



OPINION: BUILDING WORLD PEACE, LOCALLY

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The condition of mutually enforcing bottom-up social development movements and enabling top-down laws, policies and treaties, assist ever more people and groups in coming-together to achieve the change they seek.

It should be clear that if peace is to exist among humanity it is reflected in local circumstances and local conditions. After all, we as people directly experience the degrees of peace in society, and we affect its presence by our individual and group behavior.

For peace to thrive at the communal level, an age-old paradox needs to be reconciled, namely that the interests of both individuals and groups are not antagonistic, where one is achieved at the expense of the other, but instead are interwoven and satisfied through participatory planning methods and project implementation.

These development methods require third party facilitation, firstly to draw out the perceptions and priorities of the local participants, including young and old, women and men, those who have and those who have less, and secondly to build partnerships with local government, civil and business agencies.

The development projects that emerge from this democratic process assist local people in two ways – by helping to work through their differences (incorporating conflict management approaches), and advancing their socio-economic and environmental goals.

The projects work against people experiencing alienation because they no longer devote their days to activities from which they do not gain justifiable benefits and are therefore inconsistent with

their fundamental interests. Projects promote peace through meeting people's self-determined needs while satisfying community development objectives. Social and personal needs having been met in this way, through popular participation in community development, peace is given a framework most favorable to its growth and scaling up.

In the context of national and international conflicts, what is interesting is that the same methodology still applies, but can occur among representatives and leaders of the groups in conflict. The process, however, does not begin with – but merges into – joint development planning. At the outset, there needs to be an expression of past experiences and difficulties followed by an acknowledgement of those occurrences and, where appropriate, an apology. This kind of confidence-building dialogue must, moreover, be carried out in a spirit of reconciliation.

Thus conditions favorable to peace are created whereby the parties can coexist and reap tangible benefits from their mutual contact. Crucially, in order to promote actual peace, all of this must result in sustainable development for all the people.

Are there Sunnis and Shi'ites whose communities are side by side or are integrated, where these processes could build unity and avoid spiraling of distrust?

Can Israelis and Palestinians meet together and express what they must, acknowledge what they must and advance human development that enables not only Palestinian political but also economic independence?

Can neighbors who are not in conflict but nevertheless are not in communication meet together in a meaningful way to forge an action plan and thereby advance their local development?

The net result of such localized occurrences is the spreading of the umbrella of peace over ever-larger geographical areas – federating upwards. At the same time, national and global leaders who establish charters that actively encourage and necessitate community meetings and sub-national development based on the popular common will, prepare the way for peaceful conditions on the ground from their top-level positions of responsibility.

Conducive macro policies promote civil society, experiential learning and participatory development training. Governments, responsible corporations and donors should have funding programs so designed that support the range of educational, health, economic and environmental initiatives that are locally prioritized – with the main criteria being that they are community-identified and driven.

True peace – the kind that steers our present and future and that responds to our hearts' calling – therefore lies in the hands of all of us since its fruition requires actions at every societal level but which support local community control of projects intended to benefit them. Moreover – and encouragingly – the goal of world peace can be operationalized, can have a budget, can have training workshops and has commenced. It now only requires a global rallying to support popular participation in the development that will change the lives of individuals and communities.

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