

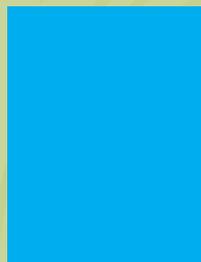


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# LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY FOR PEACEBUILDING IN THE ECOWAS REGION

Documentation of a Consultative Process



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# OVERVIEW



Espen Røst Bistandsaktuelt

Violent conflict continues to be a major problem in the world today and represents a major impediment to development. This is in view of the immense negative social, economic, and political consequences it unleashes<sup>1</sup>. These consequences have been identified as major drivers of poverty and underdevelopment<sup>2</sup> in different countries. Globally, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be one of the most affected regions<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup>. In response, there has been an increase in the number of peacebuilding actors, comprising of international and regional agencies as well as local organizations and diplomatic missions who have had an increasing influence in the peacebuilding space in the past few decades<sup>5</sup>. In West Africa particularly, the late 90s and early 2000s saw the establishment of peacebuilding mechanisms and foundational documents such as the 1999 protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peace-keeping and

security. It is from this protocol that the largest early warning and response system in West Africa i.e., ECOWARN was established. The ECOWAS protocol on democracy and good governance in 2001 further supplemented the 1999 protocol. This same period also saw the emergence of regional peacebuilding actors such as the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) established in 1998, the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) set up in 2002 and the West African Network for Security and Democratic Governance (WANSED) created in 2004<sup>6</sup>. Since then, new networks and actors have emerged in West Africa to address violent conflict.

As the growth of actors engaging in peace interventions continues, massive proliferation and diffusion of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the last ten years

1 UNESCO. (2011). *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*. Paris: UNESCO

2 Stewart, F., Holdstock, D., & Jarquin, A. (2002). 'Root causes of violent conflict in developing countries', *BMJ*, 324(7333), pp. 342-345

3 Fang, X., Kothari, S., McLoughlin, C., & Yenice, M. (2020). *The Economic Consequences of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa*. IMF working paper

4 IDRC (2020). *Global Report on Internal Displacements -GRID*. Available here: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/2020-IDMC-GRID.pdf>. Accessed on: 25, October 2021

5 Anderson, M. B., & Olson, L. (2003). *Confronting war. Critical lessons for peace practitioners*. Cambridge MA: The Collaborative for Development Action.

6 Ebo, A. (2007). Non-state actors, peacebuilding and security governance in West Africa: Beyond commercialisation. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 3(2), 53-69.

has changed how these actors engage in preventing and mitigating violence<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>. Scholarship shows an increase in the use of ICT by peacebuilders, tapping into the considerable promise of technology being a catalysator for peace<sup>9</sup>. This is mainly attributable to its ability to facilitate connectivity between diverse ideologies and cultures, thus enabling an environment where a global culture of peace can be formed.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the resultant measures to curb its spread have also accelerated the adoption of technology for peacebuilding. With populations on lockdown and peacebuilders unable to mobilize communities offline, activities such as training of peace actors, mediation processes, efforts to combat the spread of hate speech, misinformation and disinformation are increasingly being conducted online. The rate at which this is happening, is however observably abrupt, unstructured and in some instances forced.

This means that new adopters of technology for peacebuilding have had to learn on the go, to determine what works and what doesn't in short timespans. More established users have had to ramp up their programming to manage the increase in online communities and the associated threats and risks to these communities. As these changes unfold, policy actors and peace and security practitioners alike are rethinking their approaches to peacebuilding to better address emerging gaps as well as to take advantage of opportunities that come with a shift to online spaces.

The ECOWAS Commission in particular, is designing the *West Africa Peace and Security Innovation Forum (WAPSI)* - an annual gathering for the purpose of furthering citizen engagement, facilitating cutting edge research and fostering the participatory development of innovative solutions to emerging challenges to human security. To inform this forum, there is a need to further understand the topic of ICT and peacebuilding. Despite the recent spike in the use of ICT, the topic remains under-researched and under-conceptualized. This report is the first step of many towards a more systematic exploration to understanding the factors affecting innovation for peacebuilding, especially by local peacebuilding organizations in fragile settings.

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a regional consultation process, facilitated by Build Up on behalf

of the ECOWAS Commission in the context of the GIZ ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations Project, with peacebuilding organizations in West Africa that use technology in their programming. The consultations aimed at understanding the types of interventions in the region that are utilizing technology for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the challenges that peacebuilders face in adopting technology and the opportunities within their contexts that could advance and support technology-based programming to build peace.



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CTA ACP-EU

7 Larrauri, H. P., & Kahl, A. (2013). 'Technology for peacebuilding', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(3). pp. 1-15.

8 Gallagher, A. (2018). How 'Peace Tech' is Changing Global Conflict: Innovations Alter Ways That Citizens and States Make War and Peace. Washington, DC. USIP. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/05/how-peace-tech-changing-global-conflict>.

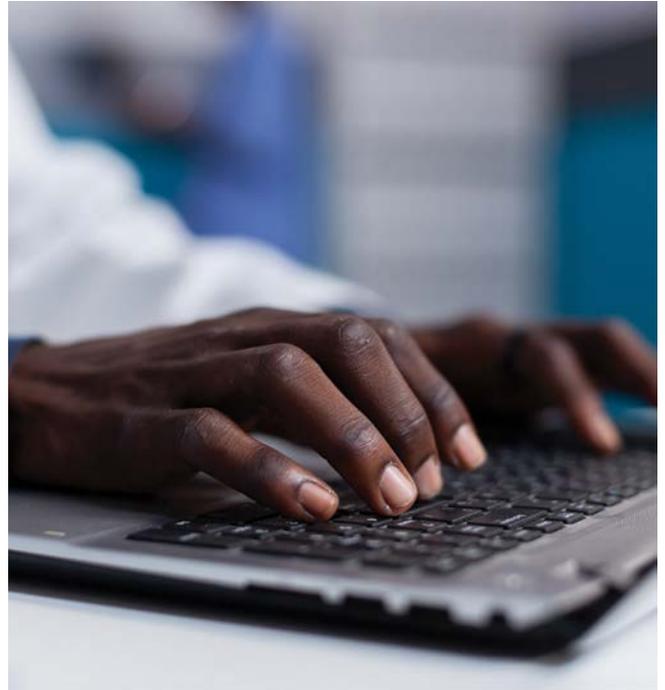
9 Mancini, F., & O'Reilly, M. (2013a). New technology and the prevention of violence and conflict. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(3). pp. 1-9.

# METHODOLOGY

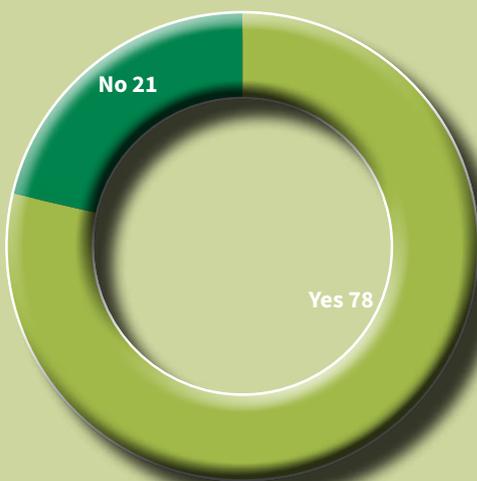
Between August and September 2021, Build Up surveyed 64 organizations running peacebuilding programs, and held eight, two-hour online consultation workshops with 76 (39 female and 37 male) peacebuilding practitioners based in West Africa. The survey respondents and workshop participants shared their experiences and insights on applying digital tools in their respective work contexts. The workshops explored how digital tools have altered peacebuilding programming and how the positive experiences of applying technology to address conflict can be amplified. This report presents the findings and recommendations from that consultation process. These findings and recommendations will be incorporated in discussions of the maiden edition of the WAPSI Forum in 2022.

## FINDINGS

The results below provide an overview of technology use by peacebuilders in their interventions. While not exhaustive, the set of quantitative results presented begin to frame the context of the intersection between peacebuilding and technology.



**In your work, do you use technology for peacebuilding or your engagement?**



### **Peacebuilders are using digital technologies in their programs.**

Majority (77%) of the survey participants are using digital tools to deliver their peacebuilding and youth engagement programs. While there has been a global shift by peacebuilders from offline spaces to digital platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020<sup>10</sup>, it is important to note that there were some programs in West Africa that were using digital technologies already prior to 2020. This is captured in the qualitative findings.

### **Social Media is the most common tool / platform used in peacebuilding programming.**

The majority of the survey participants (28) identified social media platforms as the tool of choice when adopting technology for peacebuilding and youth engagement. The use case for social media tools ranged from using the platforms to conduct trainings, running of online campaigns for sensitization and awareness raising on various social issues, to storytelling and countering harmful narratives online. Most organizations used a combination of two digital tools. For instance, an audio/video tool to capture stories and narratives from the community, and Facebook to share these stories in the form of videos to a large group or audience online and to trigger discussions related to the video topic. While use cases of social media platforms focused on them as tools for peacebuilding in and of itself, there were cases where these

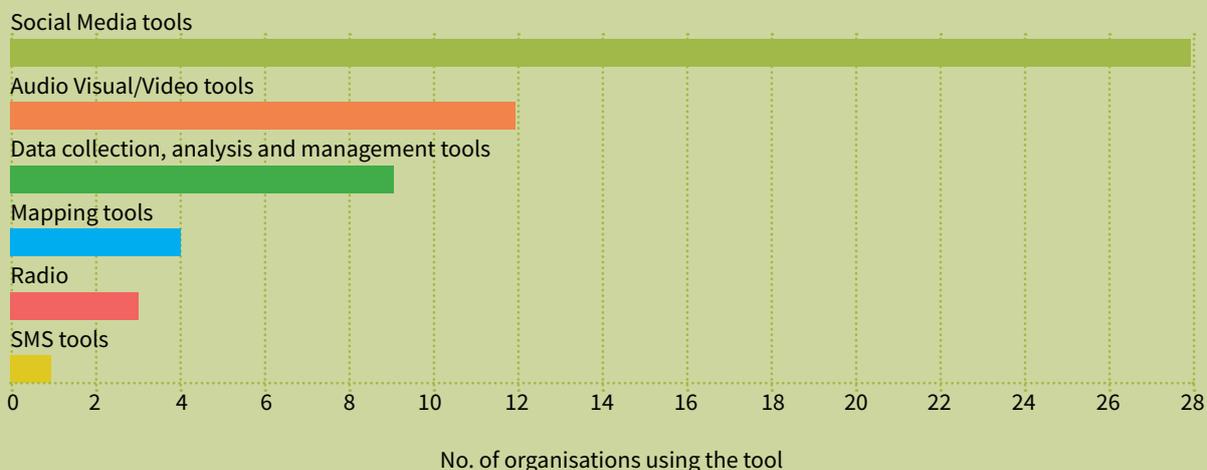
10 International Alert (2020). Can we build peace from a distance? The impact of COVID-19 on the peacebuilding sector. Background paper. Available here: <https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/COVID-19-Building-Peace-Distance-EN-2020.pdf> Accessed on: October, 12, 2021.

platforms were being used as extensions of past or current work predominantly for organizational communications.

Despite the proliferation of digital tools and social media platforms, radio is still being used in some instances. This reflects the poor internet connectivity in some remote areas and the need for engagement with community actors such as the elderly population, that is less likely to be reachable on digital platforms.

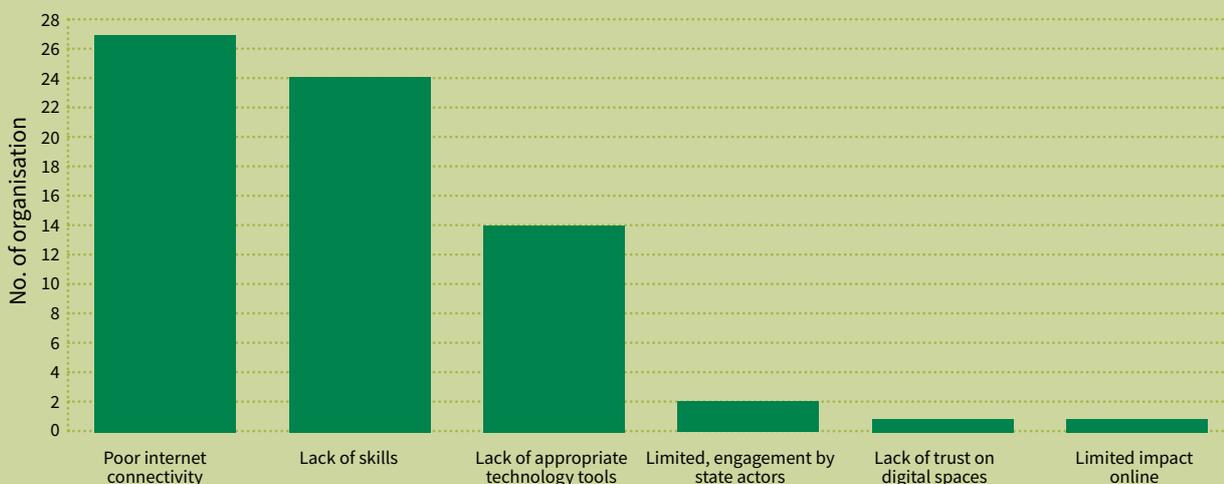


### Technology tools used for peacebuilding or youth engagement?



The move to adopt digital platforms for peacebuilding has not been without challenges.

### What are your organization’s biggest challenges when applying technologies for peacebuilding?

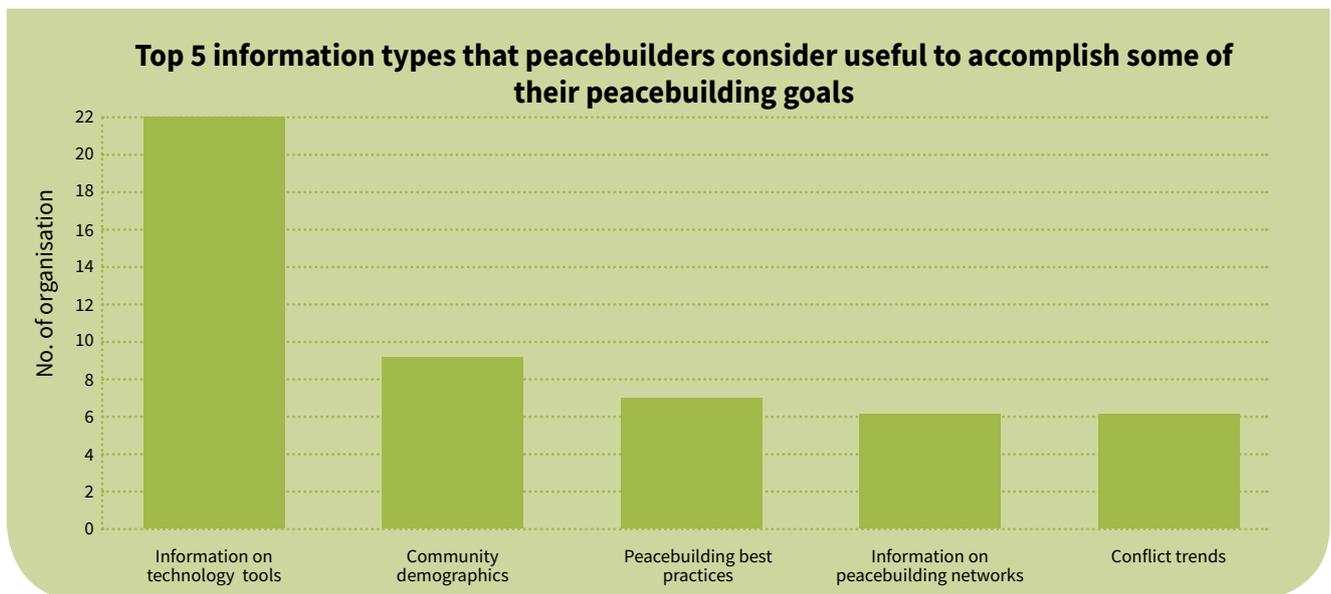


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**Poor internet connectivity is the most common challenge for peacebuilders when using technology for peacebuilding.** This is in direct relation to the most commonly used tools. Social media platforms use the internet to transmit information. This finding might point to a situation where peace actors use social media in some contexts where communities lack reliable access to grid electricity<sup>11</sup>. This challenge also might have wider implications such as high data costs which was a challenge identified as a result of poor internet connectivity. Lack of skills to maximize the use of digital technologies in peacebuilding contexts was also identified as a major challenge. These skills ranged from linking offline and online work, communicating effectively online, picture and video editing, setting up and deploying mapping programs amongst others. As peacebuilders increasingly adapt technology tools,

they will be required to acquire these and other skills necessary to harness the power and functions of digital tools to support their work.

Peacebuilders considered various types of information as useful in helping them accomplish some of their peacebuilding. Top amongst these was information about new and emerging technologies that can be used in peacebuilding. While this finding was most likely influenced by the theme and topic of the survey, other types of information that peacebuilders considered as useful for their work included community demographic information. This was considered useful to inform their programming and target different groups with different activities.



For instance, one respondent notes **“Knowing the number of people who are schooled and out of school based on localities in the country would be an important asset in the impact of our project on the one hand and on the other; it would be an asset to know the entrepreneurial trends of young people”**.

Information on peacebuilding best practices was also considered important by peacebuilders. To learn what other peacebuilders are doing and how they are doing it, what has worked and what has been challenging in addressing conflict.

In addition to the quantitative findings, four themes emerged from the consultations as areas where technology is currently used to amplify peacebuilding efforts in the ECOWAS region - and

where it also has the most future potential. Technology can be used to re-imagine youth engagement for peace, to strengthen early warning systems, to counter harmful online narratives, and for digitizing mediation. The following sections delve into each of those areas, providing examples of global practice and practice in the ECOWAS region, and explore the regional challenges and opportunities going forward.

11 McKinsey & Company (2020). Solving Africa's Infrastructure Paradox. Available here: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/operations/our-insights/solving-africas-infrastructure-paradox>. Accessed on, October 20, 2021.

# RE-IMAGINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEBUILDING



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While many states, institutions and agencies recognize that young people are major social change agents and a key human resource for development, they relegate the same youth to powerless positions that limit their potential, isolate them and their voices go unheard. Digital technologies can provide alternative spaces where youth voices are heard in ways that can influence change in their society. When youth get online, they quite often gravitate towards social media spaces where they tend to spend most of their time<sup>12</sup> and find opportunities for self-expression.<sup>13,14</sup> Social media networks, messaging applications, digital games and tech-enabled polls can all be used in a way that amplifies youth representation in decision making.

## 1.1. What is being done in West Africa?

Youth engagement was identified as a common practice in peacebuilding programming in West Africa. However, many programs focused on training youth on various themes, skills and topics. Programming for the youth was more common than programming with the youth. There was however the recognition of youth as powerful and able to fully engage in peacebuilding as collaborators and not just beneficiaries. Few programs that are captured below have been collaborating with youth to deliver peacebuilding programming and creating spaces for youth to

lead, and influence change. Here, programs go beyond just training youth to creating spaces where trained youth get to implement programs using their newly acquired skills. They get to facilitate dialogues and discussions with various actors, provide input on national peace plans, negotiate peace commitments from other youth and to pilot peacebuilding programs driven by their realities. These types of programs that shift the power that youth have in peacebuilding are beginning to re-imagine how youth are engaging in peace programming.

**Case 1:** *Coalition 2250* is an initiative by local organizations in Burkina Faso that aims to implement resolution 2250 of the United Nations<sup>15</sup>. The coalition has been advocating to the government for drafting, adoption and implementation of a national plan of action for the resolution 2250 in Burkina Faso. The coalition has included Burkinabè youth in this process by giving them an opportunity and a platform to host discussions on peace and security whose insights would inform the coalition's work and the national plan of action. The coalition first trained the youth on facilitation skills and technology tools and then provided them with the opportunity to apply these skills through the hosting and facilitating of peace and security discussions with the coalition and other Burkinabè youth.

<sup>12</sup> GeoPoll (2017) African Millennials; Mobile Usage and Media Consumption. <https://www.geopoll.com/blog/african-millennials-mobile-usage-and-media-consumption/>

<sup>13</sup> Ephraim, P. E. (2013). African youths and the dangers of social networking: a culture-centered approach to using social media. *Ethics and information technology*, 15(4), 275-284.

<sup>14</sup> Ntarangwi, M. (2020) <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2020/09/03/social-media-youth-popular-culture-music-kenya-counter-political-exploitation/>

<sup>15</sup> United Nations (2015). Resolution 2250(2015). [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)&referer=/english/&Lang=E)

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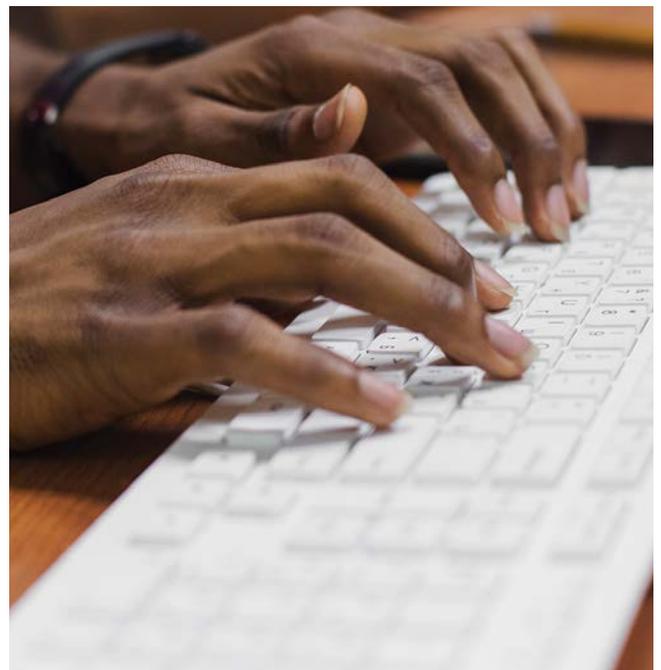


**Case 2:** The *Institute Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix* (IMRAP) has been engaging Malian youth using audio-visual tools. IMRAP deploys these tools to facilitate dialogue between communities in conflict areas. The intervention consists of short videos about peace and security in Mali that people get to watch in groups and then a facilitated discussion follows after. To further engage the youth, IMRAP has been sharing these videos on WhatsApp and YouTube and then engaging youth in these spaces to discuss ways in which violent conflict can be mitigated.

**Case 3:** *Youth for Peace Building & Development in Africa* (YOUPEDA) is a Nigerian organization that has been using Facebook to engage youth in dialogue processes on peace and human relations through their program titled “Strengthening Youths to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism”. They create inclusion by nominating both Muslim and Christian youth in their space to ensure that discussions benefit from different voices and that youth from different backgrounds and ideologies are included in the peacebuilding discussions.

**Case 4:** In Nigeria the *Center for Humanitarian Dialogue* (HD) has drawn lessons from how young people were engaging online, during the #EndSars protests and conducted an online dialogue session on social media to connect with them. Specifically, HD works with steering committees across local communities where they operate. Youth representatives within these committees are included in some of the peace processes. For instance, the HD team identified a community that had a long-standing conflict. Then, through the steering committee in this community, they mobilized young community members to participate in an online dialogue. These participants highlighted their issues and began identifying solutions for them as a collective, through a facilitated online discussion. A solution could be in the form of a solid commitment made and agreed upon by the participants to e.g., share positive messaging with their network and not facilitate the spread of hate or misinformation online, while educating their friends on the negative impact of false information and online hate. The community members from the online dialogue are now exploring with their wider community the positive impacts that virtual spaces can have on conflict.

**Case 5:** Since early 2020 *Oxfam IBIS* and *Build Up* have engaged with 6 teams of 2-3 peacebuilders from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. This ongoing project has provided training on non-violent action, human centered design and digital conflict to youth via WhatsApp, on Zoom and in person. The goal is to provide support to local civil society actors to pilot technology-enabled initiatives that promote peace.



## 1.2. WHAT IS BEING DONE AROUND THE WORLD?

**Case 1:** *Soliya* (a US-based non-governmental organization) runs the Connect Program, a large-scale virtual exchange for young people in the USA, Europe and the Middle East. University students across the globe can engage in facilitated substantive dialogue, and build meaningful relationships across national, cultural, religious, and ideological boundaries. Through a web-conferencing application, students speak face-to-face in groups of 8-10 global peers, with no more than two students from a physical classroom assigned to the same online group to ensure a deeply multilateral learning experience. Each group is led by facilitators trained by Soliya to sustain dialogue and support an environment where students can comfortably explore potentially divisive topics (such as religion, gender, current events, social culture, media, and the environment) and uncover biases. Soliya's Virtual Exchanges are a large-scale attempt to create global empathy, leadership, collaborative problem-solving and critical thinking; their goal is for young people to develop the global competence essential to thriving in an interconnected world and to co-exist peacefully.

**Case 2:** *Gharbatli* is a video game that tackles stereotypes by encouraging Syrian youth to think about their behaviours towards the other. The game uses interactive storytelling to take the user through a journey where they take actions and face consequences, inviting users to reflect on their behaviours and the decisions they made during the game. The game shows in real time the impact of a decision or an action that a person takes. The game creates an immersive environment through which users can develop a better sense of shared grievances. By taking the player through a journey where they have to make decisions and choices that affect them and others, they get to reflect and empathize with the ones affected negatively by their decisions and hopefully apply this reflection on to the real world.

## 1.3. REGIONAL CHALLENGES

**DIGITAL CONFLICT:** The emergence and growth of digital spaces and platforms in West African contexts has meant that existing conflict dynamics migrate from offline to online spaces. For instance, a participant from Côte d'Ivoire posited that:

***"I have witnessed political thuggery find its way to social media platforms in the form of harassment and intolerant content"***

Digital spaces where youth converge can easily be spaces where they are targeted by malicious actors who want to catalyze violence. As such, peacebuilders who want to get youth's attention online are in constant competition with those aiming to spread violence. This shift of conflict dynamics from offline to online spaces is being witnessed across the globe, as peacebuilders try to adapt their interventions to address this growing challenge<sup>16</sup>.

**TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE:** While new technology tools for youth engagement are emerging online, the technology infrastructure in some of the conflict contexts and rural areas still lags behind. Poor internet connectivity easily translates to high data costs posing a major challenge to youth who would like to download some of the digital tools that can enhance their engagement in peacebuilding processes. As such, digital tools that do not require the youth to download and install them in their phones are easier to use and to access. For instance, the *Parable of the Polygon* game<sup>17</sup> shared in the workshops resonated with participants from Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau and Ghana because it does not require the youth to download it. By sharing a link, it would be possible to access the game from a mobile phone or a computer. Facebook is also partnering with telecommunication companies in Sub-Saharan Africa to have its platforms, Facebook and WhatsApp, pre-installed on new mobile devices<sup>18</sup>. This would address the challenge of downloading these platforms for programs that use WhatsApp and Facebook to engage youth.

<sup>16</sup> Kavanagh, C. (2021). Digital technologies and civil conflicts. European Union Institute for Security Studies, Conflict Series, Brief 4. [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief\\_4\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_4_2021_0.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> *Parable of the Polygons* is an online explorable explanation game that focuses on a society of blue squares and yellow triangles which have slight personal biases against diversity, which leads to social segregation. The game is a useful educational tool for topics like ethnic, racial or religious segregation. <https://ncase.me/polygons/>

<sup>18</sup> Varela, F. (2019, 09 5). *Facebook expands preinstall partnerships*. Retrieved 10 8, 2021, from <https://tech.fb.com/preinstall-partnerships/>

#### 1.4. REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

**ACCESS TO YOUTH:** The gravitation of youth towards digital platforms, creates an opportunity to plug in and connect with them. *“Social media is where they(youth) can be found”*, as one participant put it. Access to youth in large numbers makes it possible for peacebuilders to tap into the agency for social change that youth have and include them in processes that aim to mitigate violent conflict. In addition to this, youth are developing and joining online communities based on interests such as sports or fashion. Understanding the drivers within these communities would present peace actors with entry points to these spaces. This would facilitate engagement with youth in their comfort zones without necessarily reinventing the wheel by creating new spaces assuming that youth are homogenous.



**UNDERSTANDING DESIRES AND HOPES:** The content youth share in online conversations creates an opportunity for peacebuilders to understand their needs, desires, hopes, worries and perceptions. Participants noted that in platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, youth conversations would revolve around social issues, the economy, politics and governance, peace messaging and intolerant content. Understanding how these topics change and are discussed by youth over time enables peacebuilders to be better informed on the youth perceptions and value systems. This better understanding makes strategies to engage youth more likely to succeed.



**NETWORKING AND MOBILIZATION:** Digital tools create opportunities and spaces where youth themselves can connect across geographies and mobilize towards a common goal. The #EndSars movement in Nigeria that began in 2020 on Twitter as a protest in response to police brutality in Nigeria<sup>19</sup>, demonstrates how youth were able to mobilize across time, and space to raise their voices against violence and social injustices. The ability for youth to galvanize into action via social platforms, presents an opportunity for peacebuilders to tap into to engage with and mobilize youth in their contexts towards a peacebuilding goal.



19 Obia, V. A. (2020). # EndSARS, a unique Twittersphere and social media regulation in Nigeria. *Blog de la LSE, 11*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2020/11/11/end-sars-a-unique-twittersphere-and-social-media-regulation-in-nigeria/>

# ENHANCING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

As technology evolves, new tools have developed the potential to facilitate affected populations' active involvement in data gathering for conflict prevention. This has seen the emergence of early warning and response systems (EWERS) that leverage technology functions in fragile contexts. With this emergence, there has been a dichotomy of EWERS, i.e., those run by local actors and those implemented at the national/regional level. At both levels, these systems rely on technology's ability to support in gathering, organizing, and analyzing data relevant to a conflict context<sup>20</sup>. For instance, through crowdsourcing and big data gathering facilitated by technology tools such as *Frontline SMS*<sup>21</sup> or *Crowdtangle Link Checker*<sup>22</sup>, new information about a conflict is provided to these systems. This new information existed in these conflict contexts but was either too costly for peacebuilders to gather and analyze, or the relevant digital tools that were able to give voice to communities in conflict and facilitate cheaper and efficient data collection methods were not available<sup>23</sup>. However, an equally important aspect of early warning systems is the response that comes from analyzing the warning information and deeming it relevant enough to warrant an action. Digital technologies can also be applied in response processes to supplement offline engagement. Disseminating messages online to address disinformation or hate speech<sup>24</sup>, peace messaging during tensions<sup>25</sup> or using social media to inform communities in conflict of any actions taken to address the conflict demonstrate the applicability of digital tools in response.

## 2.1. WHAT IS BEING DONE IN WEST AFRICA?

Early warning systems are not new to West African peacebuilders. From the region-wide ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) to localized systems run by individual organizations, EWERS have been a part of the peacebuilding infrastructure in several countries in West Africa. These systems have also embraced the functions of technology to gather and analyze early warning information for conflict insights and trends. The use of SMS, and WhatsApp to gather information and

mapping tools such as *Crowdmap*<sup>26</sup> and *Esri Maps*<sup>27</sup> to analyze and visualize early warning information is common in West Africa. Below are some cases of early warning and response programming that have adopted the use of technology.

**Case 1:** The ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (**ECOWARN**) is an observation, monitoring and response tool for conflict prevention and decision-making in operated by the ECOWAS Early Warning Department. Established in 1999 it has been in operation since 2003. ECOWARN covers the fifteen member states in the ECOWAS region and has five field monitors in each member state apart from Nigeria which has seven due to its larger population. The field monitors are equipped with mobile handsets, laptops and data connectivity to report relevant incidents around them to the ECOWARN platform after every fifteen days. These reports are guided by 56 human security indicators that the field monitors use.

The ECOWARN structure has two key parts. The early warning data collection and the response mechanism. For data gathering, ECOWAS has officially partnered with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), a regional peacebuilding organization with over 500 member organizations under its umbrella across West Africa. This structure and network enables ECOWARN to engage with local organizations in data gathering through the WANEP umbrella. For the response mechanism ECOWARN has partnerships with state security agents in the fifteen countries. ECOWARN provides monthly reports on conflict trends with recommendations and response options to the relevant government, and the government determines how to respond. All responses are assessed by ECOWARN for effectiveness and impact on a specific situation in order to identify existing response gaps or successful outcomes. All ECOWARN reports are however not available to the public due to various sensitivities related to the information the system monitors and responds to.

20 Larrauri, H. P., & Kahl, A. (2013). Technology for peacebuilding. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(3).

21 <https://www.frontlinesms.com/>

22 <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/crowdtangle-link-checker/klakndphagmmfklpelfkgjbjkimjihpmkh?hl=en>

23 IBID

24 Strachan, A.L. (2014). Interventions to counter hate speech (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1116). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

25 Shah, S., & Brown, R. (2014). Programming for Peace: Sisi Ni Amani Kenya and the 2013 Election.

26 <https://crowdmap.com/>

27 <https://www.arcgis.com/home/user.html?user=esri>

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ECOWARN has leveraged the power of technology to enhance its processes and gather more insights from the warning and response information. For instance, the platform uses Esri Maps to visualize trends across geographies, the ECOWARN team has developed a mobile application specifically for monitoring elections in the member states which has already been used in six elections by election observers. They also developed a mobile application in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to monitor incidents related to the pandemic.

**Case 2:** The *West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN)* is a fundamental part of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) conflict prevention mechanism. WARN is a regional system that monitors and reports socio-political situations that could escalate into violent conflicts. WANEP has further developed the National Early Warning System (NEWS) in all of its 15 national networks which leverages efforts of community-based conflict monitoring systems with local monitors to produce conflict and peace assessment reports and early warning reports that are shared with regional peacebuilders.

NEWS is an online system that facilitates the generation of data and information from human monitors and reporters across the ECOWAS region<sup>28</sup>. While it is set up as a national program within each country, collectively the information gathered makes NEWS a regional system. The monitors and reporters using NEWS are guided by a set of carefully selected indicators of violent conflicts at the local community, district, county, state, regional and national level.

**Case 3:** The *Community Initiative for Enhanced Peace and Development (CIEPD)* - a non-profit organization in Rivers State, Nigeria - has established and implemented the Conflict Watch Center (CWC). This is an EWER system that relies on various community-based sources of information, and community specific indicators to generate analysis on potential conflict hotspots. The approach of the CWC is tuned towards predicting, tracking, monitoring and reporting on situations, events and actors (individual, group and institutional) with the capacity to cause violence. It is built on conflict preventive measures more than mitigating measures. The public can

report to the platform via text message, WhatsApp or the online platform. Verified reports are then visualized on a map running on the *Ushahidi* platform for geospatial and trends analysis. The map is also available to other actors. Response is delivered at community level after verified reports meet a threshold for triggering conflict. This technology-based warning and response system was established in 2015.

**Case 4:** The *Liberia Early Warning and Response Network (LERN)* platform was established in 2010 by the Liberia Peacebuilding Office. The network consists of 23 organizations including Liberian government ministries, civil society organisations and United Nations organisations<sup>29</sup>. The group also comprised a large network of reporters that provided early warning data to an incident-reporting digital map that was developed by *Ushahidi* and was managed by *iLab*<sup>30</sup> Liberia at one point<sup>31</sup>. It is important to note that WANEP was involved in this system at its inception as providers of early warning information. LERN is still operational and in 2020 the system was used to track and report several COVID-19 related conflict-sensitivity issues<sup>32</sup> to prevent violent outbreaks.

**Case 5:** The *Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)* operates a robust Conflict Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system in Nigeria's nine Niger Delta states. The system compiles and links raw empirical data with qualitative analysis and response planning. It does this in conjunction with other regional, national and local systems. Data is primarily gathered from field monitors via a dedicated mobile line and integrated with data sets from other EWER systems for validation and triangulation and then visualized on a *peace map*. The peace map is used for joint analysis, conflict sensitivity planning and building peace. The peace map also integrates data from other sources such as *P4P* (IPDU SMS Early Warning), WANEP Nigeria, Fund for Peace's UNLOCK, NEEWS2015/TMG, NSRP Sources, Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria Watch, ACLED, and CIEPD. This EWER system also maps organizations in Nigeria working to promote peace and human security and have registered to receive email alerts when violence has recently escalated in their vicinity<sup>33</sup>.

28 WANEP (2021). Early Warning and Response. Available here: <https://wanep.org/wanep/early-warning-response/> Accessed, October 11, 2021

29 Peace Direct (2013). Liberia: early warning and early response collaboration. Available here: <https://www.peaceinsight.org/en/articles/liberia-early-warning/?location=liberia&theme=conflict-prevention-early-warning> Accessed on: 07, October 2021

30 Ushahidi (2012). The latest on Ushahidi Liberia + i Lab. Available here: <https://www.ushahidi.com/blog/2012/09/21/the-latest-on-ushahidi-liberia-ilab> Accessed on: 08, October 2021

31 Liberia Peacebuilding Office (2013). Liberia Early-Warning and Response Network (LERN) Trend Analysis Report. Monrovia, Liberia.

32 ACCORD(2020). COVID-19-related conflict drivers and resilience mechanisms in Liberia. Available here: <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/covid-19-related-conflict-drivers-and-resilience-mechanisms-in-liberia/> Accessed on 08, October, 2021

33 PIND(2019). An integrated Conflict Early Warning and Early Response System: Manual for data collection and analysis. Available here: <https://pindfoundation.org/pind-integrated-conflict-early-warning-early-response-ewer-system-manual/> . Accessed on 26, October 2021.

## 2.2. WHAT IS BEING DONE AROUND THE WORLD?

**Case 1:** *Una Hakika*<sup>34</sup> is a project of the Sentinel Project that operates in the Tana Delta, one of the least developed areas in Kenya. In this program, people report rumours anonymously using SMS, though they can also do so through phone calls or by contacting a trained community ambassador. Una Hakika uses a software called WikiRumours to receive rumour reports, prioritize them, verify them, and send feedback to people who reported the rumour. They also respond to requests for rumour verification with accurate information after an exhaustive investigation. This information is also sent to community ambassadors. The greatest strength of Una Hakika is in its process: by providing timely, verified information about rumours, the program incentivizes people to continue reporting rumours<sup>35</sup> that could catalyze violence.

**Case 2:** The *Sudanese Development Initiative (SUDIA)* is a Sudanese NGO that set up a conflict reporting system along nomadic routes in Sudan. SUDIA trained a network of key informants along the routes to send weekly reports via text message on key information about conflict incidents and peace agreements. All reports are tagged by source, location, date, topic, and verification status.

The reports are received by a central system that semi-automatically classifies them. There are twenty topics in the system, grouped under four broad categories: livelihoods, herding and farming, disagreements, and peace. SUDIA staff then verify the reports, and send a summary to each key informant via text messages, that can be used to inform early responses. SUDIA also produces monthly reports that it sends to national and international actors. The system has supported both community responses to incidents along the nomadic routes and a broader dialogue with authorities on the needs and challenges in these areas. The system has been running since 2012<sup>36</sup>.

## 2.3. REGIONAL CHALLENGES

**LATE REPORTING:** Information indicating the possibility of violence is often useful for prevention initiatives when it is received in a timely fashion by the relevant response actors. In situations where it is delayed, violence can break out before a prevention measure is rolled out. The late report consequently delays the response making it a conflict mitigation response and not prevention. Late reporting is a challenge experienced with multiple peacebuilding actors in the region, especially in contexts where the digital infrastructure is not reliable. Late response, however is more politically influenced than technology dependent. In instances of looming conflict, response involves state or regional actors that have the resources and capacity to intervene. However, these actors are much harder to mobilize based on the information from grassroots organizations. As such response is delayed or not implemented at all. Dynamics of this magnitude can render an early warning system less effective in preventing violence outbreaks.

**MISSING ANALYTICAL SKILLS:** Technology enabled EWER systems rely on managing and analyzing data sets gathered from the various communities, to identify patterns that signal potential violence. The data analytics and management skills and expertise required to deliver these signals are sometimes lacking in peace building organizations. This was highlighted by multiple actors in the region and was cited as the major reason for non-adopters of technology in their EWER systems. Beyond the data analytics skills, there is a need for technical skills within EWER teams to troubleshoot technology problems with the data gathering and monitoring tools when they are unresponsive or to manage the scaling of the platform to a wider community. Having the necessary technology skills and data analytics skills is also required on a full-time basis especially for EWER systems that run all day. One participant from Niger highlighted the need to “**regularly train and capacitate conflict monitors on available technologies**”. Limited skills or lack thereof can result in delays in analysis of reports and responses, critical information can be missed or misunderstood, and it ultimately becomes very challenging to prevent violence outbreaks despite having a resourced system.

34 The Una Hakika website can be accessed here: <https://unahakika.org/en/home>

35 Otunga, J.G. (2017). Chasing wind part 1: Rumour investigation in Kenya. Available here: <https://thesentinelproject.org/2017/08/04/chasing-wind-part-i-rumour-investigation-in-kenya/> Accessed on: 12 October 2021

36 Larrauri, H. P. (2013). New technologies and conflict prevention in Sudan and South Sudan, In Mancini, F., “New technology and the prevention of violence and conflict.” *International Peace Institute*.



**RELIABILITY OF EARLY WARNING REPORTS:** Participants viewed this as a two-part problem for systems that use a solicited approach<sup>37</sup>. EWER systems that rely on crowdsourcing for their data, will sometimes publicize a telephone number or mobile short codes for public reporting, and can easily receive false reports from malicious actors. These run the risk of catalyzing violence if responded to without first being verified. To address this gap, these systems will often establish a verification process to determine the accuracy of any information they receive. While this is needed and addresses the first challenge of false reporting, it creates a second celerity challenge; where a much-needed response can easily get delayed during verification. For instance, in situations where verification requires a staff member or a trusted partner to visit a location to substantiate the reports, responses will have a significant delay depending on the distance the partner or staff has to travel. Additionally, overly bureaucratic and complex verification processes also risk delaying responses.

**COST:** High technology costs were identified by participants as a major challenge and tied to poor technology infrastructure. A participant from Senegal stated: ***“In some areas with no connectivity, we have the human monitors use satellite phones to report incidents that require close attention and response, but this is a costly solution!”***

Workarounds to addressing a poor technology infrastructure context can be costly, from the type of technology used to the

human resource capacity required. SMS systems have arguably been considered as the most reliable systems in many contexts when trying to reach as many people as possible<sup>38</sup>. However, even these require a data analyst to manage the data or a digital platform to manage all messages or will usually have a cost (although low) attached to the SMS sent to the system that organizations will sometimes bear, to encourage the public to report tensions and other indicators of violence.

However, for organizations that are already implementing EWER offline, technology tools might be able to reduce costs associated with movement of monitors during reporting.

## 2.4. REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

**TRANSPORT ACTORS:** In areas with limited electricity supply and internet connectivity, peacebuilders have been working with transport actors. One workshop participant noted that: ***“the transport actors have been crucial in gathering and disseminating information in regions where technology use is absent”***. Bus drivers or motorcycle riders that ferry the public across different regions have access to information from their passengers and from the communities that they travel to, frequently. In cases of tensions or conflict in specific communities that are not digitally connected, these actors are able to sometimes move within these spaces as they migrate people fleeing from conflict and therefore gather information

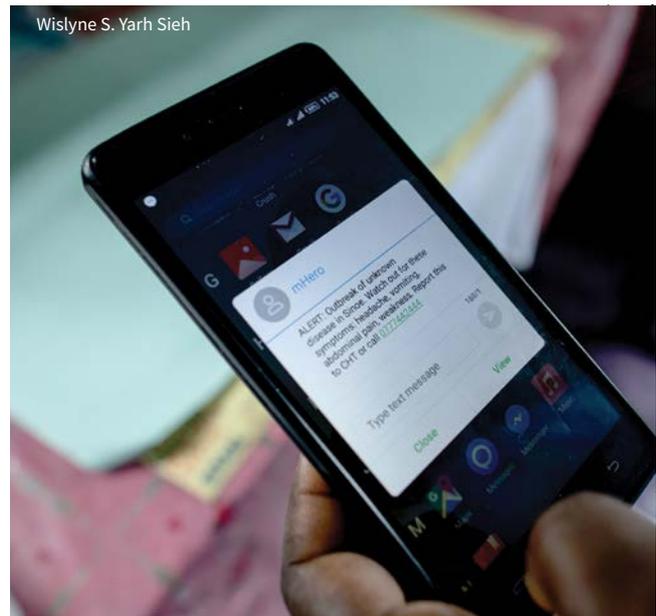
<sup>37</sup> These are early warning systems that request the public to send early warning information (e.g., rumours, tensions, mobilizing of armed groups etc) to a central point via various platforms such as SMS, telephone calls, email, twitter etc. The system basically solicits information from the public or the wisdom of the crowd and does not collect its own information by monitoring for these tensions

<sup>38</sup> Lüge, T. (2015). Comparison of SMS platforms. Available here: <https://cartong.org/sites/cartong/files/Benchmarking%20SMS%20Tools%20V%201.3%20published.pdf> Accessed 11, October, 2021

that is crucial for early warning systems. Peacebuilders have an opportunity to collaborate with transport actors and equip them with technology tools that can support their reporting and information dissemination, as they transport people or goods to different regions that are plagued with conflict.

**ACCESS TO INSTANT MESSAGING SERVICES (SPECIFICALLY WHATSAPP).** Participants were in agreement that WhatsApp was widely used in their contexts by multiple actors and would be a great tool to use in gathering early warning information and disseminating early response content. One participant noted that *“WhatsApp is used to collaborate with other organizations to pass peace information that discourages violence”*. While this specific use case was not tied to an early warning system, its potential to be incorporated into an EWER system to collect and disseminate information was identified as an opportunity to be tapped into.

**VISUALIZATION OF CONFLICT THROUGH MAPS:** The use of geographical information systems (GIS) tools was mentioned as becoming increasingly common in the peacebuilding field within the region for georeferencing and visualizing conflict. CIEPD<sup>39</sup> and PIND<sup>40</sup> in Nigeria use mapping tools in their EWER systems to visualize all reports that are received in their systems. Participants further identified that this is an opportunity for such tools to be applied and mainstreamed into more EWER systems not only to just visualize the conflict trends and indicators but also help in coordinating responses. Mapping the responses implemented by different actors can be a strong tool to identify response gaps, increase efficiency, avoid duplication and identify areas where responses have succeeded or have been unproductive.



EWER systems like the ECOWARN, or WARN by WANEP present an opportunity for bottom-up collaboration. This linking of local and regional EWER systems creates avenues for the local organizations to learn the relevant technology and data management skills from the regional actors, and for the regional systems to scale locally and gather robust granular data. Responses would also be better coordinated and the potential for duplicated efforts would be reduced. These linkages can be established and strengthened via joint training or monitoring and data analysis sessions, joint review of indicators, information sharing among other activities. One approach to achieve these linkages would be through the use of the National Centers for Coordination of the Response Mechanism (NCCRM) established by ECOWAS to decentralize its ECOWARN

**ADAPTABILITY:** Technology tools such as SMS based platforms were identified as having low barriers to adoption and adaptation for EWER systems because they were already in use in other programs within some of the organizations in the workshop. One participant from Sierra Leone pointed out that SMS is *“easy to use and can get messages to leaders faster”*. Another participant from Guinea Bissau stated: *“we used mobile phones and SMS to gather information from the public when coronavirus began spreading”*. This existing use of technology tools to gather information during a crisis or disseminate information to relevant stakeholders creates an opportunity for actors already using them, to adapt them into early warning and response programs with significant ease in setting up.

39 Community Initiative for Enhanced Peace and Development (CIEPD)

40 Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta - (PIND)

# COUNTERING HARMFUL NARRATIVES SPREAD ONLINE

Harmful content on digital platforms is becoming increasingly visible in the forms of misinformation, rumors and hate speech. It has also surfaced at the center of academic, legal, and policy agendas due to its destructive capabilities, especially its link to violent conflict. While there exists peacebuilding organizations and institutions that try to address this problem, it is important to acknowledge the potential of social media users who are unattached to peacebuilding organizations, but act as positive agents in these polarized spaces as they try to depolarize online discourse in different ways. Harnessing this potential, ensures that these agents get support and continue to engage in polarized spaces, while creating knowledge bases related to intervening in polarized digital spaces. Peacebuilders are already realizing that a collaborative approach with key actors on digital spaces such as social media influencers to deliver alternative narratives, allows them to access insights and audiences that they would otherwise find challenging to reach. This is in-part due to the digital landscape that comprises of private groups, pages and accounts and in-part due to the fact that social media platforms amplify our collective moral outrage<sup>41</sup>. In addition, as new digital tools emerge and existing ones develop new functionalities it is important for peacebuilders to stay ahead of this curve or be at par, to pre-empt how these tools and functionalities could be exploited to spread harmful narratives, or facilitate healthy discourse and productive conversations. This will help to push peace actors from a reactive space in response to harmful narratives, into a proactive space that establish healthy engagements online that act as counters to harmful content.

## 3.1. WHAT IS BEING DONE IN WEST AFRICA?

The challenge of harmful narratives spreading online was recognized to be common in contexts where communities have access to digital technologies. Participants highlighted that, harmful narratives will sometimes cross the offline - online divide, and spread even further in either direction. This has triggered the emergence of various programs that aim to; report and flag harmful narratives to relevant authorities in their countries that handle content regulation, develop and deploy counter messages and narratives online, sensitize the public on

the dangers that harmful narratives pose when they are online and research programs that study the types, context and spread of these narratives online among other programs. Participants also mentioned that some of their programs lightly touch on media literacy to reach individuals that disseminate harmful content online e.g., sharing of gruesome conflict images, without the intent to cause harm. As more people get connected and online actors get more tech savvy there was a concern that these narratives will continue to spread unless more peacebuilding actors take action. The programs below are examples of initiatives that peacebuilders are implementing in West Africa to address the spread of harmful narratives online.

**Case 1:** *Bassiki Kalan Sô* is a project in Mali that started in 2020, to address the spread of hateful revenge narratives online. *Bassiki Kalan Sô* uses *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* to share sensitization videos and messages to encourage social media users to post positive content online and refrain from spreading hate. Offline, the program also engages other members of the public for instance in the local mosques where people are sensitized on using speech that is peaceful, tolerant and uniting and why inflammatory speech should be avoided. This program has reached multiple groups in urban areas using social media platforms and communities in rural areas through offline engagement spaces such as the mosques.



41 Hu, C., (2021). Social media really is making us more morally outraged. Available here: <https://www.popsoci.com/technology/social-media-twitter-outrage/>. Accessed on 27 November, 2021

**Case 2:** In Nigeria the *Women and Youths for Justice and Peace Initiative (WAYJPI)* are running a project with youth and women to counter hate speech online. They use the Nigeria hate speech lexicon, and work with university youth, who generally spend a significant amount of their time on social media. Guided by the lexicon, they monitor for key hateful terms, record the volume of the terms over time, and then flag the posts using the terms and report these to social media companies. They further engage with social media users that use these words and inform them of the hateful and intolerant nature of the terms and their potential to cause violence. From this approach, the project has received apologies from online users who have included hate terms in their posts stating that they did not know how harmful the terms were, before being informed.

**Case 3:** *The Center for Technology and Development (CITAD)* in Nigeria, conducted a study on the use of gendered hate speech on women involved in governance and political processes in Nigeria in 2019. The study generated a glossary of words, terms and phrases that are offensive or hateful on women and girls in Nigeria. The purpose of this resource was to create awareness on the issue of gender-based hate speech; particularly how it hampers women participation in politics. CITAD has since been using this research to monitor online hate and use the findings to advocate for policies that can help in addressing this problem. CITAD also works with *Students for Peace (S4Ps)* in various tertiary institutions across the country to capacitate them on how to address hate speech and online violence against women on campus, neighbouring communities and online spaces.

**Case 4:** In Senegal the *National Audiovisual Regulatory Council*, which is the media regulatory body in the country, collects reports from the public on misinformation and disinformation. The public can report cases of false information that they witness from the local media, to the council. In such cases, disciplinary action is taken against the local media stations found to be disseminating this information and in severe cases they can lose their broadcasting licenses. Media regulatory agencies are common across different countries and can be government operated or independent actors<sup>42</sup>. Internet content regulation usually falls within the mandate of these regulatory bodies. For instance, in Senegal<sup>43</sup>, despite the fact that some of the content is shared on social media platforms owned by foreign

companies that have their own policies and regulations, the content also falls within the mandate of the Audiovisual Supreme Council of Senegal (HCA). The HCA, among other things aims to ensure, while respecting the preservation of cultural identities, objectivity and respect for a balance in the processing of information conveyed by the audiovisual media;

**Case 5:** In Côte d'Ivoire, *Interpeace* identified youth groups that were undertaking peacebuilding activities in their communities and trained them on technology tools and peacebuilding approaches. The youth groups then identified the challenges they wanted to address in their communities and one group established a cell to verify misinformation and disinformation online. The youth group also trained people on different techniques for verification and established a link between community leaders and elders who were offline to identify patterns of misinformation online and offline. The leaders and elders also help to stop the spread of misinformation and disinformation offline. The goal is to prevent political violence by identifying harmful narratives tied to mis/disinformation, alerting the established cell network and taking countermeasures to curtail the spread of the information.

**Case 6:** In Senegal, *WANEP* has an alert system to monitor hate speech. When hateful content surfaces online and is identified by the system, the team members get an alert that a particular key term or intolerant narrative has appeared online. The team then escalates this information to the relevant government agencies for response. This system monitors online hate but also functions as an early warning system, because in some instances, hate speech can be a precursor to violence. Parallel to the system, there are activists who sensitize people on the dangers of inflammatory speech especially in contexts where this speech is spewed by politicians.

<sup>42</sup> De la Brosse, R., & Frère, M. S. (2012). Media regulation in sub-Saharan Africa: Trends and stakes in French-speaking countries. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 33(3), 74-92.

<sup>43</sup> World Food Program (2021) Senegal Telecommunications. Available here: <https://dlca.logcluster.org/display/public/DLCA/3.5+Senegal+Telecommunications> Accessed on: 13 October, 2021

### 3.2. WHAT IS BEING DONE AROUND THE WORLD?

**Case 1:** In 2014 a group of Myanmar activists including former political prisoners responded to rampant public calls to hate and kill Muslims in the country by launching a campaign against hate and intolerance in Myanmar<sup>44</sup>. The campaign was “*Panzagar*” (*flower speech*). Panzagar works both offline and online. It organizes communities on Facebook, while in offline spaces it distributes stickers and posters of cartoons in the streets with messaging that discourages people from spreading hatred by urging them to put flowers in their mouths, literally. Its message is centered around urging people to watch what they say so that hate between mankind does not proliferate<sup>45</sup>. Panzagar’s symbol (and Internet meme) is a person holding a flower in their mouth, representing spreading peace through positive speech<sup>46</sup>. The Panzagar Icon/logo has become a sort of an identity badge where people proudly wear the Panzagar symbol to show that they stand for a hate free society. The Panzagar Facebook page grew rapidly in its first three weeks, and currently has over 200,000 followers. In a move to support this campaign and make a symbolic commitment not to use or tolerate speech that can spread hate, as the founder of Panzagar puts it<sup>47</sup>, thousands of people have posted photographs of themselves holding flowers in their mouths.



Brian Kelley

**Case 2:** In 2016, *Moonshot CVE* and *Jigsaw* ran a pilot program that used pre-existing online content developed by communities globally to challenge narratives that supported harm, such as violent extremism, violent misogyny, and disinformation in digital platforms. They called this the Redirect Method. The Redirect Method places advertisements (with positive or alternative content) in the search results and social media feeds of users who are searching for pre-identified terms that have been associated with a particular online harm. When online users utilize a pre-identified keyword or term when searching for something online, the Redirect Method shows those users, *content which responds to and counters socially harmful narratives, arguments and beliefs espoused by the content for which they were originally searching*<sup>48</sup>. The Redirect Method has since been deployed in different countries in collaboration with technology companies, state and non-state actors.

### 3.2. REGIONAL CHALLENGES

**OFFLINE SPREAD OF RUMOURS:** In contexts with a poor technology infrastructure, harmful narratives are spread offline. A participant from Nigeria stated that: “**in my context, internet connectivity is weak so social media use is limited, so we have more offline rumours and hate speech spread by political leaders and religious leaders**”. While offline harmful narratives are not new, they are challenging to monitor on a wider scale unless peacebuilding actors have teams at the community level, constantly engaging with the public to identify narratives spreading. Participants thus noted that efforts to address hate speech are increasingly focusing on digital spaces but the link between online and offline efforts is weak and lacking in some contexts. This has resulted in siloed efforts in the different spheres, despite the fact that sometimes the audience targeted by these efforts is the same.

**GENDER DIVIDE:** Some participants mentioned that women are usually excluded in the realm of public affairs, peace and security issues and this topic of hateful narratives and are rarely involved in programming to address it. This can be as a result of various factors such as cultural values and discrimination, stereotypes, male domination that ultimately leads to a gender digital divide<sup>49</sup> and limited participation in social issues, offline or online.

44 Dangerous Speech Project (2021). “Flower speech” in Myanmar. Available here: <https://dangerousspeech.org/myanmar/> Accessed on: 18, October, 2021

45 IBID

46 (2021) Profile Photo Available here: <https://www.facebook.com/panzagar/photos/a.1419716574951829/1431247603798726>. Accessed on 22 October, 2021.

47 The Irrawaddy (2014). Hate Speech Pours Poison Into the Heart. Available here: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/hate-speech-pours-poison-heart.html> Accessed on 22 October 2021

48 Moonshot(2021). The Redirect Method: Available here: <https://moonshotteam.com/redirect-method/> Accessed on: 26 October 2021

49 UNICEF, (2021). What we know about the gender digital divide for girls: *A literature review*. Available here: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/innovation-and-technology-gender-equality-0>, Accessed on: 12 October 2021



Despite that, they can be perpetrators of harmful narratives or be instrumental in addressing this problem at different levels and contexts. Their influence within their circles, at work, at the family level can be applied to proliferate these narratives or curtail them. Thus, limited inclusion of women in these programs becomes a hindrance to the success of programs that address social challenges such as the spread of harmful narratives.

**COUNTERING HATEFUL NARRATIVES ONLINE:** Participants from Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Senegal, Mali and Nigeria noted that there were limited programs focused on countering hate on digital platforms and a lack of a clear strategy for collaboration around this work. There were instances of some actors putting out counter messages in the comment sections on social media platforms in Nigeria. In Liberia there were cases of early warning systems that provided digital spaces for reporting hateful narratives observed online. In both countries, there were some efforts by youth groups that usually emerge during the election period and involve counter messaging campaigns.

**LANGUAGE USE ON SOCIAL MEDIA:** Language changes over time and new terms emerge and old terms can get new meanings<sup>50</sup>. As language changes, new hateful words might emerge in conflict contexts or existing terms might be given hateful meaning and with the interconnectivity of social media, these words are easily spread and have the potential to create havoc before peacebuilders catch up with this new content. In addition to this, absence of face-to-face cues on social media text-based posts make it challenging to determine motive, emotion and context in some of the posts that might carry hateful terms. It is therefore possible to misunderstand something as hateful or not because the terms being used are new or there is just not enough information to determine motive or understand context online. One Nigerian participant stated: **“Some of the things**

**we look at as hate speech and dangerous speech<sup>51</sup> can be very fluid, one moment they are hateful and dangerous and the next minute they just are not.”** These instances can be challenging to actors addressing the spread of content that they do not fully understand because of its evolution or lack of more information to determine context. Peacebuilders have to not only counter these narratives but constantly and closely monitor the shifts in meaning of these narratives and their potential to harm. This can be a time consuming and resource demanding process.

### 3.3. REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

**CROSS-PLATFORM INFORMATION SHARING:** In contexts with limited internet access, participants mentioned that they would share information across different technology tools. Information from platforms that rely on the internet for communication such as WhatsApp was being shared to platforms like SMS that are suitable for areas with unreliable internet connectivity. One participant from Côte d’Ivoire explained their project: **“We were running a project to bring together Muslim and Christian girls from different backgrounds to discuss so we set up a WhatsApp group where they could discuss various topics. However, some girls did not have access to WhatsApp but were using SMS, and one of the girls agreed to be the bridge and share messages from the WhatsApp group to SMS and from SMS to WhatsApp to enable all girls to participate”.**

Cross platform information sharing is useful when addressing harmful narratives especially in areas where there is a technology infrastructure but it has some limitations that create a digital divide between those who have access to internet services and those that have access to basic mobile telephony services such as voice and SMS. Online actors addressing harmful narratives are able to share their findings with actors on SMS to compare trends while the actors using SMS are able to gather offline patterns and trends of similar narratives and push them “upwards” for analysis. Further, it is possible to run coordinated campaigns on internet-based platforms and on SMS to ensure that the approach covers different digital spaces that hate might emerge.

**ONLINE CAMPAIGNS:** Participants noted that there was a huge potential in West African countries to create strategic online campaigns that can be deployed to address and counter hateful narratives online. Sighting an example from Sweden that uses the hashtag #jagärhär to coordinate online actions that counter hate, participants referenced the #EndSARS online protests that started in Nigeria but resonated also in other West African countries. The use of a common hashtag by peacebuilders in

50 Steels, L. (2017). Do languages evolve or merely change? *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, 43, 199-203.

51 “Dangerous Speech is any form of expression (speech, text, or images) that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group”. (Dangerous Speech Project, 2021)



West Africa to engage in digital spaces was identified as an opportunity that can be tapped. One participant coined the hashtag **#BustIT**, suggesting that it could be used by peace actors to debunk disinformation, meaning that the person posting or the false information has been “**busted**” before spreading and causing harm.

**KEYWORD MONITORING:** Senegalese, Malian and Burkinabè participants mentioned that in their contexts, social media companies such as Facebook and other public information platforms have established technical and automated social media monitoring systems based on specific key words that are inflammatory or hateful. When these keywords are used in a comment, the systems identify and flag these comments and sometimes delete them. This is an automated way to manage hate speech online. Such efforts by technology companies present an opportunity for engaging with local peacebuilders to build these automated monitoring systems and ensure that they do not curtail freedom of speech or expression during content deletion. The delicate balance between prevention of harmful content spreading online and ensuring fundamental rights are upheld can be achieved through such collaboration opportunities.

**CYBERCRIME LAWS:** Some participants mentioned the presence of laws and policies that govern the digital spaces. A participant in Senegal mentioned that: “***we have laws in cyber-crime that have led to the arrest of youths that were spreading misinformation, disinformation and hateful content***”. While cybercrime laws are useful to navigate the digital spaces and protect users from harmful content, they should be implemented in a transparent and accountable way to avoid misuse and weaponization of these laws as was witnessed in Mauritania in 2018 when Mauritanian activist Abdallahi Salem Ould Yali was jailed for calling the Haratines ethnic group (which he belongs to) to demand their rights and resists discrimination<sup>52</sup>.

52 Human Rights Watch (2021). Abuse of Cybercrime Measures Taints UN Talks. Available here: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/05/abuse-cybercrime-measures-taints-un-talks> Accessed on, 12 October 2021

# DIGITAL MEDIATION

A mediation process design determines the steps and structure that a mediation or facilitation process will follow. The design contains procedural, organizational and some substantive matters, which can be highly political. Failure to consider these matters and jumping straight into a web conferencing tool, can render a digital mediation process unsuccessful. The transition from in-person to online formats requires more than just picking a video conference tool. Online interactions have different dynamics that need to be considered. A first reaction is to think about what a meeting loses by going online, rather than considering what virtual rooms and digital tools can enable people in different locations to meet. Important elements in mediation such as trust are likely to suffer or be a challenge to establish in digital mediation. As such, peacebuilders need to think of alternative ways to build or re-establish trust in digital spaces. For instance, there has been instances of hybrid approaches, that aim at incorporating a physical meeting in the digital mediation process to maintain trust. Others will begin with an offline mediation process and then when trust is established, migrate the process into a digital space. These adjustments to the mediation process are part of the digital process design. The digital process design is a set of best practices that can help actors redesign a mediation process specifically for the digital space. This process helps peace actors critically reflect on why they need to roll out a digital mediation process, what they might lose and gain from it and how they can minimize the losses and amplify the gains.

## 4.1. WHAT IS BEING DONE IN WEST AFRICA?

Digital mediation programs were the least common among the four themes covered in these consultations, due to some of the challenges presented below. This is however not particular to West Africa. Globally there are few programs that engage in digital mediation due to various issues. In fact, a recent report by UNDPPA<sup>53</sup> to provide mediators with concrete examples and practical information on digital mediation programs only includes 15 examples. However, consultation participants found the concept practical citing that the approach would be useful in their contexts but would have to be preceded with other aspects such as training of offline mediators on digital facilitation skills, access to the internet and digital literacy training.

**Case 1:** In 2020 *Build Up* ran an entire participatory research process in Burkina Faso on conflict and resilience drivers over WhatsApp. This involved consultations with key stake-holders, analysis workshops, training and supporting the enumerator teams as they spoke to over 2000 Burkinabè in the 6 regions of the country. At the beginning the team held a digital consultation with 40 civil society groups and government representatives to develop a research questionnaire based on their priorities. Getting 40 different stakeholders to agree on a research questionnaire that would capture sensitive topics, proved quite challenging at first due to the different views and agendas. *Build Up* decided to run this process as a digitally mediated process in order to come to a consensus on the questionnaire. The project team had planned to hold a two day in-person workshop for this initial stage but shifted it to an 8-day consultation over WhatsApp<sup>54</sup>. Due to the magnitude of this undertaking, there were always 2-3 facilitators to analyze the data, put together materials and ensure a smooth flow of the process. In the end, the process sent and received over 10,000 messages over the 8 days and arrived at a consensus on the drivers of conflict and resilience in Burkina Faso that informed the final and agreed upon questionnaire.

## 4.2. WHAT IS BEING DONE AROUND THE WORLD?

**Case 1:** The *Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)* conducted digital mediation processes in Libya which aimed at restarting the political process after more than a year of war and several years of parliamentary divisions and strife. They mediated six electronic informal sessions that were in support of a formal peace process run by the United Nations in Libya. Four of the sessions were between the members of the house of representatives in Libya. They would bring the members together on Zoom to discuss issues around the resumption of the peace process and the talks and mediate these sessions. Having a web conferencing platform like Zoom, HD was able to manage the participants for instance with their names, raising hand function, muting background noises, moving them into groups among other functions<sup>55</sup>. These Zoom meetings complimented some offline sessions that HD had facilitated prior to COVID-19. They also complimented some of the relationships that HD had cultivated in the course of 10 years that they had been working in Libya.

53 UNDPPA, HD. (2019). Digital Technologies and Mediation in Armed Conflict. Available here: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/DigitalToolkitReport.pdf> Accessed on 24, October, 2021

54 *This is important to know because it somewhat a rule of thumb that it takes about three to four times longer to run a workshop over a messaging app than to run an offline workshop*

55 *These functions are also available in other video conferencing tools and not unique to Zoom*

## Documentation of a Consultative Process

**Case 2:** In 2018, a power sharing arrangement was signed in South Sudan, however, implementation of the agreement has been extremely slow due to disagreements between the political parties and at the cost of human lives due to the ongoing conflict. In response to this, the *United Nations Mission in South Sudan UNMISS* began an offline mediation process for all political parties called the political parties forum (PPF). It was the first time that political parties were brought into the same room in a non-oppositional setting, thus there were tensions in the room. However, the participants valued this forum and wanted to continue with it because they appreciated the open channels for discussion in the room. When the pandemic hit and the government enforced gathering restrictions, the ability for UNMISS to continue with its work on mediation and engagement offline was diminished.

Based on this momentum that UNMISS had gained on these PPFs and given the challenges around the pandemic, UNMISS migrated the process online. They used Microsoft Teams. Some participants had to be provided with internet bundles to facilitate their access. Most of the participants were using their mobile phones to participate in the process. UNMISS continued these digital mediation processes for three months. Through the support of UNMISS the political parties successfully built the capacity of their representatives to use video conferencing as a tool for participating in digitally mediated processes, dialogue sessions within the party and training. It also generated a positive climate of exchange both between the parties and with UNMISS.

### 4.3. REGIONAL CHALLENGES

**BUILDING TRUST ONLINE:** Mediation processes that involve participants in conflict with each other require trust that can be built offline through joint mundane activities, such as sharing a cup of tea. The absence of this physical engagement in an online space makes it more challenging to build trust. Participants mentioned that it was quite challenging to build the trust needed for constructive dialogues and distractions could easily set in. They mentioned that the online space can easily create a distance between participants instead of bringing them closer, making them feel detached from the process and ultimately lose trust in the process.

**DIGITAL MEDIATION SKILLS:** Good offline facilitators are not always good online facilitators. When dialogue processes shift to digital spaces offline facilitators need to adjust their facilitation skills to take advantage of the digital spaces. Participants mentioned that the skills needed to navigate digital spaces and hold dialogue processes in these environments were not common with facilitators in their field. Questions from participants focused on how peacebuilders could navigate the online spaces

and facilitate dialogue and how offline facilitation skills could be put to use online.

**POOR CONNECTIVITY:** For mediation processes to be successful, meaningful and active participation from all stakeholders is essential. Facilitators need to guide and manage sensitive conversations and ensure formation of an inclusive space. Offline, these considerations are often met by bringing all stakeholders in the same room with limited distractions and by facilitating a natural conversation flow. When these considerations are moved to digital space, mediation processes can easily be disrupted by poor internet connectivity of one or all parties involved. A party that keeps on dropping in and out of the digital space because of poor internet connectivity might be seen as unprofessional, a spoiler or not serious with the process. In this context poor connectivity not only excludes an actor from fully participating but can have adverse effects on a digital mediation process. Malian and Nigerien participants for instance mentioned that digital mediation processes could work in urban spaces, but that participants from rural areas would find it challenging.



**PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA:** While social media has its benefits as a tool to support democratic and peaceful processes, it also has its down sides that facilitate misinformation and intolerance and other vices<sup>56</sup>. With this duality, some actors might choose to focus on the negative side of social media. It therefore becomes an uphill task to convince such actors to conduct mediation dialogue processes on social media. A participant from Burkina Faso, shared that they were faced with criticism from religious and community leaders who were to be involved in mediation dialogues, for suggesting and using social media for mediation and conflict mitigation. The negative perception of social media can easily cloud the view of various actors who are key in the mediation process.

#### 4.4. REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

**ONGOING OFFLINE MEDIATION EFFORTS:** There was a clear indication that offline mediation efforts were ongoing in the region to address conflicts. Some participants in the sessions were mediators in offline spaces and wanted to learn about ways they could achieve the results from offline mediation processes in a digital space. One participant from Burkina Faso mentioned: ***“I am a mediator now and I know how important trust is, how do you get that trust on digital mediation?”*** Participants also identified the benefits of incorporating digital tools and saw an opportunity to apply these tools to continue their mediation work especially during government enforced curfews and lockdowns in response to the spread of COVID-19. A participant from Nigeria stated ***“I am a council member of the Plateau State “MultiDoor Court” which is an alternative dispute resolution window for solving all kinds of conflicts. [...] I believe that the work we do can have a power edge by using digital tools”*** The presence of offline mediators in the region creates an opportunity to capacitate them to be able to adopt digital platforms and continue their work despite hurdles such as lock downs and gathering restrictions. Having an understanding of the mediation process in different contexts creates a foundation upon which the technology becomes an added benefit and not a replacement of the process. Training would focus on the digital space dynamics and not have to cover the basics of mediation, because this would be existing knowledge. After the training, there is also an opportunity for the mediators to share and exchange different ideas and strategies they apply in the adoption of digital tools to facilitate dialogue.

**GROWTH OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS:** Although internet connectivity was cited as a challenge, this was in reference to the use of video conferencing tools such as Zoom. Participants viewed and thought of digital mediation processes as only possible with video conferencing platforms. After learning about digital mediation and consultation processes that can be conducted on messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, they identified the prevalent use of WhatsApp in their contexts as an opportunity to explore digital mediation. Participants noted: ***“The use and development of digital technology by millions of people in Niger, especially social networks and media [...]”*** as an existing opportunity that can enable digital mediation. Another participant from Mali noted ***“In Mali, the current use of WhatsApp can be an opportunity”***.

**EXISTING ONLINE PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS:** Participants were in agreement that there was a popular use of social media platforms for sensitization and awareness campaigns in the region. Other use cases included the use of social media to urge communities to be peaceful during elections. A participant from Liberia shared: ***“In Liberia, the youth used social media platforms to send peace messages during the recent elections to calm tensions.”*** They identified this as an opportunity to extend the use of social media beyond awareness campaigns to digital mediation. The barriers to move in this direction would be low because the target audience would be social media users and not all demographics. This approach would complement the offline mediation processes that for instance would include the community elders while the online mediation dialogues would engage the youth who have access to these tools. A participant from Ghana mentioned that, ***“this approach would work because the young people are eager to learn, they have appetite and the basic technological understanding that can be harnessed for such intervention”***. The processes would happen in parallel and feed information to each other for an inclusive mediation process.

56 Dwivedi, Y. K., Kelly, G., Janssen, M., Rana, N. P., Slade, E. L., & Clement, M. (2018). Social media: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Information Systems Frontiers, 20*(3), 419-423.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations for regional institutions e.g., ECOWAS, governments and development partners and regional peacebuilding actors.

- **Develop and strengthen peacebuilders' information, communication and technology skills.** The shift by peacebuilders to engage communities in digital spaces, means that a boost in their technology skills is needed. This will enable them to leverage the use of the technologies to understand digital conflict dynamics and build peace. Technology companies, governments, academic institutions and development partners need to develop ICT programs and courses that apply a social development or peacebuilding lens for peace actors to enhance their skills. Beyond staff capacity building, funders should provide organizations with resources to improve their technology assets such as software licenses and hardware acquisition and management. The focus here should not be on the technical aspects alone but also ways in which the technical skills and tools can be applied to social development. Where possible, the programs should be delivered in local languages to ensure inclusion.
- **Regional learning and sharing:** Regional agencies, governments and development partners should provide platforms and spaces where peacebuilders can convene to share their lessons from using technology in peacebuilding programming. Such fora can be organized by thematic or programmatic focus to enable deeper learning sessions. For instance, a workshop for regional early warning and response practitioners. The planned West African Peace and Security Innovation (WAPSI) forum is a suitable space to kickstart these co-learning sessions and also determine the programmatic areas that can meet beyond the WAPSI forum.
- **Re-imagining public-private partnerships.** The digital divide<sup>57</sup> remains a major challenge for peacebuilders adopting technologies for peacebuilding. As such regional institutions such as ECOWAS and governments should re-imagine regional partnerships with telecommunication companies to establish policies that promote technology based social development. For instance, reduced data costs for peacebuilders monitoring conflict using digital platforms or institutions conducting digital mediation programs with communities in conflict. While this does not eliminate the digital divide, it reduces the barriers to entry to the technology space for peacebuilders who already

have established trust with communities in conflict and plan to use technology to enhance their work.

- **Strengthen links between offline and online programs.** Even with this shift to digital spaces, it is imperative that the offline programming is not ignored. Recognising that conflict dynamics oscillate between the two spheres, regional institutions, donors and peacebuilding networks should strengthen and support programs that bridge this on/offline divide to implement dynamic peacebuilding activities. This may also emphasize the need for offline peacebuilders to collaborate with digital peacebuilders.

Aside from the general recommendations, below are thematic focused recommendations for peacebuilders.

## RE-IMAGINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PEACEBUILDING

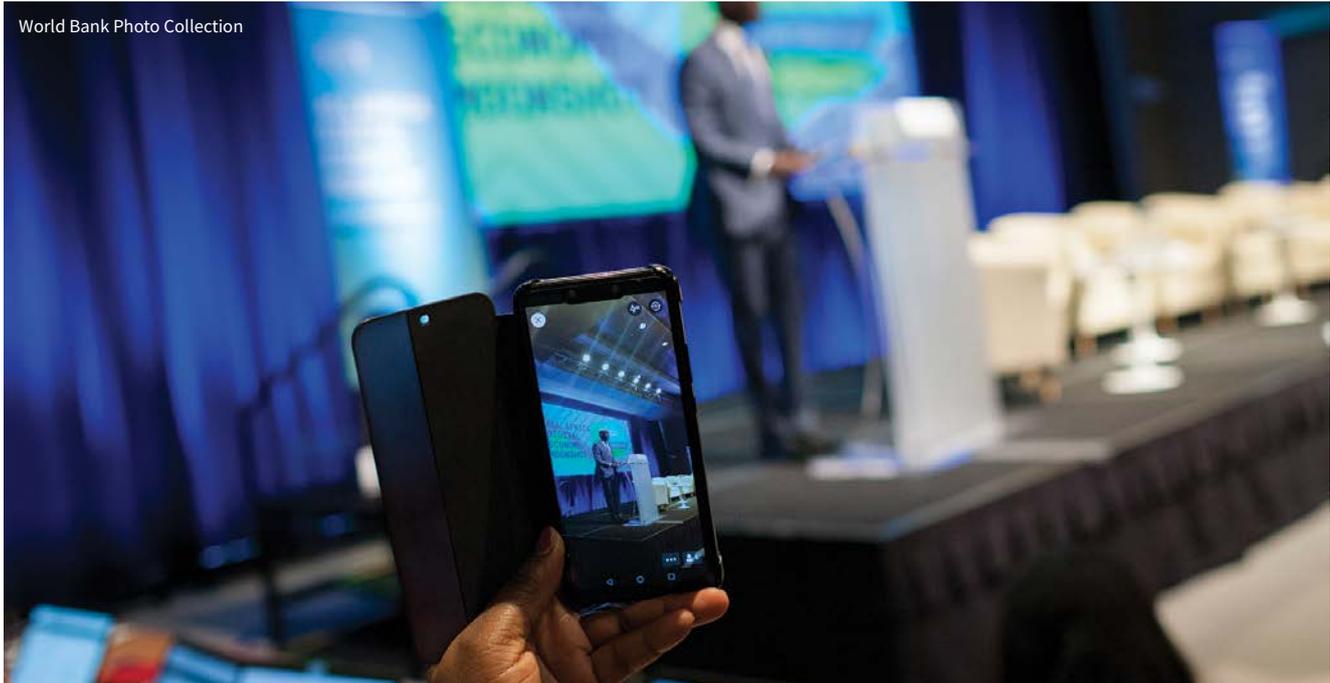
- **Involve youth in peacebuilding not only as beneficiaries but implementers:** Peacebuilders should elevate the role of youth in peacebuilding as skilled navigators of online spaces, to play a significant role in peacebuilding. Considered as digital natives<sup>58</sup>, these youth can be the ones to support training on technology skills, or to identify relevant trends online as they unfold. In other contexts, youth have led digital peacebuilding initiatives, reaching out to other youth online at risk of recruitment and polarization. This active role of youth in digital spaces needs to be mainstreamed, as they have a lot to offer with regard to the online space.

## ENHANCING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

- **Link local EWER systems with regional systems.** Early warning systems rely on a distributed network of actors to be effective. As such, national systems like Liberia Early Warning and Response Network (LERN) and region-wide systems like ECOWARN should re-examine how to establish clear links with local systems. It is commendable that ECOWARN already works with the West African Peace Network. However, actors outside WANEP with EWER systems can be provided with channels for information exchange to enrich the regional and national systems. Such channels can also serve as opportunities for the local actors to learn about various technologies and techniques for data analysis and management used by regional systems.

57 "The digital divide can refer to the disparity between individuals, households, communities and/or countries at different socio-economic and institutional levels who have or who do not have the opportunity to access and use ICTs." Srinuan, C., & Bohlin, E. (2011) *Understanding the digital divide: A literature survey and ways forward*.

58 Dingli, A., & Seychell, D. (2015). *The new digital natives*. JB Metzler: Stuttgart, Germany.



• **Included digital based early responses:** Peace actors deploying early warning systems should include early responses that are not only based offline but also online. In instances where the spread of harmful rumours and disinformation on digital spaces is an indicator of looming violence, early responses that take advantage of technology should accompany offline responses. These can be in the form of massive coordinated debunking and countering misinformation campaigns online or activation of digital peacebuilders to depolarize divisive debates online among other strategies. These would support offline efforts that might be slower to implement.

#### COUNTERING HARMFUL NARRATIVES SPREAD ONLINE

- **Promote digital media literacy among peacebuilders and their target communities that combines technical skills and social responsibility.** As peacebuilders shift to digital spaces, governments, academic institutions and regional development actors need to provide digital literacy programs to peace actors and the public. These should not only aim to provide the technical skills needed to address digital challenges such as privacy issues, misinformation and disinformation, internet fraud, cyberattacks among other problems but inculcate the concept of social responsibility when engaging with content online. Understanding these digital risks, how they affect our social well-being and how to mitigate them, would enable both the peacebuilders to first protect themselves and navigate these challenges to build healthy digital spaces.
- **Promote data driven interventions.** Peacebuilding actors should be guided by data or research when intervening in digital spaces to address harmful narratives. Understanding

different narratives online, their potency to different actors, their target audience and perpetrators, their linkages to the offline context would help to inform the strategic approach used to address them. Organisations such as CITAD are already on this path with their recourse that analyses the hateful narratives targeted at women in Nigeria and the public perception on women in politics. The resource has been used by an organization to inform their strategies to address this type of content. This type of collaboration between inquiry and project implementation can be achieved through CSO and academia partnerships or project design that is preceded and informed by locally led research.

#### DIGITAL MEDIATION

- **Invest in the process not only on the technology:** Digital mediation is not about getting the best video conferencing technology to conduct mediation talks but a process that might begin and end offline. Peacebuilders should therefore invest in building offline relationships or leveraging existing offline relationships to implement online activities. Before embarking on a digital mediation process for instance, digital experience and literacy may vary between different actors and peacebuilders should consider how to bridge this gap. During the digital process, privacy of the conversations and full participation should be considered. After the mediation talks, information gathered will usually have to be shared offline especially if it is to inform policy. Investing in the process from beginning, middle and end and not just the technology that will be used mainly in the middle, provides peacebuilders with a better chance of conducting successful digital mediation interventions.

## ANNEX 1.

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Re-imagining youth engagement in peacebuilding (West Africa)</b>			
<b>Coalition 2250</b>	<i>Coalition 2250</i> is an initiative by local organizations in Burkina Faso that aims to implement resolution 2250 of the United Nations. The coalition has been advocating to the government for drafting, adoption and implementation of a national plan of action for the resolution 2250 in Burkina Faso. The coalition has included Burkinabè youth in this process by giving them an opportunity and a platform to host discussions on peace and security whose insights would inform the coalition's work and the national plan of action. The coalition first trained the youth on facilitation skills and technology tools and then provided them with the opportunity to apply these skills through the hosting and facilitating of peace and security discussions with the coalition and other Burkinabè youth.	<b>Burkina Faso</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>The Institute Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix (IMRAP)</b>	The <i>Institute Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix</i> (IMRAP) has been engaging Malian youth using audio-visual tools. IMRAP deploys these tools to facilitate dialogue between communities in conflict areas. The intervention consists of short videos about peace and security in Mali that people get to watch in groups and then a facilitated discussion follows after. To further engage the youth, IMRAP has been sharing these videos on WhatsApp and YouTube and then engaging youth in these spaces to discuss ways in which violent conflict can be mitigated.	<b>Mali</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Youth for Peace Building &amp; Development in Africa (YOUPEDA)</b>	<i>Youth for Peace Building &amp; Development in Africa</i> (YOUPEDA) is a Nigerian organization that has been using Facebook to engage youth in dialogue processes on peace and human relations through their program titled "Strengthening Youths to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism". They create inclusion by nominating both Muslim and Christian youth in their space to ensure that discussions benefit from different voices and that youth from different backgrounds and ideologies are included in the peacebuilding discussions.	<b>Nigeria</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)</b>	(HD) has drawn lessons from how young people were engaging online, during the #EndSars protests and conducted an online dialogue session on social media to connect with them. Specifically, HD works with steering committees across local communities where they operate. Youth representatives within these committees are included in some of the peace processes. For instance, the HD team identified a community that had a long-standing conflict. Then, through the steering committee in this community, they mobilized young community members to participate in an online dialogue. These participants highlighted their issues and began identifying solutions for them as a collective, through a facilitated online discussion. A solution could be in the form of a solid commitment made and agreed upon by the participants to e.g., share positive messaging with their network and not facilitate the spread of hate or misinformation online, while educating their friends on the negative impact of false information and online hate. The community members from the online dialogue are now exploring with their wider community the positive impacts that virtual spaces can have on conflict.	<b>Nigeria</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Oxfam IBIS and Build Up</b>	Since early 2020 <i>Oxfam IBIS</i> and <i>Build Up</i> have engaged with 6 teams of 2-3 peacebuilders from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. This ongoing project has provided training on non-violent action, human centered design and digital conflict to youth via WhatsApp, on Zoom and in person. The goal is to provide support to local civil society actors to pilot technology-enabled initiatives that promote peace	<b>Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Re-imagining youth engagement in peacebuilding (Global)</b>			
<b>International Alert Philippines and Build Up</b>	<p>Throughout 2018 and 2019, Build Up worked with International Alert's youth network to train two cohorts of youth leaders in participatory video and strategic communications. The project accompanied the production of seven short films that tackle urgent issues faced by the youth and their communities: migration discrimination, flooding, disintegrating indigenous culture and traditions, clan feuding, and violent extremism. Since production, the films have been showcased to diverse audiences through community screenings across major cities in the Philippines.</p> <p>These have also been featured prominently in Alert's social media campaigns on Facebook and Twitter to enhance deliberations and discussions, raising awareness with more than 60,000 views and galvanizing action.</p>		<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>United Nations Alliance of Civilizations</b>	In January 2021, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) hosted the first Online Youth Consultation on Preventing Violent Extremism through Sport within the framework of the UN Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism. This saw young people aged 15-29, who are interested in the role sport can play in preventing violent extremism through policymaking, innovative programming, knowledge sharing and awareness-raising share their views and insights. The forum was graced with the presence of 48 young leaders from 40 countries and 5 continents, along with 20 National Focal Points (NFPs) on PVE nominated by member states to represent their respective entities in the global PVE NFP network. The information gathered from this consultation will be used to develop a guide for Policymakers to promote the role of sports and its values in preventing violent extremism and to ensure the inclusion of sports values-based initiatives in the PVE National Action Plans.	<b>Global</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>

## Documentation of a Consultative Process

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<p><b>Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security (CMDPS)</b></p> <p>and</p> <p><b>Build Up</b></p>	<p>The Maskani Commons is a collaboration between 6 public universities in Western Kenya, the Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security (CMDPS) and Build Up. In this program sixty students received training and accompaniment as they intervened on polarizing issues of politics, ethnicity and Covid-19 on their own social media feeds.</p> <p>It focused on engaging Kenyan students in the identification of social themes and topics that triggered online polarization and the spread of harmful content on digital platforms, and engaged them in the promotion of constructive and depolarizing dialogue across ethnic, gender and age demographics. By doing so, the project equipped students, who now formally refer to themselves as the Maskani Commons, to mitigate division and conflict in Kenya on digital spaces. Over the three months, they chose to focus on ethnic divisiveness, political instability in the lead up to the 2022 elections, and misinformation around the covid19 pandemic.</p>	Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Technology based Early Warning and Response systems (West Africa)</b>			
ECOWAS	<p>The ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (<b>ECOWARN</b>) is an observation, monitoring and response tool for conflict prevention and decision-making in operated by the ECOWAS Early Warning Department. Established in 1999 it has been in operation since 2003. ECOWARN covers the fifteen member states in the ECOWAS region and has five field monitors in each state apart from Nigeria which has seven due to its larger population. The field monitors are equipped with mobile handsets, laptops and data connectivity to report relevant incidents around them to the ECOWARN platform after every fifteen days. These reports are guided by 56 human security indicators that the field monitors use.</p> <p>The ECOWARN structure has two key parts. The early warning data collection and the response mechanism. For data gathering, ECOWAS has officially partnered with the WestAfrica Networkfor Peacebuilding (WANEP), a regional peacebuilding organization with over 500 member organizations within its umbrella across West Africa. This structure and network enable ECOWARN to engage with local organizations in data gathering through the WANEP umbrella. For the response mechanism ECOWARN has partnerships with state security agents in the fifteen countries. ECOWARN provides monthly reports on conflict trends with recommendations and response options to the relevant government, and the government determines how to respond. All responses are assessed by ECOWARN for effectiveness and impact on a specific situation in order to identify existing response gaps or successful outcomes. All ECOWARN reports are however not available to the public due to various sensitivities related to the information the system monitors and responds to.</p>	West Africa	<a href="#">Link</a>

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)</b>	<p>The <i>West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network (WARN)</i> is a fundamental part of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) conflict prevention mechanism. WARN is a regional system that monitors and reports socio-political situations that could escalate into violent conflicts. WANEP has further developed the National Early Warning System (NEWS) in all of its 15 national networks which leverages efforts of community-based conflict monitoring systems with local monitors to produce conflict and peace assessment reports and early warning reports that are shared with regional peacebuilders.</p> <p>NEWS is an online system that facilitates the generation of data and information from human monitors and reporters across the ECOWAS region. While it is set up as a national program within each country, collectively the information gathered makes NEWS a regional system. The monitors and reporters using NEWS are guided by a set of carefully selected indicators of violent conflicts at the local community, district, county, state, regional and national level.</p>	<b>West Africa</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Community Initiative for Enhanced Peace and Development (CIEPD)</b>	<p>The <i>Community Initiative for Enhanced Peace and Development (CIEPD)</i> - a non-profit organization in Rivers State, Nigeria - has established and implemented the Conflict Watch Center (CWC). This is an EWER system that relies on various community-based sources of information, and community specific indicators to generate analysis on potential conflict hotspots. The approach of the CWC is tuned towards predicting, tracking, monitoring and reporting on situations, events and actors (individual, group and institutional) with the capacity to cause violence. It is built on conflict preventive measures more than mitigating measures. The public can report to the platform via text message, WhatsApp or the online platform. Verified reports are then visualized on a map running on the <i>Ushahidi</i> platform for geospatial and trends analysis. The map is also available to other actors. Response is delivered at community level after verified reports meet a threshold for triggering conflict. This technology-based warning and response system was established in 2015.</p>	<b>Nigeria</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>  <a href="#">Link 2</a>
<b>Liberia Peacebuilding Office</b>	<p>The <i>Liberia Early Warning and Response Network (LERN)</i> platform was established in 2010 by the Liberia Peacebuilding Office. The network consists of 23 organizations including Liberian government ministries, civil society organisations and United Nations organisations. The group also comprised a large network of reporters that provided early warning data to an incident-reporting digital map that was developed by <i>Ushahidi</i> and was managed by <i>iLab</i> Liberia at one point. It is important to note that WANEP was involved in this system at its inception as providers of early warning information. LERN is still operational and in 2020 the system was used to track and report several COVID-19 related conflict-sensitivity issues to prevent violent outbreaks.</p>	<b>Liberia</b>	<a href="#">Link</a>

## Documentation of a Consultative Process

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)</b>	The <i>Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)</i> operates a robust Conflict Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) system in Nigeria's nine Niger Delta states. The system compiles and links raw empirical data with qualitative analysis and response planning. It does this in conjunction with other regional, national and local systems. Data is primarily gathered from field monitors via a dedicated mobile line and integrated with data sets from other EWER systems for validation and triangulation and then visualized on a peace map. The peace map is used for joint analysis, conflict sensitivity planning and building peace. The peace map also integrates data from other sources such as <i>P4P</i> (IPDU SMS Early Warning), WANEP Nigeria, Fund for Peace's UNLOCK, NEEWS2015/TMG, NSRP Sources, Council on Foreign Relations, Nigeria Watch, ACLED, and CIEPD. This EWER system also maps organizations in Nigeria working to promote peace and human security and have registered to receive email alerts when violence has recently escalated in their vicinity.	<b>Nigeria</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>  <a href="#">Link 2</a>
<b>Technology based Early Warning and Response systems (Global)</b>			
<b>The Institute for Social Accountability/ Mercy Corps/ PeaceTech Lab</b>	In 2017, The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA) partnered with Mercy Corps and PeaceTech Lab to implement an 18-month election violence prevention and response program in Kenya. The three organizations aimed to mitigate the risk of escalation of election-related violence in the lead up to, during, and immediately following the Kenyan elections currently scheduled for August 2017. They set up an EWER framework at the centre of which was an SMS based platform to facilitate communication between the community and the programming team. The community used the SMS platform to send out early warning messages to the program team and the programming team would escalate the verified information to the response teams. Peace messaging aimed at countering rumors or misinformation were also disseminated via the platform to the public.	Kenya	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Belun</b>	Belun's EWER system works with a volunteer-based monitoring network to gather relevant early warning data and information about violent incidents and situational changes in 3 municipalities of Timor-Leste. 10 monitors operating in 10 Administrative posts collect the data, which is then transmitted via tablet computer to the Belun office for analysis and Belun's new Incident and Conflict Potential Data Porta that has a <a href="#">mapping platform</a> . After data analysis and compilation, alerts are released immediately when the reports are serious and need immediate response. There are also monthly reports that summarize the most notable incidents and trends and provide a graphical review of all incidents recorded each month. Other reports developed include the conflict potential analysis reports that review a longer period of activities (4 months -1 year) and research reports and policy briefs	Timor-Leste	<a href="#">Link</a>

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Countering Harmful Narratives Spread online (West Africa)</b>			
<b>Various Organizations</b>	<i>Bassiki Kalan Sô</i> is a project in Mali that started in 2020, to address the spread of hateful revenge narratives online. <i>Bassiki Kalan Sô</i> uses <i>Facebook</i> and <i>WhatsApp</i> to share sensitization videos and messages to encourage social media users to post positive content online and refrain from spreading hate. Offline, the program also engages other members of the public for instance in the local communities where people are sensitized on using speech that is peaceful, tolerant and uniting and why inflammatory speech should be avoided. This program has reached multiple groups in urban areas using social media platforms and communities in rural areas through offline engagement	Sahel	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Women and Youths for Justice and Peace Initiative (WAYJPI)</b>	In Nigeria the <i>Women and Youths for Justice and Peace Initiative (WAYJPI)</i> are running a project with youth and women to counter hate speech online. They use the Nigeria <a href="#">hate speech lexicon</a> , and work with university youth, who generally spend a significant amount of their time on social media. Guided by the lexicon, they monitor for key hateful terms, record the volume of the terms over time, and then flag the posts using the terms and report these to social media companies. They further engage with social media users that use these words and inform them of the hateful and intolerant nature of the terms and their potential to cause violence. From this approach, the project has received apologies from online users who have included hate terms in their posts stating that they did not know how harmful the terms were, before being informed.	Nigeria	<a href="#">Link</a> <sup>*59</sup>
<b>The Center for Technology and Development (CITAD)</b>	<i>The Center for Technology and Development (CITAD)</i> in Nigeria, conducted a study on the use of gendered hate speech on women involved in governance and political processes in Nigeria in 2019. The study generated a glossary of words, terms and phrases that are offensive or hateful on women and girls in Nigeria. The purpose of this resource was to create awareness on the issue of gender-based hate speech; particularly how it hampers women participation in politics. CITAD has since been using this research to monitor online hate and use the findings to advocate for policies that can help in addressing this problem. CITAD also works with <i>Students for Peace (S4Ps)</i> in various tertiary institutions across the country to capacitate them on how to address hate speech and online violence against women on campus, neighbouring communities and online spaces.	Nigeria	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>

59 \*This link does not belong to the WAYJPI website. It is included here in place of an official website or social media presence when these two are not available on line or readily accessible

## Documentation of a Consultative Process

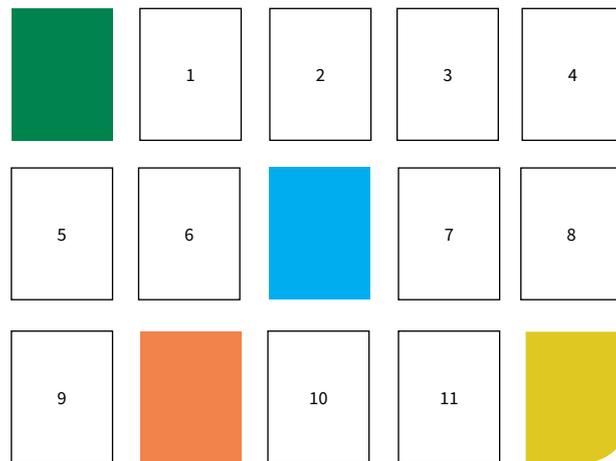
ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<p><b>National Audiovisual Regulatory Council-Senegal</b></p> <p><b>Audiovisual Supreme Council of Senegal (HCA)</b></p>	<p>In Senegal the <i>National Audiovisual Regulatory Council</i>, which is the media regulatory body in the country, collects reports from the public on misinformation and disinformation. The public can report cases of false information that they witness from the local media, to the council. In such cases, disciplinary action is taken against the local media stations found to be disseminating this information and in severe cases they can lose their broadcasting licenses. Media regulatory agencies are common across different countries and can be government operated or independent actors. Internet content regulation usually falls within the mandate of these regulatory bodies. For instance, in Senegal, despite the fact that some of the content is shared on social media platforms owned by foreign companies that have their own policies and regulations, the content also falls within the mandate of the Audiovisual Supreme Council of Senegal (HCA). The HCA, among other things aims to ensure, while respecting the preservation of cultural identities, objectivity and respect for a balance in the processing of information conveyed by the audiovisual media;</p>	Senegal	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Interpeace</b>	<p>In Côte d'Ivoire, <i>Interpeace</i> identified youth groups that were undertaking peacebuilding activities in their communities and trained them on technology tools and peacebuilding approaches. The youth groups then identified the challenges they wanted to address in their communities and one group established a cell to verify misinformation and disinformation online. The youth group also trained people on different techniques for verification and established a link between community leaders and elders who were offline to identify patterns of misinformation online and offline. The leaders and elders also help to stop the spread of misinformation and disinformation offline. The goal is to prevent political violence by identifying harmful narratives tied to mis/disinformation, alerting the established cell network and taking countermeasures to curtail the spread of the information.</p>	Côte d'Ivoire	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)</b>	<p>In Senegal, <i>WANEP</i> has an alert system to monitor hate speech. When hateful content surfaces online and is identified by the system, the team members get an alert that a particular key term or intolerant narrative has appeared online. The team then escalates this information to the relevant government agencies for response. This system monitors online hate but also functions as an early warning system, because in some instances, hate speech can be a precursor to violence. Parallel to the system, there are activists who sensitize people on the dangers of inflammatory speech especially in contexts where this speech is spewed by politicians.</p>	Senegal	<a href="#">Link</a>

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Countering Harmful Narratives Spread online (Global)</b>			
<b>#jagärhär (Social Media users)</b>	<p>#jagärhär is a social movement that uses counter speech to counter hate speech. It started in Sweden, in 2016 as a Facebook group where the members fight together against hatred and threats, racism, sexism, homophobia &amp; funkophobia etc. on social media. Today, 150,000 people around Europe act every day of the year on social media against cyber-hatred and misinformation to counter hatred, protect the vulnerable and inspire more people to stand up for and defend human rights and freedom of expression. Members of #jagärhär (which means “I am here”) seek out hatred in comment threads of newspaper articles posted on Facebook and then respond together, following a strict set of rules which includes keeping a respectful and non-condescending tone and never spreading prejudice or rumors. As a guide for deciding which speech to counter, the group uses the Swedish legal concept of hate speech.</p> <p>Members respond to comments, then ‘like’ each other’s comments, pushing them to the top of the comments thread, since Facebook ranks comments on public pages based on interactions (‘likes’ and replies).<sup>24</sup> This is a vital feature of #jagärhär’s model: they make use of Facebook’s system to amplify their own civil, fact-based comments and bury hateful or xenophobic comments at the bottom of comment threads, making it less likely that others will see them.</p>	Sweden/ Wider Europe	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Lithuanian Elves</b>	<p>Five years ago, the population in Lithuania realized the sheer scale of Russian propaganda during the Ukraine conflict. Few individuals began organizing on social media platforms to counter hate speech and pro-Russia propaganda and the group began to grow. It now includes business people, academics, students, civil society basically the ordinary citizen and called Digital Elves. The elves patrol social media, coordinating their actions through Facebook or Skype to expose fake accounts. On a busy day, fellow elves report as many as 10 or 20 accounts spreading propaganda and hate to get them removed. They collaborate with other actors such as Debunk.eu that work on debunking false information and are activated online to support such efforts during key political events or social events that might trigger hate speech and misinformation. The strategy used by the elves is to diversify the skills of its members. There are different types of elves – some are debunkers of false information, others run “blame and shame” online campaigns against pro-russian trolls, others report accounts spreading hate and so on. This strategy enables one person not to be overwhelmed with doing everything but to coordinate with others and address the problem from multiple sides.</p>	Lithuania	<a href="#">Link</a>

## Documentation of a Consultative Process

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Digital Mediation (West Africa)</b>			
<b>Build Up</b>	In 2020 <i>Build Up</i> ran an entire participatory research process in Burkina Faso on conflict and resilience drivers over WhatsApp. This involved consultations with key stake-holders, analysis workshops, training and supporting the enumerator teams as they spoke to over 2000 Burkinabè in the 6 regions of the country. At the beginning the team held a digital consultation with 40 civil society groups and government representatives to develop a research questionnaire based on their priorities. Getting 40 different stakeholders to agree on a research questionnaire that would capture sensitive topics, proved quite challenging at first due to the different views and agendas. Build Up decided to run this process as a digitally mediated process in order to come to a consensus on the questionnaire. The project team had planned to hold a two day in-person workshop for this initial stage but shifted it to an 8-day consultation over WhatsApp. Due to the magnitude of this undertaking, there were always 2-3 facilitators to analyze the data, put together materials and ensure a smooth flow of the process. In the end, the process sent and received over 10,000 messages over the 8 days and arrived at a consensus on the drivers of conflict and resilience in Burkina Faso that informed the final and agreed upon questionnaire.	Burkina Faso	<a href="#">Link</a>
<b>Digital Mediation (Global)</b>			
<b>The Donbass Dialogue</b>	The Donbass Dialogue (DD) is an innovative virtual dialogue platform created in April 2015 by three displaced persons from Donetsk city (non-government-controlled areas) who relocated to Svyatohorsk (government-controlled areas) in eastern Ukraine. The platform seeks to reconnect members of divided communities amid an ongoing conflict by using a sophisticated crowdsourcing methodology that identifies issues of mutual concern. The top issues are then addressed in greater detail during a week-long 'offline dialogue', which takes place twice per year. The 'offline dialogue' is conducted using a new-generation DD Talk service based on peer-to-peer technology (WebRTC), which allows anonymous connection without prior authorization and thus creates a seemingly 'safe space' for all dialogue participants, wherever they may be physically located. DD participants include community and civil society representatives, IDPs, volunteers, experts and others who believe that dialogue with the 'other side' – even during an active armed conflict – is a prerequisite for building a lasting peace. Since April 2015, seven such dialogues have taken place, and DD now includes more than 400 members in its virtual community.	Ukraine	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a> <a href="#">Link 3</a>

ORGANIZATION	GLOBAL PROGRAM DEFINITION	COUNTRY	LINK
<b>Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)</b>	<p>The <i>Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)</i> conducted digital mediation processes in Libya which aimed at restarting the political process after over a year of war and after several years of parliamentary divisions and strife. They mediated six electronic informal sessions that were in support of a formal peace process run by the United Nations in Libya. Four of the sessions were between the members of the house of representatives in Libya. They would bring the members together on Zoom to discuss issues around the resumption of the peace process and the talks and mediate these sessions. Having a web conferencing platform like Zoom, HD was able to manage the participants for instance with their names, raising hand function, muting background noises, moving them into groups among other functions. These Zoom meetings complimented some offline sessions that HD had facilitated prior to COVID-19. They also complimented some of the relationships that HD had cultivated in the course of 10 years that they had been working in Libya.</p>	Libya	<a href="#">Link 1</a>
<b>United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)</b>	<p>In 2018, a power sharing arrangement was signed in South Sudan, however, implementation of the agreement has been extremely slow due to disagreements between the political parties and at the cost of human lives due to the ongoing conflict. In response to this, the <i>United Nations Mission in South Sudan UNMISS</i> began an offline mediation process for all political parties called the political parties forum (PPF). It was the first time that political parties were brought into the same room in a non-oppositional setting, thus there were tensions in the room. However, the participants valued this forum and wanted to continue with it because they appreciated the open channels for discussion in the room. When the pandemic hit and the government enforced gathering restrictions, the ability for UNMISS to continue with its work on mediation and engagement was diminished.</p> <p>Based on this momentum that UNMISS had gained on these PPFs and given the challenges around the pandemic, UNMISS migrated the process online. They used Microsoft Teams. Some participants had to be provided with internet bundles to facilitate their access. Most of the participants were using their mobile phones to participate in the process. UNMISS continued these digital mediation processes for three months. Through the support of UNMISS the political parties successfully built the capacity of their representatives to use video conferencing as a tool for participating in digitally mediated processes, dialogue sessions within the party and training. It also generated a positive climate of exchange both between the parties and with UNMISS.</p>	South Sudan	<a href="#">Link</a>



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