEA) to induce learning of organizations for a change of their theory of action.¹¹ Forming a NEA that is constituted by information-sharing and an iterative approach can provoke deeper learning and a shift towards an integrated approach, which includes political, social and structural dimensions of peacebuilding. Based on this work, Ropers & Anuvatudom's used a JLP to facilitate a joint conflict analysis with multiple civil society organizations, academic institutions and a state institution involved in peacebuilding in the Deep South of Thailand.¹² They found this approach useful to prepare and nurture multi-party peace constituencies. Similarly, (virtual) communities of practice were used to create a peer mentoring network for peacebuilders from East/North African warzones¹³ and have also been instrumental in supporting youth-empowerment in peacebuilding.¹⁴

Joint learning and communities of practice are particularly important in the context of peacebuilding as peacebuilders are affected by their surroundings, which can help or hinder their ability to reflect on, analyze or react to events. That is why it is so important to create learning communities that encourage practitioners to make time, space and use resources for learning, and – as an organization – to focus on developing the learning approach itself.¹⁵ Additionally, communities of practice enable peacebuilders to transfer the tacit knowledge they often have.¹⁶ Finally, Selnes & Sallis describe trust as a pre-condition for and effect of joint learning, or as they call it, relationship learning, and stress its use to "buffer the consequences of uncertainty".¹⁷ From this perspective, the relevance

of joint learning in contexts affected by conflict, violence, and crises, becomes even more evident.

Feminist approaches to knowledge and learning

Feminist peacebuilding is, similar to JLPs, grounded in the sharing of and acting based on experience, hearing different voices, and informal and grassroots initiatives and settings. Moreover, feminist peacebuilding often emphasizes the importance of relationship and community building which is another common characteristic with JLPs.

The exact meaning of a feminist or gender approach to knowledge is disputed within the feminist discourse and different strands of feminist epistemology can be identified.¹⁸ Yet, some basic principles that underly feminist knowledge production are women's condition and experience, intersectionality, positionality, and representation.¹⁹ The condition of women and their intersectional experience are often considered as a starting point to feminist knowledge production.²⁰ Feminist approaches to peacebuilding in the mainstream discourse emphasize the importance of acknowledging gendered relations of power and their role in violence and war as well as the inclusion of women in all dimensions of peacebuilding.²¹ Yet, feminist peacebuilding also highlights the value of women-led grassroots and informal peacebuilding initiatives like peer-to-peer support and care.²² Accordingly, feminist peacebuilding strategies include knowledge-sharing with and education within communities to fulfill basic needs and create resource development for conflict prevention.²³ It also addresses resource scarcity as one of the root causes of conflict.²⁴ Furthermore, relationship building, and community development are essential feminist peacebuilding strategies in order to build networks and coalitions.²⁵

- [Psychology, \(2019\): 1-17.](#)
- 19 [ibid.](#)
- 20 [Alice R. Dunn, "How should an understanding of gender shape our approach to the production of knowledge?," Journal of International Women's Studies 22, no. 2 \(2021\): 92-102.](#) Accessed February 1, 2023.
- 21 [Donna Pankhurst, "The 'Sex War' and Other Wars: Towards a Feminist Approach to Peace Building," Development in Practice 13, no 2/3 \(2003\): 154-177; Catia Cecilia Confrontini, "What Is Feminist Peace?," in Intelligent Compassion: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Feminist Peace \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012\), 3-18 ; Helen Kezie-Nwoha, "Feminist Peace and Security in Africa," in Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding \(Oxford: Oxfam International, 2020\), 18-32.](#) Accessed February 1, 2023.
- 22 [Fiona Smyth, Amina Hersi, Abigail Baloumus, Anna Tonelli, Helen Khezi-Nwoah, Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Alisia Evans, Paula Banerjee, and Zeynep Kaya, Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding \(Oxford: Oxfam International, 2020\).](#) Accessed February 1, 2023.
- 23 [Mary Jane Collier, Brandi Lawless, and Karambu Ringera, "Negotiating Contextually Contingent Agency: Situated Feminist Peacebuilding Strategies in Kenya," Women's Studies in Communication 39, no. 4 \(2016\): 399-421. DOI.](#)
- 24 [Smyth et al., Transforming Power.](#)
- 25 [Collier, Lawless, and Ringera, "Contextually Contingent Agency".](#)

Feminist peacebuilding highlights the importance of relying on lived experiences to inform peacebuilding policy and practice.

26 Pankhurst, “Sex War”; Smyth et al., Transforming Power.

27 Kezie-Nwoha, “Feminist Peace”.

28 [Alanis Bello Ramírez and Gina Marelá Wirz, “A Global Southern feminist approach to peace research,” à propos – The KOFF Peacebuilding Magazine \(2022\).](#) Accessed February 1, 2023.

29 *ibid.*

30 [Hannah Twomey, ed., On “shrinking space” a framing paper \(Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2017\).](#) Accessed February 1, 2023; [Barbare Unmüssig, Civil society under pressure – shrinking – closing – no space \(Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2015\).](#) Accessed February 1, 2023.

31 *ibid.*

32 Twomey, “shrinking space”

Thus, it is essential to ensure that many different voices and perspectives, particularly of women and marginalized groups, in a society are heard and considered.²⁶ Thereby, traditional methods and indigenous knowledge can be included as they often rely on collectivity and community orientation.²⁷ However, feminist ethics in research also imply knowledge that does not reproduce discrimination and power hierarchies.²⁸ Particularly “establishing knowledge practices that do not seek to annul the voices of the communities, nor to see them as subjects without agency, but rather to build with them and not over them” is important.²⁹

Civil society

An active civil society is essential for democracies. Yet, the space that civil societies can inhabit has increasingly been described as shrinking or closing completely. Democratic and non-democratic governments all over the world have been taking measures against civil society actors in recent years.³⁰ Repression particularly targets grassroot and community-based civil society actors who fight for democracy, justice and human rights and criticize the government.³¹ To counter this repressive tendency, civil society actors must collectively organize. In doing so, joint reflections about the repressive measures, their intent and effect are necessary.³² This is particularly important to channel solidarity and make resistance against repressive

Also, conflict, violence, and authoritarian contexts tend to foster polarization, fragmentation, and mistrust between families, communities, civil society actors, and the state. In such a context, joint reflection and learning can contribute to promoting mutual understanding and (re)establishing trust, which are essential to any peacebuilding efforts.

tendencies visible.³³ Lastly, collaboration between different civil society actors or between civil society and state entities can empower civil society organizations and lead to common pathways and partnership as they show synergies.³⁴

Joint learning is, thus, an opportunity for civil society to set the agenda, bring in their expertise and jointly develop strategies for peacebuilding. Thereby, they constitute an alternative to high-level formal peace processes and highlight the important peacebuilding work that happens at grassroots levels through civil society actors.

33 *ibid.*

34 Nasrin Jahan Jinia, Mohammed Asaduzzaman, and Juha Vartola, “Empowerment of Civil Society,” in *Reduced Inequality*, ed. Walzer Leal Filho, Anabela Marisa Azul, Luciana Brandli, Amanda Lange Salvia, Pincar Özuyar, and Tony Wall (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020).

3 Joint Learning at KOFF

Over the past years, KOFF has designed and facilitated three JLPs, all aimed at making use of and generating collective knowledge. Each JLP was on a different topic or region and worked with slightly different approaches and modalities (funding, partnerships, etc.). This shows that the method of JLPs is flexible and can be adapted to the needs and requirements of the participants, donors or intended audience. However, generally, KOFF JLPs had following characteristics in common:

- create space and occasion to reflect on practice among peers;
- transcend sectors & programmatic silos;
- involve different perspectives;
- enable cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder analyses and development of strategies;
- make existing and new knowledge visible and relevant for policy and practice.

Overview of KOFF JLPs 2015 – 2021

From 2015 to 2022, KOFF successfully designed and facilitated three JLPs, with the support of various KOFF member organizations.

Shrinking Space for Civil Society in Honduras, 2015-17

Initiated by HEKS and Peace Watch Switzerland, facilitated and coordinated by KOFF, supported and funded by Brücke Le Pont, Helvetas, Honduras Forum Schweiz, Peace Brigades International, the Swiss Red Cross, and Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC) Honduras. Budget: ~ CHF 50'000.00 (exceeded by far)

Swiss Civil Society Contribution to the National Action Plan (NAP) 1325, 2018-22

Initiated, coordinated & implemented by cfd, KOFF, PeaceWomen Across the Globe, supported by an advisory group composed of (KOFF) civil society organizations, funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). Budget: ~ CHF 900'000.00

Peacebuilding & Migration, 2019-20

Mandated and funded by the Swiss FDFA, coordinated, facilitated & implemented by KOFF, learning community composed of (KOFF) civil society, governmental actors, and international organizations. Budget: ~ CHF 350,000.00

The JLPs were facilitated by one or more designated parties. Yet, the participants (e.g., partners in project countries, learning community or advisory group members) played an important role in the agenda-setting and the process design. The spaces that were created for learning had various shapes and forms (e.g., online tools for collaboration, virtual meetings, in-person roundtables, joint creation of written products, field visits or bilateral exchanges). KOFF members mentioned that it is important to remain open to different modalities of coming together to reflect and learn, or in their words: “We must question old and create new performances” (KOFF member). This might require rejection of what is conventionally assumed to be the right way to collaborate in a professional space (like sitting at a table and using formal language), which is an act of un- and re-learning in itself. It requires courage and confidence of those leading and facilitating the process. In any case, the modalities of coming together to learn from each other can look very different depending on the geographic and cultural context or composition of the group.

In the following, the learnings and reflections from KOFF members who were actively involved in one or more JLPs are synthesized to create a blueprint for future KOFF JLPs and inspire critical reflection and learning on how to design, implement and monitor JLPs to ensure the greatest learning impact.

The impact hypothesis of JLPs at KOFF is that trans-sectoral and multi-stakeholder reflection leads to context-specific, pragmatic, and innovative strategies, as well as enhanced trust between actors between parties that are fragmented, competing or in conflict. Based on this, synergies and expertise are capitalized and documented to make existing knowledge visible, accessible and to support each other’s work. Finally, this contributes to enhanced impact in the support of political and social transition and transformation processes.

4 Requirements and conditions for a JLP

This chapter looks at the requirements and conditions that are necessary to initiate, facilitate and coordinate a JLP.

What is needed to initiate a JLP

JLPs are about more than just mandating a study and publishing recommendations. They require ownership and the active and continued involvement of a broad range of actors in the design and implementation of the process. This ensures that the process fits the learning needs and abilities, resources, constraints, and interests of involved participants.

“We need to learn and reflect about ‘joint learning’ - how can we collaborate to learn, advance and have a greater impact?” (KOFF member)

The interviews with participants from previous JLPs indicated that the most impactful learning processes are those that are not policy-driven, but rather centered on the needs and experiences of people, with the objective of learning from latter to inform practice and policymaking. The JLP on the Swiss NAP 1325 is a good example for this. While the process aimed at influencing policy in Switzerland, it focused on themes such as care or feminist peace, which are grounded in people’s realities but are often neglected in the agendas of policymakers. Another example is the JLP on shrinking space for civil society in Honduras, which was a concrete response to the need of two KOFF member

organizations and their partner organizations in the country. It fed into a new project that built on the results of the JLP, including new insights as well as enhanced trust among the partners. Moreover, it provided thematic impulses for continued exchange and learning on specific aspects addressed in the JLP (i.e., the psychosocial approach) with mid- to long-term effects (i.e., SDC’s ongoing psychosocial program in Honduras), both in the country and among Swiss civil society.

The following check list is based on learnings from past JLPs and indicates what is required to successfully initiate such a process.

What to keep in mind when setting up a JLP:

- Need and relevance of selected topic for peacebuilding practice (people’s willingness and ability to participate depends on the relevance to their work!).
- Ownership, interest and availability / resources in the platform or respective learning community to participate in the process.
- Availability and flexibility of funding.
- Designated moderator / facilitator (could be done by one or more parties).
- Clear but open guiding question(s).
- Fixed duration (depending on the urgency of the topic it could be a longer or shorter process).

How to design & facilitate a JLP

At the heart of JLPs is the goal to facilitate dialogue and regular exchange between a broad range of actors. Hence, the facilitator of the process plays an important role. When designing the process, it is good to ask yourself who is the right one to do the job. The answer

depends on several factors, including facilitation and coordination skills, familiarity with or expertise on the chosen topic, existing trusted relationships with participants, ability to commit, etc.

KOFF member organizations have had different roles in

Participants of KOFF JLPs have been and can be involved

as:

Donors/financial contributors;

(co-) coordinators;

(co-) facilitators;

(co-) researchers;

thematic contributors;

advisors;

participants.

JLPs. When we look at how the past JLPs came into existence and were designed, the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities early on in such a process to ensure constructive collaboration, manage expectations and avoid misunderstandings that could stand in the way of achieving the objectives of the process stands out. This does not rule out the option to re-evaluate the distribution of roles and introduce new ones throughout the process. In the JLP on the NAP 1325, for instance, the coordination team composed of three different organizations decided to do a team coaching session with an external moderator after the first phase of the process, to make space for reflections about team satisfaction, roles, and responsibilities, and adapt its modes of collaboration.

Moreover, JLPs benefit from adopting a design thinking/ open ended process approach. This approach is helpful to encourage critical reflection, questioning of the status quo and testing of solutions in a short span of time, allowing new ideas to emerge. It also ensures space for critical reflection about the process itself, as

well as continuous adaptation.

JLPs at KOFF have the following essential features:

- Process-orientation,
- capitalization or archiving of experiences,
- innovation and bringing new findings to public debates, and
- facilitation of links between practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.

In the design of the JLPs, these features must be considered by the initiator. In addition, they can ask themselves: How to capitalize on and give grassroots peacebuilding visibility? How to ensure that new knowledge is produced collectively and disseminated widely? How to ensure participation of a broad range of actors? One important aspect is to enhance visibility and accessibility of the process. This can be done by including different communication methods (e.g., e-mail, website, phone calls, social media, etc.) and exchange formats (online or in person) and languages (actual languages, formal / informal language, etc.). However, while contributions by different KOFF members and other parties are important, being open to new members throughout the process can create challenges for ensuring that the JLP is a safer space for honest conversations and sharing of personal experiences. The question is how to find a balance between being open and at the same time maintaining confidentiality and trust. In KOFF's experience, it is useful to work with modalities that complement each other (i.e., both closed and open formats). Moreover, it helps to work with the same parties over a longer period, as it increases trust and creates common knowledge and language to build on. To ensure such a commitment, it is useful to ask participants in the beginning to commit to the process, for instance by signing a memorandum of understanding.

5 Effects and challenges of JLPs

The following elements are essential to increase the learning effect of the JLPs:

1. Representation of different perspectives and types of expertise.
2. Cross-sectoral exchange.
3. Input from research and practice.
4. Primary data collection, analysis, and synthesis.
5. Continuous exchange and sharing of expertise over a longer period.
6. Concrete case examples from practice.
7. Clear guiding questions.
8. Testing / validating solutions.
9. Visualizations.
10. Concrete output in form of a final product.

JLPs have an effect in and of itself, for instance on internal agenda setting of participating organizations, as well as on relationships between the involved parties. For example, in the JLP on shrinking space in Honduras, the process helped to build trust between the participants who were future partners for concrete project work on the ground. Moreover, participants usually gain new perspectives on a topic. For example, in the JLP on migration and peacebuilding, participants said that they walked away with new language that helped them to frame the peace & migration nexus in a more nuanced way. Beyond that, the JLPs also have an impact on peacebuilding practice as they often result in context-specific and practical new or revised approaches, tools, or concrete initiatives.

Final product: impact on practice

Participants of previous JLPs emphasized the importance of working towards a final product that can be disseminated and used beyond the JLP. Participants are more motivated, and the impact is more sustainable when the process results in a product that has relevance for practitioners, such as for example the toolbox on migration in peacebuilding which was a result of the JLP on the same topic. The impact and sustainability increase the stronger the ownership of participants over the final product or produced knowledge is.

Multisectoral and multilateral exchange, consolidation, and trust-building

The JLPs offer a space for multi-sectoral and multilateral exchange of positive and challenging experiences. The broad participation of organizations and institutions beyond KOFFs traditional constituency show the relevance of the chosen topics and the joint learning approach. Combining perspectives and experiences from different sectors is essential to capture complexity, avoid duplication of efforts & move

towards coherence. Moreover, it contributes to the creation of alternative and innovative approaches. The JLPs highlight the benefits of dialogue and cooperation across silos.

Bridging policy, theory, and practice

JLPs usually build on the state of the art in the field and existing academic literature, while also focusing on individual practical experiences and embedding these in policy frameworks. As such, they are successful in assessing the impact of policies on practice and emphasizing the need to adapt global policies to specific contexts to make them practical. JLPs highlight the added value of building on existing research, theories, and concepts to inform practical approaches. Finally, this approach also helps to understand the relevance of including and building on practical experiences when designing policies. Many participants appreciate the efforts made to transfer the knowledge that is produced throughout the process to the level of policymaking (e.g., through bilateral meetings with policymakers, conferences, trainings, etc.). The JLPs are therefore an opportunity to bring grassroots experiences and knowledge to that level.

Some of the challenges for a JLP include:

- How to deal with dilemmas resulting from donor funding linked to a specific agenda, on the one hand, and the desire to create ownership as well as opportunities for agenda-setting in civil society, on the other hand?
- How to manage the expectations of participants and donors regarding the impact and concrete result of the JLP?
- How to ensure that participants stay engaged and that there are human and financial resources for continued & pro-active engagement during the process?

Despite broad and genuine interest, it is not always easy to keep the various participants engaged throughout the process. A lack of resources and time on the side of the participating organizations is sometimes an obstacle for participation. To make participation easier, the facilitator can cluster the content into sub-topics, so that the organizations could then attend the meetings that were most interesting and relevant to them. Further, online project management tools or exchange platforms can be used. Expectation management on both sides is important, to ensure that people stay engaged while acknowledging the limitations of their own engagement and the project itself.

- How to create an open, inclusive and diverse learning community that is at the same time “safe” enough for people to share personal experiences and engage in a dialogue about sensitive and challenging topics?
- JLPs normally have a limited time frame and, even though there is usually a need for follow up, this is often not budgeted for. How to ensure continuity?
- How to measure and demonstrate the qualitative impact that learning has on people and their surroundings?
- Who learns from this JLP and how to disseminate the learnings beyond participants and usual circles?
- How to strike the balance between being open, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, guiding the process (regarding questions and themes that are discussed, as well as in regard to the process structure itself)?
- How to ensure that there is ownership over the final product?

6 Conclusion

The conversations with participants of previous KOFF JLPs have confirmed that the JLPs helped to bridge divides and bring different actors to talk with each other about topics that are either sensitive or not usually discussed among these stakeholders (such as migration, shrinking space or care work). In all cases, the result was a mix of new ideas, innovative strategies and making existing knowledge visible. While the impact on supporting long-term political and social processes is difficult to measure, at least two of the three JLPs created (lasting) spaces for dialogue between civil society, policymakers, and academia, and one JLP had a concrete impact in practice in the shape of a new project and ongoing collaboration on some of the topics addressed. Convening, funding, and facilitating such learning spaces is a meaningful role for a platform such as KOFF to hold. However, it is essential that the agenda is set by implementation partners and people with practical and lived experience. Furthermore, a successful JLP needs appropriate resource allocation (time, funds, capacities) to the overall process, as well as to the different roles.

This requires the will of participants and donors to embark in such a process with an open mind and to commit to collective learning as an essential part of an effective and innovative peacebuilding practice.

About the Authors

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Dorothea Schiewer works for the Policy & Platform team at swisspeace. In this function she supports the work of the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF. She supports the organization and coordination of the exchange in the KOFF network in form of dialogues, information-sharing and events. She has a background in International Governance and is currently studying European Global Studies with a focus on peace and conflict studies at the University of Basel.