



Educational Peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crises

Briefing paper 3: The role of Stakeholders in Peacebuilding

Introduction

For this briefing paper, we aim to showcase that the active participation of different actors and organisations has a significant impact on the development of peacebuilding projects. Rotary International is one organization that has experience of working with Higher Education Institutions, agencies and governments in coordinating workshops, scholarships and initiatives towards the construction of longstanding peace in Latin America. This collaborative paper is structured in two sections: the first addresses the role of stakeholders in peacebuilding and the second comprises the vision and experience shared by Rotary International as an international stakeholder for peacebuilding.

1. Peacebuilding approaches

A core element of our “Educational Peacebuilding” research project is to recognise that peacebuilding processes should concern every member and actor in the society. We believe that embracing an inclusive approach ‘turns stakeholders into actors, builds social cohesion and fosters reconciliation, which in turn reinforces sustainable peace’ (QCEA, 2018). Therefore, drawing on the experience of Medellin and Acapulco we will create an in-depth understanding of the infrastructure, engagement, resources and policies required to educationally transform a community. This will provide insight into the types of processes, dynamics and compromises required from key stakeholders with our specific focus on informal education, culture, the arts and community engagement within both cities.

Historically, the approaches to reduce urban violence in Latin America have involved a variety of strategies stretching from direct police involvements to pacifying neighbourhoods through education, culture, sports or arts. However, it is important to highlight that each country, city or region has unique characteristics and circumstances that must be considered by policy-makers when defining and adopting these approaches, i.e. every peacebuilding setting requires precise considerations and it is unique (Berdal and Mousavizadeh, 2010). In this regard, some of the policies that have been implemented in the region have also taken into account the historical and cultural assets of the cities to develop interventions towards peacebuilding (WOLA, 2011). Furthermore, governments looking at reducing urban violence can rely on strategies that are heavily related to coercive police and military actions on one hand and on the other, they can embrace the epidemiological perspective that looks at reducing violence by targeting at-risk youth and redirecting conflict to non-violent responses (Cerdá, Tracy and Keyes, 2018).

Despite the institutional interventions, such as the Plan Merida and Plan Colombia, and approximately one trillion of dollars spent by the US government since the 1970’s in



attempting to dismantle the operation of drug cartels in the region (Huey, 2014), many challenges remain. Latin America is still considered one of the least peaceful areas in the world¹, where significant elements of corruption, weak institutions, systematic impunity, lack of opportunities and historic socioeconomic inequalities continue to affect its prosperity and development.

Essential to peacebuilding processes is the concept of stakeholders that are defined as actors coming together to participate and cooperate at different levels for the sake of building peaceful societies. In this sense, a comprehensive definition of a stakeholder would envision a group, individual or entity that has an interest in the success of a given project and that is also impacted by the outcome of this endeavour (Smith, 2020). Coordination, effective communication and meaningful engagement between stakeholders and initiatives is crucial in order to ensure various perspectives, lived realities, visions and commitments are negotiated and included.

In order to move forward with a practical implementation of peacebuilding initiatives with such a range of stakeholders, one tool may be to develop consistent maps of actors, which includes their characteristics, resources, commitment and historic interventions. This in turn allows the creation of plans with clearer goals. The creation of maps of stakeholders envisages that the engagement of actors is not unilateral or one-sided and stipulates that the stakeholders' actions in peacebuilding must also be accepted by other parties (Ganson, 2019). Following this overall cooperative goal, mapping tools such as stakeholder analysis, impact grids or social network analysis can facilitate the full identification of interactions that occur within a setting, fostering a better understanding of information, influence and power flows (Arévalo de León and Tager, 2015). However, if the actors are set on pursuing and supporting different interests, the main challenge is to create a suitable environment where stakeholders feel included in the decision-making processes.

The challenge of inclusiveness can therefore lie at the heart of effective peacebuilding practices. Given that level of inclusion or exclusion of key actors or agencies can lead to inappropriate or ineffective initiatives, an inclusive approach is fundamental when designing, implementing and evaluating initiatives that have the potential to transform ordinary endeavours into impactful contributions towards peacebuilding (QCEA, 2018). The list of potential stakeholders or actors in peacebuilding is not limited to specific sectors; they can include religious groups, international aid agencies, local NGO's, charities or foundations, private sector associations, community-based organisations, higher education institutions, think tanks or research centres.

¹ The three regions in the Americas recorded a deterioration in peacefulness in the 2019 GPI, with Central America and the Caribbean showing the largest deteriorations, followed by South America, and then North America. <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/06/GPI-2019-web003.pdf>



The understanding of how stakeholders' collaboration can strengthen peacebuilding initiatives has become even more relevant during the current global pandemic. There is evidence suggesting that school closures during the crisis have widened the gap in skills development, affecting the opportunities for vulnerable groups and increasing the danger of 'future inequality in society' (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020) as well as the reproduction of the cycle of violence and social distress. In this light, the commitment and active participation of different actors to reduce socioeconomic inequalities plays a more determinant role in the construction of a more peaceful society.

In the following section, we will examine the vision and experience of Rotary International as one active stakeholder on how different actors, authorities and communities can come together to share experiences and design hands-on initiatives for peacebuilding.

2. Rotary International views on the role of Stakeholders in Peacebuilding

Rotary International, the world's largest volunteer-service organization, has had peacebuilding at its core since its founding in 1905. From sitting at the table at the UN charter conference in 1945, to collaborating on the creation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to commanding high-level consultative status at the UN Economic and Social Council – Rotary is recognized and respected for their deep commitment to peace as an international humanitarian organization. Rotary is made up of 1.2 million Rotarians, more than 200,000 Rotaractors ("young Rotarians" ages 18 and older), and more than 340,000 Interactors (young people 12-18 years old) organized into clubs in more than 200 countries globally, and guided by a common, unifying ethos of "service above self" (Rotary International, 2020).

The Organization consists of three core parts: 1) Rotary and Rotaract clubs, 2) Rotary International (which coordinates global programs and provides support to clubs), and 3) The Rotary Foundation (funding Rotary's humanitarian initiatives). Rotary International and The Rotary Foundation have "seven areas of focus" that are aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, specifically: a) peacebuilding and conflict prevention; b) disease prevention and treatment; c) water, sanitation, and hygiene; d) maternal and child health; e) basic education and literacy; f) community economic development; and g) environment (Rotary International, 2020).

Rotary and Peacebuilding

Of particular note for this paper is the peacebuilding and conflict prevention area of focus, supporting strategic Rotary International-level programs including the Rotary Peace Fellowship (for master's or professional certificate-level studies in peace and conflict resolution), grants (at local, state, national, or international levels), and the strategic partnership between the Organization and the Institute for Economics & Peace. At club levels, Rotarians, Rotaractors, or Interactors may carry out projects in community-level, national-level, or international training in conflict prevention and mediation, youth



peacebuilding programs, or socio-economic initiatives in conflict-ridden regions. In most cases, these can be considered community-based, grassroots peacebuilding efforts – ideally based on pressing community “peace needs” and/or club members’ connections or interests.

Challenges

The professional background of Rotary and Rotaract members tends to reflect that of business, private sector, with some non-profit, government, and civil society members. Apart from Rotary Peace Fellows, Rotarians and Rotaractors do not tend to come from the peacebuilding sector or have a strong academic or professional background in this area. This means that when it comes to clubs designing, planning, and carrying out a “peace project,” they are often at a loss for where to start. A common concern overheard is “But what is peace? We have so many issues in our community; where can we start?” Many Rotarians and Rotaractors may not be familiar with tools, methodologies, and best practices (e.g. community peace mapping, “do no harm”) for peacebuilding - “we don’t know what we don’t know” – and this may affect interventions’ effectiveness.²

At a Rotary International or The Rotary Foundation-level, the fact that there is no *single or common* peacebuilding goal or program does have an influence on thousands of clubs. Many clubs desire this level of freedom and autonomy; they seek membership and recognition from the global Rotary body, but wish to be able to determine the projects and programs they will support at a more local level. This doesn’t mean that individual club projects don’t have an impact; on the contrary, local, grassroots efforts in peacebuilding are essential in many cases – they often consider the local context and resources better than a distant international entity. In this sense, individual Rotary, Rotaract, and Interact club peacebuilding projects are not necessarily part of a single, bigger “Rotary peace plan.”

Case in Point

Many peacebuilding projects proposed and carried out by Rotarians, Rotaractors, and/or Interactors focus on education and training. One such example that links to the [Educational Peacebuilding Model in Medellín and Acapulco research initiative](#) is that of Rotary Positive Peace Workshops in Mexico and Colombia for young peacebuilders.

² This is one of the key reasons Rotary has partnered with the [Institute for Economics and Peace](#), an independent think tank and leader in the study of peace and conflict, to help address the root causes of conflict and create conditions that foster peace. IEP’s research is centered around Johan Galtung’s concept of Positive Peace – or the attitudes, institutions and structures underlying more peaceful societies. Positive Peace goes beyond just stopping war, to consider what needs to be in place in order to build peace. Rotary’s [strategic partnership](#) with the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) helps Rotarians and Rotaractors “frame” peace – to recognize the grassroots work they do in the seven areas of focus as a way to build sustainable, Positive Peace. The partnership focuses on education and community-based programming: providing tools for Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Rotary stakeholders to better understand peace and to take concrete action in their communities towards building it.



Rotary’s strategic partnership with the Institute for Economics & Peace provides peace education and community-based programming to Rotarians and Rotaractors. A key activity during the pilot of this partnership (2017-2019) was the creation of Positive Peace Workshops in focal countries: Mexico and Colombia. The goal of these workshops was to bring together groups of community leaders and peacebuilders to examine the practical, impactful, and measurable investments that could be made in communities to strengthen Positive Peace³. Mexico and Colombia were selected as pilot countries based primarily on key Rotarians, Rotaractors, and Rotary Peace Fellows being present and engaged in peacebuilding education “on-the-ground.”

The partnership helped connect these Rotary stakeholders with Rotarians in the US and Canada interested in allying to provide part of the project funding. The hosts then applied for a Rotary Foundation global grant (projects valued at \$30,000 USD or more and that require sponsors outside of the host country) and oversaw project administration, coordination, and implementation. In both Mexico and Colombia, expert peacebuilding trainers from PartnersGlobal (an international nonprofit) and their country-affiliate offices were engaged to provide hands-on facilitation, in combination with the Institute for Economics & Peace providing technical knowledge of Positive Peace, along with Mexico- and Colombia-based Rotary Peace Fellows and Alumni providing support in project coordination and monitoring and evaluation. In sum, a number of international and local stakeholders – both with and beyond Rotary – came together to organize, coordinate, and implement these workshops.

The Colombia and Mexico Positive Peace Workshops in 2019 took different forms: Colombia conducting a series of five regional, three-day workshops and a three-day training of trainers; and Mexico at a national level three-day workshop and a three-day training of trainers. In both countries, workshop organizers carried out diagnostic mapping processes to select participants, identifying the most committed and connected young peacebuilders (aged 18 – 30), including Rotaractors, university students, members of the YMCA, and other civil society organizations (with 364 participants in total). All workshops had similar objectives: enhancing knowledge and skills of Positive Peace among participants; building a broader, stronger network of young leaders who are allied, well-equipped, and committed to strengthening peace in their communities; and equipping participants with methodologies, practical tools, and frameworks (e.g., community mapping, stakeholder analysis, monitoring

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and evaluation) to devise innovative solutions for promoting Positive Peace within their spheres of influence.

Following the Mexico and Colombia Positive Peace Workshops, participants were encouraged to join networks and to collaborate with other likeminded colleagues to carry out projects and actions applying their learning. For example, some participants worked with local or municipal authorities in their community on a pressing issue (e.g., domestic violence, migration, education, human rights); or participants from various states or regions formed a national network featuring presentations and learning opportunities for the public. Additionally, in both countries, the Positive Peace Workshops more strongly connected participants with Rotarians and related projects.⁴ This has enabled Rotarians to engage training participants, applying their newly-learned knowledge and skills in practical, actionable ways, as well as connecting with Rotary resources, support, and funding (e.g., Rotary district grants and Global Grants). These participants, in turn, serve as ideal candidates for the Rotary Peace Fellowship, Rotary groups, as Rotaractors, and as potential future Rotarians.

In essence, The Rotary Foundation funded the workshops, or large-scale peacebuilding education initiatives, that were overseen by the strategic partnership between Rotary International and IEP (providing institutional “umbrella” project support), that were in turn coordinated and facilitated by expert peacebuilding organizations and Rotary Peace Fellows. These workshops provided community-based peacebuilders (many of whom were Rotaractors; all of whom became Rotary stakeholders) the education, skills, knowledge, networks, and resources to jump start or enhance a peacebuilding initiative locally, nationally, or even internationally.

⁴ True Roots, a consulting organization directed by Summer Lewis, was selected to coordinate the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of The Rotary Foundation Global Grant for the “Second National Encounter – Strengthening the Pillars of Positive Peace” in Mexico in 2019. Together with Nicola Coakley, M&E Manager, True Roots monitored and measured the impact of this project. In conclusion, both the quantitative and qualitative findings showed clearly that the project's objective to build a better-equipped, cohesive network of young peacebuilders was met through various angles. The data demonstrated that participants not only felt better connected to their peers working in peace-related projects, but also to a broader network of professional, academic, and fundraising opportunities and resources related to peacebuilding. The connections participants made at the Encounter proved to be both relevant and accessible, with large numbers of participants reporting a year later that they had accessed new opportunities thanks to connections made through the project. The final evaluation report for this Mexico Positive Peace Workshop 2019 is available at: <https://create.piktochart.com/output/45857729-2019-final-evaluation-report>.



Realities and Possibilities

Rotary International provides the structure, the spaces, and the “glue” to bring together individuals from diverse walks of life, to collaborate. Rotary creates a “space” for peacebuilding to happen, and provides certain tools and suggestions. (We see this in the example of the Rotary sponsored Mexico and Colombia Positive Peace Workshops.) However, Rotary does not spell out or dictate what clubs and individual Rotarians, Rotaractors and Interactors should do, and this, in a way, embodies perhaps a more “bottom-up” ethos of peacebuilding beginning with the core belief that everyone can be an agent of change. Rotary International provides support, but ultimately motivates and places the onus on its members as being called to service – to be peacebuilders.

The experience and vision shared by Rotary International demonstrates that peacebuilding is an endeavour that should articulate the objectives, resources, infrastructures and motivations of many actors to achieve meaningful results. As presented by this organization, the activities they carry out consider the participation of local actors, communities, higher education institutions, governments, sponsors, rotary clubs, research centres, foundations amongst other actors that work together towards the construction of longstanding peace, which corroborates that peacebuilding should be everybody’s business and that collaboration and communication among stakeholders are essential elements for impactful initiatives.

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