KOFF Digital Peacebuilding Master Class

A Synthesis

On 3 April 2023, KOFF hosted the Digital Peacebuilding Master Class at the kHaus in Basel. The objective was to provide a space for discussion and learning on this increasingly important topic. The content of the event also offered a preview of the longer course on Digital Peacebuilding in Theory & Practice that will be offered online by swisspeace in June.

The Master Class was designed and facilitated by Emma Baumhofer, Digital Peacebuilding Expert at swisspeace, and included participants from peacebuilding practice, academia, and the private sector.

Background

Digital technology is not neutral. On the one hand, technology is embedded into existing power structures and has affordances that enable conflict. In these cases, technology rewards conflict and aggression, exacerbates existing inequalities, and reinforces hegemonic power structures, like gendered ones. Digital technologies are therefore part of the conflict landscape, and they alter conflict dynamics, even for those who do not directly use them. On the other hand, digital spaces are also crucial zones for positive peacebuilding, activism, collaboration, and research. They can enhance access to knowledge, networks, and resources, allow for comprehensive data collection and analysis, and increase the scope of peacebuilding initiatives.

As digital technology plays such a crucial role in conflict and peace, it's important for peacebuilders to increase their digital literacy. The worlds of peacebuilding and technology have a lot they can offer each other, and the Master Class explored how to approach this reciprocal relationship.

Content and reflections

The Master Class began with two interactive exercises to get to know each other and to exchange on the unique perspectives and challenges each participant brought to the Master Class. As a preparatory task, participants had been asked to reflect on the following guiding questions: What challenges and opportunities does digital technology bring to our peacebuilding work? How do you know when a digital element is needed in your program or context? What challenges do you face in implementing digital peacebuilding work?

Taking participant's experiences and challenges regarding digital peacebuilding as a starting point allowed for a practice-oriented Master Class relevant to participants' realities. The overarching question was: How can we address these challenges as a community to facilitate the mainstreaming of digital peacebuilding into peace policy and practice?

The introductory section of the Master Class was followed by an input from Emma Baumhofer. She covered the basic principles of digital peacebuilding, the concept of digital conflict drivers, and some of the key events that have shaped the current digital policy landscape. As part of this, she walked participants through some key sections of the swisspeace Digital Peacebuilding Toolkit, focusing specifically on the Project Inspiration and Challenges and Opportunities sections.

The expert input was followed by a round of Q&A and discussion, as well as group work to discuss specific scenarios and opportunities. Some of the challenges mentioned include: digital security risks in authoritarian contexts, how to handle data being used to fuel misinformation, how to get stakeholders comfortable with digital project components when it is a new topic for them, among others. One step that the group decided would help to mainstream digital into peacebuilding would be to include it as part of context analyses before projects begin. One useful resource for this work is the recently published framework from UNDPPA: Digital Technology-Sensitive Conflict Analysis. There is room here for more of this type of work, creating guiding frameworks to facilitate integrating digital into larger peacebuilding work.

We look forward to welcoming you at future KOFF events.

Further ressources

- [Digital Peacebuilding Toolkit](#)
- [The Case for Designing Tech for Social Cohesion](#), Search for Common Ground
- [The Digital Space and Peace Processes: A Thought Piece](#), Principles for Peace