CONDUCIVE SPACE FOR PEACE

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
2024 - 2026

Extended Version

Conducive Space for Peace (CSP) is a Danish registered non-governmental organisation committed to work towards equitable and effective global collaboration for sustainable peace with civil society at the centre. We work in the service of local actors and communities in conflict affected contexts as well as for the global community that experiences increasing polarisation, inequality, and violence. Our mission is to transform the global peacebuilding and development systems to better enable local leadership. CSP works as a connector and accompanier, creating space for change agents to come together to learn and leverage their collective strengths.

CSP consists of a strong team and board that holds diverse expertise, perspectives, and backgrounds. We are part of strong networks of change agents that hold wisdom and innovative power and we believe that together we can create positive change. Radical change is inevitable at this time in global history. What matters is how we navigate through these dynamic times and strive to shape the emerging global landscape and change paradigms that are upon us. For CSP, the ways in which we come together to learn, innovate, create and reimagine are essential in mobilising the power of change agents and bringing the human potential to the forefront of change processes.

Equity is our core value and every part of our organisation, processes of engagement and substantive work are scrutinized for its alignment with the values we hold. We learn every day on how better to walk the talk; within our team, with our board, among our partners and within the networks of change agents that we are part of. Based on those learnings, CSP continues to adjust its organisational set-up and ways of working to be as relevant as possible in pursuing its mission and living its values. Moving into the next strategic cycle of CSP, we have undergone a leadership transition that serves as an important step on this lifelong journey.

Contents

SUMMARY

The global context is rapidly changing. Political shifts, wars and refugee flows with ramifications for security and economic survival across the world prompt countries in the Global North to focus on their immediate national interests. At the same time, social movements such as Black Lives Matter and decolonising aid demand radical change across an international system that is inequitable and unable to meet the challenges of today.

Over the past 10 years, peacebuilding support has become firmly embedded in and influenced by national foreign policy and political shifts such as populism and securitisation in donor countries. Relationships between countries in the Global North and Global South, along with the international institutions that are shaped by and govern these relations, continue to be based on colonial continuities and structural asymmetries. Layers of additional inequities are created by domestic priorities and top–down donor requirements. There is discrepancy between what is needed from international institutions in providing relevant support to peace and development versus the realities of the current aid and peacebuilding system. There is also a disconnect between what is said and what is done—between policy discourse and actual ways of working in the system. It is recognised that local civil society actors have a crucial role to play in peacebuilding and development, yet systemic ways of working – in global governance and in the aid system – fail to change in ways that allow them to hold power to lead the way.

Momentum for change in the international system is growing, with multiple actors and organisations pushing for new ways of working. Efforts mainly focus on developing systems innovations, prototypes or pilot projects, and centring on new funding mechanisms to address systemic inequities. They are typically driven by change agents in one particular part of the system or within an organisation. Despite numerous change-related efforts, providing support to civil society in the Global South is still largely defined by long-established and conventional ways of working in the aid system. The persistent challenges and inequities therein, in structures, practices, and attitudes, prompt us to question whether current change efforts will be able to deliver on the commitments signaled in policy frameworks such as the Grand Bargain and donor-led 'localisation' policies. What does it take to genuinely transform the system in ways that address the fundamental inequities and key challenges in enabling civil society led collaboration on peacebuilding locally and globally? And is such transformation even possible in the current global context where zero-sum geopolitics sparks short-term thinking that centers on national security and economic protectionism, furthering the gap towards what is needed to build sustainable peace?

No matter what, the rapidly changing global context will undoubtedly force change in the international aid as well as global governance infrastructure over the next 5 to 10 years. While it is impossible to predict exactly what will happen, it is clear that the widening gap between persistent systems challenges on the one side and mounting momentum for change on the other will either render the current international systems irrelevant or make it open to larger-scale transformation. In this rapidly changing global context, Conducive Space for Peace (CSP) sees an opportunity to create space for radically new thinking and action. This is shaped by the need for new forms of global and trans-local collaboration that put civil society actors (individuals, organisations and networks) at the centre, as the ones best placed and most able to promote sustainable peace and development at both local and global levels.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The strategic framework (2024–2026) guides and informs how CSP will work to influence systems change in the peacebuilding field (along with the broader aid infrastructure) over the next three years. In particular, it outlines how we can collectively move beyond piecemeal innovations that address systemic dysfunctions and towards a more radical shift in who holds the power to drive change and set the conditions within which these changes can happen. This requires greater focus on developing future infrastructures and spaces that are more relevant for collaborating on peacebuilding as alternatives to the current system and the ways of working defined by that system.

Following the Summary, this document offers an overview of the current international system of support for peacebuilding and briefly explains how CSP's learning and strategic processes have shaped this strategic framework document (page 6). This is followed by a discussion of the competing political forces that drive the system to be less and less able to support peacebuilding, on the one hand, and the diverse forces that call for radical systems change, on the other (page 10). Next, the CSP theory of change and related assumptions—upon which this strategic framework is based—is presented (page 14), after which it outlines the main activities that make up the CSP pathways of change during this three-year period (page 16). Finally, and for reference, the document explains key terms and concepts relevant to the CSP approach (page 20) as well as offers resources and data that underscores the analysis (page 23).

The elements in this strategy development process move from an analysis of the current context for systems change including what other actors in the peacebuilding, development, and systems change fields are doing, which serves as a frame of reference for understanding the specific value added CSP brings to systems change initiatives. CSP learnings then provide the basis for the specific activities that are emanating from this strategic framework, as well as how they will be implemented.
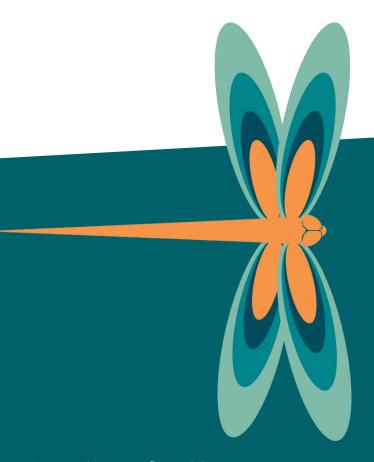

Figure 1. The Dragonfly Model

The Dragonfly Model provides a framework for understanding the nature of system change in different dimensions of the global peacebuilding system. Each wing of the dragonfly illustrates one important dimension of the global peacebuilding system, and each 'layer' of the wing, nested into the other layers, holds important insights about different approaches to change that can be complementary. The Dragonfly Model offers a new way of understanding the multiple layers of systems change, the complementarity among diverse change efforts, and how interconnected national and international systems can be powered by the muscles at the core: locally-led peacebuilding. As CSP has mainly focused on changing the current international system until now, it is now shifting its priorities towards playing a catalytic role in shaping future global infrastructures for peace.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are needed more than ever. Violent conflict is at historically high levels,[1] with record numbers of people displaced globally as a result.[2] Furthermore, violent conflicts recur at alarmingly high rates. In the past five years, they are increasingly spilling over to the broader region within which they are embedded and even beyond. Root causes of violent conflict remain unresolved over time, partly due to the short-term nature of international engagements. Clearly there is a need to rethink global collaboration on peacebuilding and develop new ways of working that can prevent violent conflicts and bring about sustainable peace.

Whereas the international system is unable to effectively address violent conflict, there is ample evidence that local leadership is the linchpin to sustainable peace and development. That is, the people closest to a conflict, with lived experience, knowledge of what works and what does not work within that context, with genuine legitimacy and with webs of relations, are best equipped to take the lead in promoting sustainable peace in their own contexts. Given this, it is therefore of paramount importance that international support for peacebuilding and development strives to be as relevant as possible to the needs of these local actors. It is equally obvious, however, that the international system is ill equipped to do so. In particular, it is widely recognised that both the quantity and quality of international support are beset by profound challenges that prevent civil society actors and organisations from fulfilling their potential in building sustainable peace and development, in their local contexts and across the globe. This tendency is exacerbated by the efforts of authoritarian regimes, especially in conflict-affected countries, to actively restrict civic spaces, thus further undermining local peacebuilding potentials.

Signalling awareness of these problems and incapacities, many of the largest institutions in the world have spoken out and developed policies that call for a rethink of international cooperation in a way that better supports local actors and sustainable peacebuilding and development—from the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (November 2011) to the Grand Bargain 2.0 (December 2021),

and most recently, A New Agenda for Peace from the UN Secretary General (July 2023). While the normative recognition of the importance of local leadership and equitable partnership is growing, a significant gap between rhetoric and reality persists. The realisation of global financial commitments continues to fall short. The latest figures show a decline in development and humanitarian aid to local and national civil society from 3.5 percent in 2016 to 2.1 percent in 2022, which is a far cry from the Grand Bargain aspirations of 25 per cent.[3] Although these figures relate to the broader humanitarian field, there is no indication that the institutions and funding mechanisms for peacebuilding are faring any better.

Beyond funding commitments (quantity of support), more attention is needed to enhance the quality of support for peacebuilding. This entails revisiting the power inequities embedded in the aid and global governance systems. Current institutions with a mandate to support local civil society continue to uphold systemic ways of working that restrict abilities to meet local needs and enable local leadership. Top–down accountability requirements and national donor interests often override local priorities thus causing peace and development assistance to be less relevant and sustainable. At times, this support is even counterproductive in local contexts, risking or causing actual harm (despite the best of intentions) that could have been avoided if local actors had been in the driving seat from the outset.

Other key international modalities of support to peacebuilding —such as human rights protection, security council resolutions, peacekeeping and peace enforcement to protect civilians, weapons regulations and so on—are also not working effectively and providing space for civil society to lead the way. Deepening divisions and growing rifts between powerful state actors create obstacles for shared agendas, joint solutions and coordinated actions. Competing ideological visions and power grabs continue to pose significant threats to global stability and foster widespread uncertainty. In the face of dynamically shifting realities on the ground, the system is reactive and slow, when it needs to be preventive and proactive.

Moreover, increasing levels of armed conflict and displacement are factors that should prompt a stronger and more consistent focus on promoting sustainable peace and preventing renewed violent conflict. Instead, this elicits greater support for short-term security and stabilisation measures[4], which frequently happens at the expense of long-term peacebuilding engagements; regardless of what type of actor is supported. This is despite of the fact that global policy frameworks such as the New Agenda for Peace are prompting an increased focus on preventive measures that address the root causes of conflict.
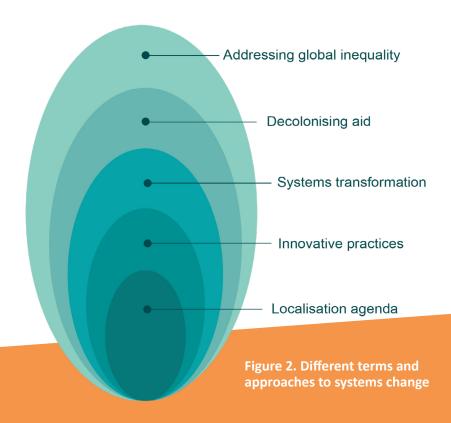
The current system is less likely to change through existing efforts to facilitate change—by talking about it, by developing progressive policies or through innovations in discrete parts of the system. Crucially, the system is also not transforming fast enough to meet the urgent need for change in our rapidly shifting world. Rather, the global conditions that negatively impact international peacebuilding and the aid infrastructure more generally will intensify, rendering this system less equitable and less relevant to the needs of local civil society actors who work to promote sustainable peace and development.

These dynamics and the persistent inability of the international community to operationalise its commitments to local leadership signify a need for profound change beyond piecemeal solutions.

Systems change: different meanings and implications

The space for systems change in international coope-ration is inhabited by multiple approaches based on different understanding of the change needed. Some flow consistently from one to the other with obvious complementarities while others productively contest each other. Terms are sometimes used interchange-ably, thus making it difficult to navigate in the systems change space.

The 'nested paradigm' of systems change (see figure 2) is CSPs attempt to explain how the different terms generally refer to different approaches to systems change. They typically signify somewhat different understandings of the problem; whether the problem is ineffectiveness to support local actors, or whether the problem is inequity and injustice within the aid system and beyond. It should be clear that the approaches to systems change are not strictly in one

- Addressing global inequality
- Decolonising aid
- Systems transformation
- Innovative practices
- Localisation agenda

Figure 2. Different terms and approaches to systems change

or the other category but can be seen on a continuum or nested within one another. It should be noted that the terms are used somewhat inconsistently, and this is CSPs offer of an understanding of the systems change field. It has become a field of its own.

In international policy spaces where donors and international organisations are driving systems change the localisation agenda is often used to demand or encourage international organisations to better enable local leadership. The agenda is widely contested because it's operationalisation means that initiatives driven by internationals are 'made local' by leaving it for local organisations to implement them, without actually changing the underlying division of power. Also, the term localisation is often used in policy frameworks, less so in actual change initiatives.

Moving beyond policy, many are pursuing systems change by applying innovative practices to prompt the system to better enable local leadership. Innovative practices often refer to mechanisms such as a participatory grant making facility, and they rarely involve systems-wide change. For systems-wide change to occur, one would need a systems transformation lens that implies transforming structures, practices, and attitudes in a way that radically changes the power asymmetries. We are now moving closer to a 'decolonising aid' agenda which holds the power asymmetries and inequities in the aid sector and their historical legacies as the core problem and thus at the centre of the change agenda. The 'decolonising aid' agenda is most predominant among Global South actors, some of whom would want to see the aid infrastructure abolished and most who see a clear link to broader global inequities. In this perspective, it is not enough to try to address inequities within the system as it is part and parcel of global structures and practices that continuously reproduce inequity and oppression.

Hence any transformed (sub)system – peacebuilding, aid or otherwise – would also need to fundamentally change the way it is positioned towards and can leverage these structures and practices. This is, of course, a crude summary of an evolving discourse and practice.

In CSPs strategic framework, we position ourselves among those pursuing systems transformation and decolonising aid. CSP does not focus on policy changes or changes that only pay lip-service to systems change. Also, CSP is not engaged in innovating specific funding mechanisms that address the challenges of the system, but we create space for 'innovators' and other change agents to come together to pursue broader systems transformation and address the underlying power assymmetries embedded in the system. CSPs strategic focus on the future and reimagining equitable spaces and infrastructures for peace reflects our understanding that current international institutions and their ways of working have proved extremely difficult to change in ways that address such power imbalances. With the global context for peacebuilding in flux, more innovative and radical ideas are needed in order to move beyond the challenges and inequities of the current system. In CSP we are not only intend to propose alternative infrastructures for peace but also to contribute to redefining the systems change landscape as we know it today, and as illustrated by the 'nested paradigm'.

The strategy development process

Strategic development at CSP is best described as an emergent process that shifts between fluidity and crystallisation. Our aim is to develop a strategic framework that is flexible and open to adaptation. It is a key organisational document designed to guide CSP work in coming years, with space to make

adjustments along the way as our knowledge and insight of the context changes. This allows us to better understand the implications of CSP learnings and enables us to more readily adapt. Our emergent process reflects and is fully aligned with both core organisational values and central ways of working, which guarantees CSP continues to be relevant in rapidly changing global and local contexts.

This document lays out the strategic direction for CSPs engagement in systems change for local leadership and sustainable peacebuilding from 2024 to 2026. It builds on CSPs efforts to date to pursue systems change to put local leadership in peacebuilding and development at the centre of the international aid infrastructure and global governance. In particular, the strategic framework outlined in this document is a natural continuation of the 2019–2022 strategy, which in turn builds on previous organisational work. Beginning in September 2022, the new strategy gradually started to move CSPs focus to be less oriented towards the current international system and more towards the future and what we term 'global infrastructures and spaces for peace'. During this period, CSP will take steps to ensure that the necessary human resources and organisational structures are in place to implement the pathways for change outlined in this strategic framework.

Importantly, this strategic framework process has prompted CSP to take a bird's eye view of what has been, what is now and what is coming. We have sensed the trajectory of change in the international system to identify gaps and opportunities in the current landscape of systems change and peacebuilding. This process has also allowed us to learn from past mistakes and successes in facilitating systems change. This culminates in a clearer understanding of the distinctive value CSP adds and our niche in the world today: 1) to create space for learning and learning among change agents in order to move from systems innovation to systems transformation; and 2) to create space for reimagining the global infrastructures for peace, thereby developing alternative and equitable forms of global collaboration that can promote sustainable peace in a radically changing global context.

Learning at CSP

Over the past three years (2021–2023), CSP has undertaken extensive multi-actor learning processes focused on systems change for locally led peacebuilding. In early 2021, we developed a learning framework that we applied and adjusted during this period. Our learning efforts focus on the context for systems change, the actors involved, key trends and the relevance and outcomes of CSPs approaches to catalysing change. We use a range of learning approaches to identify and consolidate emerging insights. Within the organisation, these include biannual learning retreats in which all staff participate, bimonthly learning meetings across the CSP team and one-to-one knowledge sharing and learning dialogues. We also hold regular learning sessions with a variety of partners—participants in CSPs engagement activities, individual change agents and/or groups of and networks of change agents.

The After Action Review is another key learning approach at CSP. We conduct these reviews on all activities, except short-term CSP engagements in activities organised by others. In some cases, several After Action Reviews can be undertaken over time in longer-term engagements, as occurred during the reimagining process that we co-facilitated with Humanity United from 2020 to 2021. All these learning approaches have led to new understandings and renewed inspiration for the broader CSP organisational agenda for systems change. They also shape and define the development of the 2024–2026 strategic framework.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

In 2024, conditions for systems change are radically different than what was the case only a few years earlier. The current situation is defined by two primary competing forces. On the one hand, it is constrained by multiple political forces that drive the international system to be less able to support locally led peacebuilding in ways that are relevant, timely, sustainable, and not least, equitable. On the other hand, it is inspired by diverse forces that call for systems change to make peacebuilding and development support more relevant for local civil society actors and global governance structures more equitable, and thus more effective for sustainable outcomes. The 2024–2026 CSP strategic framework is situated between these constraints and drivers of change, which are increasingly moving in opposite directions.

The political context of peacebuilding and aid

The world is increasingly fractured across multiple dimensions, leading to geopolitical polarisation. Authoritarianism is on the rise, oppressive regimes act emboldened, and in 'western' democracies right-wing populist agendas are taking centre stage in parliaments and public discourse. The internal forces shaping politics in donor countries also impact relations between the Global North and the Global South, promoting a political culture that sidelines global engagement and multilateralism based on the spirit of solidarity, in favour of those more inward-looking nationalist agendas. These trends are rapidly shrinking the space for middle ground and compromise, which is exponentially hastened by the rampant growth of disinformation, extremism and hate speech in digital spaces. The propensity to manipulate reality has gone viral.

Highly internationalised conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine or Gaza, not only contribute to accelerating these shifts but result in higher levels of defence and military spending,[5] thus challenging priorities that focus on peacebuilding and reducing available funds.[6] While the peacebuilding field has for years been challenged by the short-term attention span of donors that aim to 'stabilise' and stop violence but fail to engage in the long-term to promote sustainable peace, this struggle has now taken new dimensions. A securitisation lens is shaping the discourse that peace can be won through war, and that military means are the key to keeping populations safe.

Alongside this, development aid continues to be used, and with a renewed fervor, as a tool to promote national interests of donor countries. Foreign ministries and their closely related bilateral donor agencies are under pressure from domestic political constituencies, which play a steadily growing role in influencing international policy and funding priorities. This includes focusing attention on nearby neighbouring countries and specific geographic areas; for example, to prevent irregular migration into the donor country.[7] In turn, this results in a lack of support to people most in need, with funding patterns shifting away from countries that are farthest from donor country interests toward those with immediate influence and geopolitical impact on their own security situation. Donor-defined thematic priorities often override the priorities of the people who know best—those who live with conflict and know what is needed to resolve it. This further serves to undermine the leadership of local actors, both in their own local contexts and at the global level. In short, top–down donor priorities circumvent local leadership in international cooperation.

At the same time social movements such as Black Lives Matter and 'decolonising aid' continue to push for increased recognition of inequities that are often firmly rooted in the colonial legacies upon which many countries in the Global North are built. Key in this is examining how these inequities are embedded in the present-day institutional frameworks that govern relations between the Global North and Global South. Deep-seated prejudice and structural racism translating to attitudes, practices and institutional structures continue to prioritise Western knowledge and expertise over local knowledge, including the knowledge held by those who are subjects of and subject to that same prejudice and structural racism. Overcoming these ingrained inequities entails efforts to transform the structures, practices, and attitudes of the aid system and the institutions it is made up of.

Mainstream funding modalities concretely encapsulate the need for systems change in the face of thoroughly normalised inequities. Among other things, these funding approaches are typically project based and short term in nature, offering limited or no overhead costs to local organisations. They also demand extensive time, expertise and financial investments in grant or proposal writing and in ensuring donor reporting requirements are fulfilled. More often than not, donor funding lacks flexibility to adjust according to changing circumstances and emerging opportunities. These shortcomings are made worse by the risk averse culture in donor agencies and their state bureaucracies. In practice, this is operationalised in the push for stricter accountability measures and more stringent due diligence requirements. In turn, this solidifies and reinforces the existing aid infrastructure: Only those organisations that can meet donor accountability and operational standards, including capacities to handle large amounts of funding, can benefit from the system. This means that large international NGOs, development consultancies, UN agencies and private sector actors manage the vast majority of available money,[8] the primary consequence of which is that few of these financial resources reach local organisations, where they are needed the most.

The systems change landscape

The confluence of the multiple political factors that have sustained and decreased the ability of the aid infrastructure and peacebuilding system to enable local leadership and promote sustainable peace has contributed to growing recognition that systems change is needed. The growing recognition and heightened demand for change has culminated in an international discourse that places increasingly greater emphasis on localisation, local leadership and locally led peacebuilding. This is illustrated by the growing number of initiatives, conference sessions, webinars, working groups, publications and articles outlining the pressing need to better support local leadership and to 'decolonize aid'. Bilateral donor policy frameworks have also moved towards emphasising this agenda.[9]

This is in sharp contrast to the situation less than a decade ago when only few in the peacebuilding field and beyond focused on the systemic challenges and inequities, and there was limited awareness of, and much less momentum for, the need for large-scale systems transformation. Marking significant progress, the value of locally led peacebuilding to creating sustainable peace and the need for broad systems transformation is now at the centre of the global peacebuilding and aid system discourse, with CSP playing an active role in promoting and developing traction for this agenda since the organisation was founded in 2016.

It is clear that sustainable actions to transform the global peacebuilding system require various types of change among diverse actors across all layers
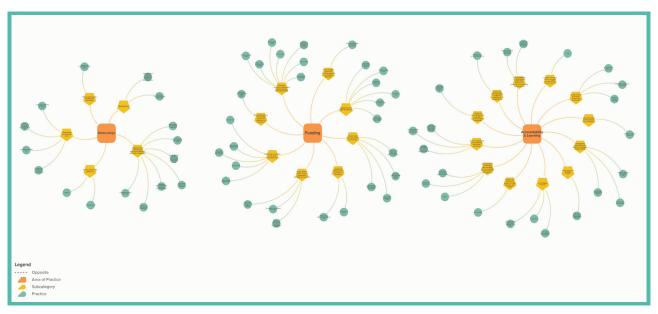

Figure 3. Kumu mapping of systems change initiatives taking place in a variety of contexts and mapping of change agents (organisations and people) engaging in these initiatives.

of the system. These actions must build on the complementarities of different approaches to systems change and leap into broader transformational processes. While local actors in conflict-affected contexts have borne the consequences of system dysfunctions for years, they struggle to address these challenges because this demands change outside their sphere of influence. This indicates that inter-national organisations themselves, including donor agencies, international NGOs and other traditional types of peacebuilding actors, must change from within to shift power to local actors and create space for new ways of promoting and supporting sustainable peace and development to emerge.

Many actors, organisations and networks are pursuing numerous systems change activities designed to shift power to local actors in the international peacebuilding system, as well as more broadly in the development and humanitarian aid sectors. Systems change efforts use multiple approaches and entry points. Most systems change initiatives are systems innovations that try to address the dysfunctions and inequities of existing ways of working. Over the years, CSP has been mapping these systems innovations, specifically looking at emerging practices and key patterns and trends across them.[10] According to our learning, these innovations tend to address three specific areas: funding modalities; accountability and learning; and partnership modalities. Such innovations are often siloed in one project at an organisation or in one discrete geographic location. This means that an innovation in one location rarely inspires similar innovations in other parts of the organisation, much less are these replicated at other organisations or in other parts of the system. Systems innovations rarely translate into broader systems transformation.

While numerous, systems innovation efforts often lack interconnectedness and fail to more broadly inspire different ways of working. This is due to the lack of institutional knowledge about how to embark on such change processes and lack of readiness. This is exacerbated by the fact that the structural conditions required to allow innovative practices to cross-pollinate are absent. Hence, momentum for change, along with talk about the critical need for locally led peacebuilding, may have increased dramatically, but this has not yet translated (much less materialised) into larger-scale institutional and systems trans-formation.

Systems innovations are often made possible by dedicated change agents who challenge the system from within their own organisations or departments and in their area of specialisation or expertise. In particular, they tend to challenge the bureaucratic, hierarchical and generally accepted ways of working by using their intimate knowledge of and ability to navigate the system to develop new procedures, processes or mechanisms that better support local leadership. These individuals, and at times (small) groups or net-works of individuals, are frequently guided by the values of equity and anti-racism, an understanding of systemic power dynamics, and a sense of being compromised by the inconsistencies between their values as compared to international institutional ways of working. They have often reached a threshold of tolerance with the power inequities in the system, especially as this constrains their capacities to support local actors. Change agents are coming together in loose networks where they can stand to-gether, learn together, and innovate together. Such networks include the RINGO network, ShiftThePower movement, and the evolving Innovators Hive, which is a resource and networking space hosted by CSP.
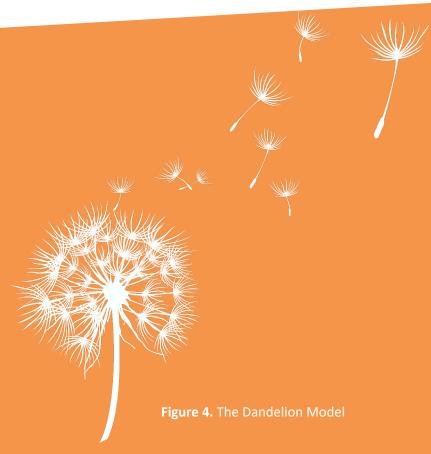
OUR CHANGE APPROACH

The 2024–2026 strategic framework is based on the CSP theory of change. This theory of change has evolved from the overall assumption that the current international system (especially the aid infrastructure) is not fit for purpose and is inequitable in its ways of working. Consequently, it will become less and less relevant for and able to address current and emerging global challenges related to violent conflict and polarisation. The social inequities that permeate all aspects of life in the contemporary world are equally embedded in the aid infrastructure and its colonial history.

While the current system is under more and more pressure from both external and internal factors, there is no way of predicting exactly how global change processes will unfold over the next 5 to 10 years. Despite this uncertainty, one thing is clear. This instability can open up space for developing alternative and more equitable global infrastructures and spaces, with greater potential for promoting peace in the future global context. The CSP theory of change is designed as a constructive response to this situation.
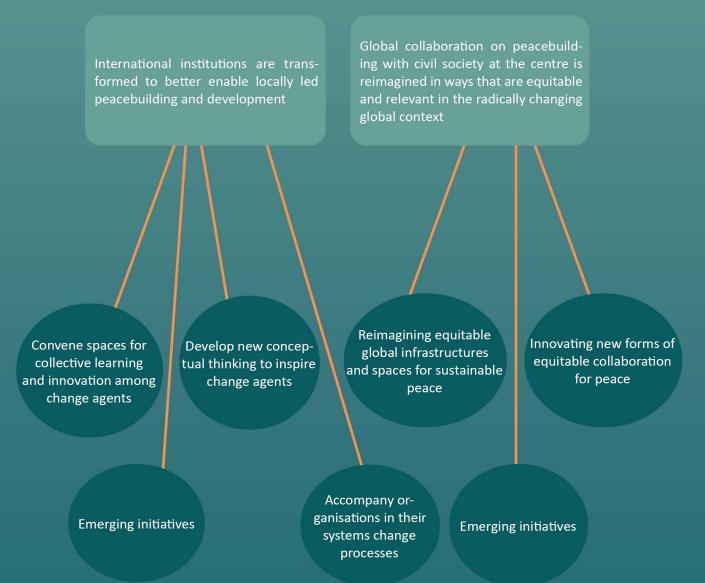
In the CSP theory of change, change agents and change agent networks are at the centre of creating change, whether in the current system or in processes to develop entirely new approaches that move towards the future. Our change agent orientation continues to be a core value. Natural phenomena have prompted CSP to ponder on how change agents can come together in networks/collectives and grow to become more inspired, wiser, and energized for change. These frameworks serve as the foundation for CSPs work with change agents and change agent networks. Some notable examples are the dragonfly, the dandelion, the beehive, and the DNA. These sources of inspiration are essential for stimulating new thinking at CSP and among other change agents in our collective efforts to pursue global transformation for shifting power and enabling space for locally led peacebuilding.

The Dandelion Model shows how networks of change agents can facilitate change. In the Dandelion Model, each change agent takes off to spread thoughts and ideas in new places, where other groups of change agents will form. Each small seed with its hairy umbrella-like 'pappus' can spread ideas and energy towards change. Change initiatives and networks of change agents will quickly form, and new seeds will multiply. The Dandelion Model does not require that the group of change agents are part of a structure like an organization or a network, or that they reconvene after their first encounter. It only requires that at some point in time a specific group of people come together long enough and in such a way that they inspire one another, learn together, and leave sufficiently energized to want to go off and start new conversations and change processes among another group of change agents.

Figure 4. The Dandelion Model

THEORY OF CHANGE

VISION

An equitable and effective global peacebuilding system that holds local agency and power at the core and provides a conducive space for equal and dignified collaboration for sustainable peace.

OUTCOMES

International institutions are transformed to better enable locally led peacebuilding and development

Global collaboration on peacebuilding with civil society at the centre is reimagined in ways that are equitable and relevant in the radically changing global context

PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

Convene spaces for collective learning and innovation among change agents

Develop new conceptual thinking to inspire change agents

Reimagining equitable global infrastructures and spaces for sustainable peace

Innovating new forms of equitable collaboration for peace

Emerging initiatives

Accompany organisations in their systems change processes

Emerging initiatives

PATHWAYS TO CHANGE

The 2024–2026 strategic framework envisions two pathways to change: 1) Acting to transform the current system to shift power and better enable local leadership; and 2) Reimagining global infrastructures and spaces for peace and equity. These pathways signify a transition from focusing mainly on changing the current system to one that looks to the future in order to shape transformative action towards new infrastructures for peace, beyond what we know today; beyond the conditionalities and power asymmetries of the current international system. Each pathway to change builds on previous CSP work.

Acting to transform the current system to support local leadership

Over the past three years, CSP has contributed to building significant momentum for institutional change to shift power to local actors. We have supported diverse change agents in pursuing change—from where they stand, in their own organisations and in the broader system. This work was based on extensive consultations and collaboration with both civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts and international institutional actors. Among other things, this lead us to consolidate learnings about the challenges and opportunities for change and convey this through publications and reflection pieces. Secondly, we developed new conceptual frameworks and methodologies to inspire change agents to work in more complementary and transformative ways (such as the Dragonfly and Chain of Influence models). Third, we engaged in advocacy for change with decision makers at international organisations; for example, by facilitating workshops to create space for sharing and learning on systems innovation and systems transformation. Many have already joined these efforts and new actors continue to join in, thus signalling that greater momentum for change has been built. There has been much talk about the challenges and the need for systems change, such that the momentum for systems change is clear and increasingly widespread.

This creates new space for CSP to focus on pursuing action for change. As many people are now asking: How do we move beyond the talk? How can we take action to create change? To support change agents to address these questions, CSP will help sharpen focus on the ways in which change agents can act to create transformative change—from where they stand and in cooperation or coordination with others. This consists of providing new ways for them to understand the obstacles to and avenues for change. Within the first pathway to change, CSP pursues three types of activities designed to support the achievement of Outcome 1.

Develop new conceptual thinking that inspire change agents for transformative action

CSP will continue to write and publish relevant documentation but with less focus on the challenges of the system and the need for change. There is now a growing community of research-practitioners engaged in building momentum for change by producing documentation, and CSP does not consider it necessary to continue to hold a key role in this area. Rather CSP has a particular role to play in moving from recognising the need for change to translating this into practice. Likewise, in terms of the growing literature on innovative practices for local leadership, CSP does not have a key role to play in producing more publications beyond the Innovative Practices note. However, we have a particular role in creating and sustaining a resource hub, the Innovators Hive, where such knowledge products are shared and made easily available for the increasing number of change agents who aspire to promote systems change for local leadership in peacebuilding and development. Furthermore, CSP has a key role to play in developing new thinking on systems change, taking as its point of departure inspiration from natural phenomena as well as peacebuilding concepts that are then applied to systems change. We aspire to stay on the forefront of systems thinking and practice in order to help guide practitioners seeking out avenues for moving from talk to action, from policy to practice.

Convene spaces for collective learning and innovation among change agents

One challenge in moving beyond piecemeal innovations to broader systems transformation is that there is limited sharing and learning among change agents who implement innovative practices. Not only is there a lack of knowledge of what others are doing, there is also a lack of spaces for sharing in ways that allow others learn and adopt new practices. While CSP does not work on specific systems innovation efforts or in particular parts of the system, we instead aspire to serve as a convener among people who do. We will convene various change agents who are pursuing system innovation in different parts of the system, bringing them together in constructive and experiential learning spaces such as workshops. As a convener, CSP aims to promote complementarity between these efforts and between change agents across the system, supporting them to inspire one another. The particular contribution CSP will make is to support the process of translating innovations in discrete parts of the system to broader systems transformation. This work is supported by the Innovators Hive, that will enable change agents to share information about innovative practices for systems change, learn from others and find inspiration, as well as connect with peers who also work to change the system to better enable local leadership.

Accompany organisations in their systems change processes

The link between systems innovation and systems transformation is not merely about scaling smaller initiatives but requires a much more ambitious endeavour of dealing with top–down power structures within and between international organisations. In CSP's work to accompany change agents, we are supporting processes to understand and address the power inequities embedded in their organisational structures and ways of working. In particular, this activity area applies local-to-global process thinking. In the forms CSP has applied in recent years, we start this process in conversation with local civil society actors in conflict-affected contexts. Then, based on the outcome of these conversations, we convene international actors in dialogue about how they can change their ways of working according to what local actors need, and prompt them to explore opportunities for change in order to accommodate these needs. The donors, or those who in other ways hold power in the Chain of Influence must then assess their own structures and ways of working that either provide an enabling or an inhibiting space for change towards shifting power to local actors. The local-to-global analysis and change processes can be carried out both in organisations and between the types of organisations that form part of the current global peacebuilding and development system. Other types of accompaniment processes may be developed with organisations seeking transformative change.
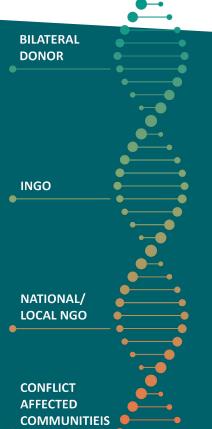

BILATERAL DONOR

INGO

NATIONAL/ LOCAL NGO

CONFLICT AFFECTED COMMUNITIEIS

Figure 5. Chain of Influence

Chain of Influence Framework offers a way of tracing the journey of funding, power and influence through the peacebuilding and development systems from bilateral donors to United Nations (UN) agencies and INGOs, and on to national and local civil society actors. It provides an understanding of the complex inter-linkages between ways of working in one part of the system and ways of working in other parts of the system, either within and among organisations. Transformative change can only happen if multiple layers of organisations are involved in the change process, and the framework can therefore inform who needs to be part of change processes and in what sequence. The Chain of Influence framework suggest ways of conducting bottom-up change processes that hold local actors and their need at the core of the change process.

The future: reimagining global infra-structures for peace and equity

In 2021, CSP and Humanity United co-facilitated the Reimagining Peacebuilding initiative, together with 25 peacebuilders from multiple conflict-affected countries to reimagine the future of peacebuilding through a participatory co-creation process. This work is based on the premise that the current global peacebuilding and development model, where power and decision-making is often held by people far away from conflict contexts, is not working and that the key to sustainable peace is local leadership. The initiative supported the transformation of the way local, national and international groups approach peacebuilding efforts, to focus on the agency and power of local people working to build peace in their own contexts. It consisted of 12 collaborative creative virtual workshops using futures and design methodologies. The initiative created space to explore the historical patterns that have led to the current peacebuilding context, the current challenges and obstacles to peacebuilding and, most importantly, the emerging opportunities and threats that could shape the future of peacebuilding, with emphasis on bringing local actors to the forefront. These exchanges also explored how to collectively pursue these desired vision(s) of peacebuilding.

This consists of one primary initiative that contributes to the achievement of Outcome 2 (developing new infrastructures and spaces for global collaboration for the future).

RESPACE – developing scenarios and gaining traction for new pathways to change

Building on the 2021 reimagining process and taking it to a global level, this engagement will implement the Global Reimagining of Equitable Spaces and Infrastructures for Peace, or the RESPACE initiative.[11] Many reimagining initiatives use the current system as a starting point and aim to change the system using core methodologies such as imagining futures processes, three horizons and transformative scenario planning. These methodologies reimagine peacebuilding and/or development by jumping to the future and then moving backwards to the present in order to explore how to bring about change in the current system. CSP will use the transformative scenarios process as a core RESPACE initiative methodology, which will be complemented by other relevant methodologies as the process evolves.

RESPACE will engage a team of 30 change agents, who will come together to share experiences and perspectives, reimagine possible futures, and strategize toward building an alternative and desirable future for peacebuilding. The reimagined scenarios will represent various stories of what could happen in the world if we follow different trajectories to promote peace, not all of which will present positive future outlooks. Nonetheless, some of these scenarios may contain aspirations to develop new ways of collaborating for peace and equity. The RESPACE team will further explore and sharpen these, as they may possibly become stepping stones for pursuing these visions in collaborative ways.

The graphic below illustrates the overall dynamic of the RESPACE process moving in between convergence – co-thinking and co-creating in the Scenario Team – and divergence – reaching out to other stakeholders in the system to test ideas, sense the environment, and entangle other and more people in this reimagining. Between the first and third phase the dynamic of the process design functions somewhat akin to a beehive: The participants come together to explore and create, then move out to collect more food for thought and come back together to share and further reimaging and later to strategize. The fourth phase, on the other hand sees the RESPACE Team members disperse like the pappus of a dandelion in the wind. These parachute seeds will always find cracks to grow in and will spread widely even to unfertile grounds, they grow new initiatives and networks of themselves.
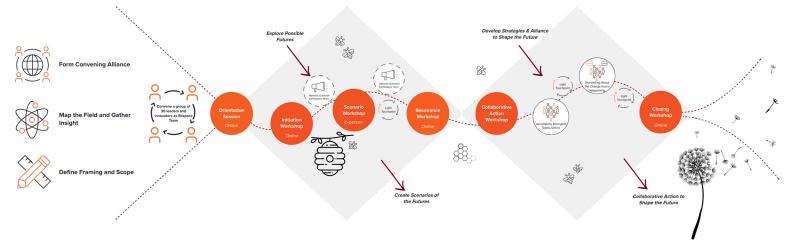

Figure 6. The RESPACE process

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Global North and Global South

CSP uses the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' because they are the most widely used and understood terms in the peacebuilding and development fields at present. We are aware of the problematic assumptions and history of the various terms used to describe countries and societies outside of North America and Europe. While terms are constantly innovated in the aid sector, they continue to contain and hide imaginations of underdevelopment, backwardness and fragility. Additional discomfort with these terms stems from their broad generalisation and implied uniformity, when in fact they refer to widely diverse peoples, countries and regions. There may be other terms that are conceptually richer but many of these are equally or more contested.

Local, global, and trans-local

The term 'local actor' is here used to define civil society actors operating in a specific country context within which the actor has lived experience, regardless of whether this is in the Global North or the Global South. We recognise that the typical understanding of the term 'local' refers to a context that is the object of international interventions. Our aim is to shift this understanding to a broader use of the term that indicates we are all local in various parts of the world, such that we each mobilise our locality and globality as we see relevant. Reciprocity and equity are enhanced by mobilising both the local and global perspectives and expertise of actors and organisations who work in their own countries as well as in the global context and who aspire to create change in both spaces. The strategic framework centres on the inter-linkages between the local and the global. When using the term global in global infrastructures for peace, we refer to the space that connects multiple localities and holds the trans-local as a defining characteristic. According to this understanding, the global does not refer to structures imbued with power asymmetries and state-centric logics. In this trans-local space, the global-to-local and local-to-global linkages represent the driving forces for change.

Change agent and change agent networks

Change agents are identified as individuals who recognise the challenges of the system and the need for systems change. Change agents challenge the status quo through their actions. Systems are made up of individuals, and through their actions shifts in those systems can occur. People are therefore key to facilitating systems change. Change agents can stand together and form social movements, networks, and organisations with the power to create change. The nature of these change agent networks and the way that they organise to facilitate change differ. Recognising the key importance of change agents and the way change agents engage with one another and with the broader context, CSP has developed new thinking that informs how we can most strategically create space for change agents to stand together to catalyse change, as illustrated in figure 4.

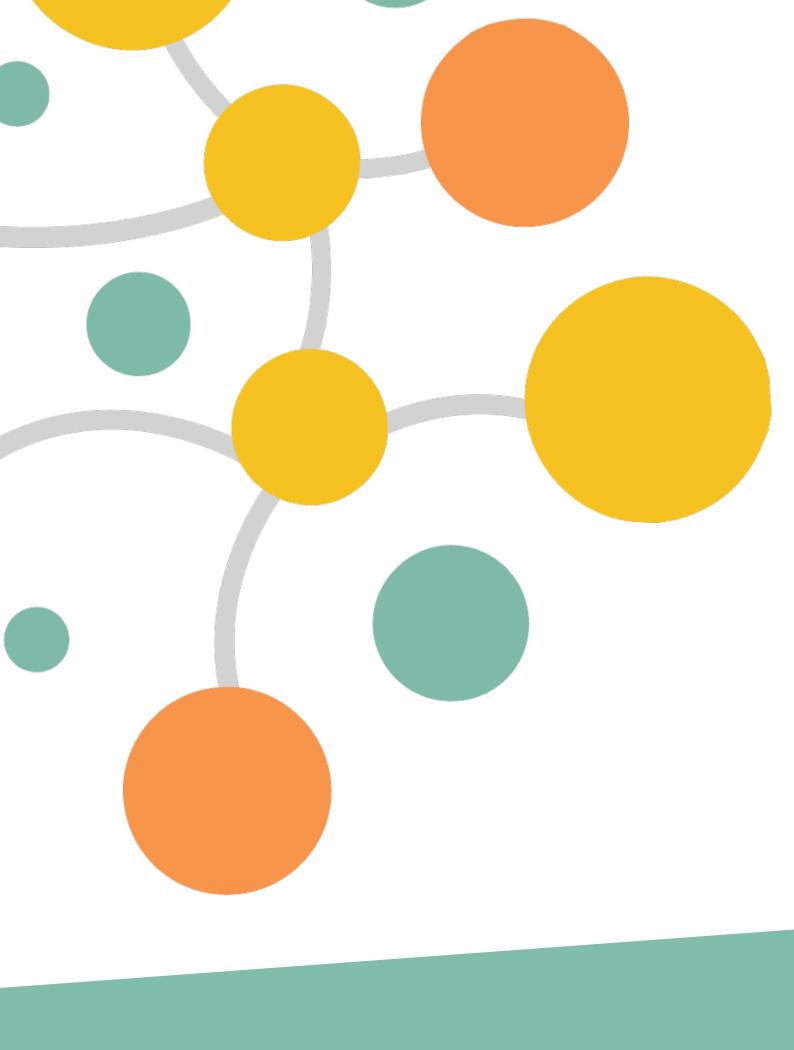## Peacebuilding, peacebuilding system, and aid infrastructure

Peacebuilding is here understood as long-term engagement to address root causes of conflict, building sustainable mechanisms and processes to address conflict in constructive ways and (re)building relations, both between conflicting parties, and between people and the state. Peacebuilding practice and approaches are embedded in several overlapping systems that govern how peacebuilding is implemented within and among international institutions. In more generic terms, these systems consist of actors, organisations and global ways of working that either hold the explicit intention to promote peace or influence how peacebuilding can be pursued both at global and local levels. There are at least three inter-connected systems that guide how peacebuilding is done when international actors are involved: the aid architecture; the global governance and international relation systems; and the sphere of domestic politics in states involved in the peacebuilding field. The aid infrastructure references the global systems and structures that underpin the ways in which philanthropic, bilateral and multilateral development cooperation and other financing decisions are made. Other parts of the peacebuilding system are embedded in global governance structures and are directly linked to foreign policies, international relations, and diplomacy.

Global infrastructures and spaces vs global systems

When talking about what the future might look like, the framing 'global infrastructures and spaces for peace' is used instead of referring to the global system. The term 'global' refers to all actors within and beyond the current international system and does not only entail the current international institutions that form part of that system. The notion of 'infrastructures' refers to a degree of structural predictability and sustainability of spaces within which relevant actors engage in equitable partnerships for the purpose of promoting sustainable peace; however, with less structural rigidity and hierarchy than what is seen in the current international systems.

Systems innovation and systems transformation

CSP borrows its understanding of systems innovation and systems transformation from Robert Ricigliano (2012) in Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peace, in which the term 'systems innovation' is understood as systems change efforts that address dysfunctionalities of a system in order to make it work here and now, but without changing the underlying structures, practices, and attitudes across the system. Systems innovation often takes the form of filling one gap, fixing one way of working, or solving one particular problem, typically in a relatively isolated area. In contrast, the term 'systems transformation' aims at changing the broader web of relations and dynamics of power within the system as they are embedded in structures, practices, and attitudes.

ENDNOTES

1   See Institute for Economics & Peace (2023), <u>Global Peace Index 2023: Measuring Peace in a Complex World</u>.

2   In 2022, the number of people "forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order" grew by 21 per cent to an estimated 108.4 million; see UNHCR (2023), <u>Global trends forced displacement in 2022</u>.

3   See Development Initiatives (2023) <u>Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023</u>

4   The term 'stabilisation' is understood as shorter-term efforts to stop violence and prevent new outbreaks of violence. Stabilisation is different from peacebuilding, which focuses on addressing the underlying causes of conflict and on establishing sustainable structures to deal with violent conflict for the long term. Stabilisation can be termed 'negative peace' as it serves the purpose of stopping violence, but not of creating sustainable peace, which can be termed 'positive peace'.

5   World military expenditure rose by 3.7 per cent in real terms in 2022, to reach a record high of 2240 billion USD; see Sipri(2023), <u>Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2022.</u>

6   ODA supporting peace objectives reached a five-year low of 11% in 2021, down from 13% in 2019, decreasing from US$3.9 billion to US$3.5 billion ; see OECD (2023), <u>Peace and Official Development Assistance</u>.

7   ODA flows over 2019-2021 thus closely relate to EU immigration flows, with Türkiye, Afghanistan and Syria, topping both the EU's ODA and EU asylum applications in 2021; see CONCORD(2023) <u>Aidwatch 2023: Bursting the ODA Buble</u>.

8   Nearly all of this funding to NGOs (US$6.4 billion) was channelled to INGOs, with only 0.2% (US$80 million) of direct funding being channelled to local and national NGOs ; see Development Initiatives (2023) <u>Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023</u>.

9   See recent local leadership commitments by development agencies such as <u>USAID</u>, a <u>UK House of Commons report</u> on racism in the aid sector, <u>Grand Bargain 2.0,</u> which doubles down focus on local leadership and local resourcing, the <u>Pledge for Change</u> initiatives by some of the largest development international organisations, among other relevant policy changes.

10   It is important to note that whenever CSP develops overviews of systems change efforts through traditional mappings (such as Kumu mapping), much more innovative ways of understanding systems change, inspired by nature, are also offered elsewhere; e.g. <u>The Dragonfly Model: Systems Change to Strengthen Support for Locally-Led Peacebuilding</u> (March 2021);

11   Humanity United will also facilitate a parallel follow up track for the Reimagining Peacebuilding initiative in the form of the Reimagine Trans-local initiative, which will continue the trans-local futures work to align with values and principles of social equity and shift power to local actors.