



**COUNTERING VIOLENT CONFLICT &  
POLARISATION.  
HOW CAN DONORS HELP?**

**CONFERENCE TAKEAWAYS**

This report reflects some key takeaways from a February 2024 conference convened by SCl in Belfast, focusing on Countering Violent Conflict & Polarisation. Emerging from discussions involving around 200 global delegates from the worlds of philanthropy, government and practice the document offers perspectives on the key challenges and strategies to address these pressing global issues. For more information and resources from the conference, please visit: [socialchangeinitiative.com/countering-violent-conflict-polarisation-how-can-donors-help](https://socialchangeinitiative.com/countering-violent-conflict-polarisation-how-can-donors-help)



# 1

## Funding Challenges and Opportunities

- Donors have a long tradition of playing a significant and effective role in supporting peacebuilding efforts globally, contributing to various stages of conflict resolution and transformation.
- Despite the vital role of philanthropy, funding for peacebuilding remains insufficient, especially at the local cutting edge of conflict, where resources are often scarce.
- Peacebuilding initiatives are often viewed as politically sensitive and financially risky by donors, which can deter investment. This perception highlights the need for reframing narratives to emphasise the positive contribution funding and supporting peacebuilding can make to address the root causes of conflict.

# 2

## Inclusivity and Dialogue

- Inclusive peace processes, engaging diverse stakeholders, are crucial for sustainable peace. These processes often involve dialogue with individuals and groups holding differing perspectives rooted in diverse experiences. There is a challenge to donors to support initiatives that prioritise inclusivity and dialogue.
- Donors, particularly private philanthropy, must hold firm to the principle of inclusivity and courageously support innovative approaches that others may overlook, even if they seem like "hopeless causes."
- Engagement with local communities affected by conflict is paramount. Donors need to build the relationships that enable an understanding of their needs and perspectives. They also need to fund the space to allow local peacebuilders to lead initiatives and determine effective solutions. Donors must adopt a more organic and less rigid approach which is sufficiently flexible to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. Wisdom often resides within communities, and donors should ask, "What do you need?"

# 3

## Addressing Polarisation and Fragmentation

- Polarisation within societies exacerbates the divisions and challenges in conflict-affected regions. Donors should develop guidelines and strategies to counteract polarisation and fragmentation, both online and offline, to promote cohesion and resilience.
- Donors must gather insights from diverse perspectives, including marginalised groups, to understand conflict triggers and polarisation factors. They also need to be aware of concerning underlying trends, such as young people's attitudes to democracy and the increasing reliance on social media for information. Building connections among donors and practitioners is crucial for collaborative problem-solving which includes identifying the impact of polarisation and opportunities to promote dialogue and a sense of belonging.
- Protecting democratic space is crucial given the rise in authoritarianism. This affects not just politics but also regulatory bodies some of which are increasingly moving to limit civil action by charities and others. Safeguarding and maintaining media independence is vital for critical debate and freedom of opinion. To tackle 'othering' in our era, we need to engage in open dialogue and outreach efforts to ease societal tensions and promote a greater sense of belonging.



## 4 Risk, Accountability and Justice

- Donors must be willing to take calculated risks and challenge restrictive regulations limiting funding to community-based organisations and activists. This may involve sharing risks and resources among donors to counteract repressive actions and protect the space for peacebuilding.
- Peace versus justice is a false dichotomy - accountability and justice are integral to sustainable peacebuilding efforts. We need to reframe and broaden our understanding of peacebuilding to ensure that it encompasses all its dimensions. These must include respect for human rights.
- The narratives we craft around peacebuilding are important and need to speak to peacebuilders that are working on the front line of conflict as well as taking account of global geo-political trends.

## 5 Future Perspectives and Challenges

- The changing global landscape, including shifts in demographics and questioning of Western democratic ideals, presents new challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding efforts.
- Balancing urgent humanitarian needs with long-term peacebuilding goals is essential. Donors should balance supporting initiatives that address immediate crises while also investing in initiatives with long-term sustainability.
- Donors need to recognise their privileged position as being custodians of 'patient capital', while also being able to respond to urgent challenges. Philanthropic donors can be the R & D (Research and Development) of peacebuilding, but donors can also contribute the essential added value of connections and support.
- Increased and ongoing dialogue and opportunities for reflection between philanthropy, bilateral donors, and practitioners are crucial. Creating spaces for dialogue allows for collaborative problem-solving and enhances the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives.