CONDUCIVE SPACE FOR PEACE
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
2024 - 2026

WHO WE ARE

Conducive Space for Peace (CSP) is a Danish registered non-governmental organisation committed to working towards equitable 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, and 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 and equitable collaboration. 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 engage with change agents who have wisdom and exercise innovative power. 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 these dynamic and challenging times, striving to shape the emerging global landscape and change the dominant paradigms used to frame reality. 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. Every part of our organisation, processes of engagement, and substantive work is scrutinised for alignment with the values we hold. Each day, we learn 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 these learnings, CSP continues to adjust its organisational set-up and ways of working to be as relevant as possible in pursuing our mission and living our values.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The strategic framework (2024–2026) guides and informs how CSP will work to influence systems change in the peacebuilding and 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 a radical rethink and greater focus on developing future infrastructures and spaces that are more relevant and equitable for collaborating on peacebuilding locally and globally.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are needed more than ever. Violent conflict is at historically high levels with record numbers of people displaced globally as a result. Violent conflicts recur at alarmingly high rates. In the past five years, they are increasingly spilling over to the region within which they are embedded and beyond. Inequality and polarisation are rising both globally and within countries. This is also reflected in the way international systems work, including efforts to pursue peace. Clearly there is a need to rethink global collaboration on peacebuilding and develop new ways of working that can prevent violent conflict and bring about sustainable peace.

The world is increasingly divided, with rising geopolitical tensions, growing authoritarianism, and the prominence of right-wing populism in Western democracies. Internal dynamics in donor countries are influencing North–South relations, favouring nationalist self-interested approaches over collaborative, solidarity-based approaches. This shift towards more insular policies is reducing opportunities for consensus and cooperation, which is exacerbated by the widespread dissemination of disinformation, extremism, and hate speech online, further fuelling division and manipulating public perception.

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, thus challenging priorities that focus on peacebuilding and reducing available funds. For years, the peacebuilding field has been challenged by the short term attention span of donors that aim to stabilise and stop violence, but fail to engage to promote sustainable peace in the long term. This struggle has now taken on 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.

The current international environment is marked by two opposing dynamics. On the one hand, the political and economic interests of bilateral donors are increasingly shaping the aid system and further enhancing the embedded power assymmetries. Awareness of these power asymmetries and their consequences is also mounting, thus further fuelling polarisation at global and local levels. On the other hand, momentum for change is increasing, with diverse and powerful actors and movements advocating for radical systemic change, shifting power, and decolonising aid. At the same time, proxy and hybrid warfare is unfolding in dangerous proximity to the polarisations and inequities of the system.

Although the increasing demand for systems change has elicited significant attention by decision makers in the aid and peacebuilding systems, the question remains whether the envisioned adaptive change processes will be able to address the challenges at the speed necessary for those demanding change. This leaves us with two main options for pursuing the change that is needed: to prompt the current international system to embark on much more radical and transformative change processes and/or to develop new equitable infrastructures for global collaboration that are better at enabling locally led peacebuilding. The 2024–2026 CSP strategic framework is designed to navigate these conflicting pressures, which are moving in increasingly divergent directions.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE AID SYSTEM

Development aid is increasingly wielded as an instrument of donor national interests, influenced by their own domestic political pressures and a focus on regions that directly affect their security such as controlling irregular migration. This diverts support and resources from the people most in need to areas of geopolitical interest to donors, sidelining the priorities of local actors living in conflict. Donor-defined thematic and geographic priorities undermine the leadership of the people who know best – in their local context and on the global level.

Mainstream funding modalities concretely encapsulate the need for systems change in the face of normalised inequities. Among other things, these funding approaches are typically project based and short term in nature and offer 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 can access and manage the vast majority of available money, the primary consequence of which is that few of these financial resources reach local organisations that need it most.

Signalling awareness of these problems, 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 (July 2023) from the UN Secretary-General. While normative recognition of the importance of local leadership and equitable partnership is growing, a significant gap between rhetoric and reality persists.
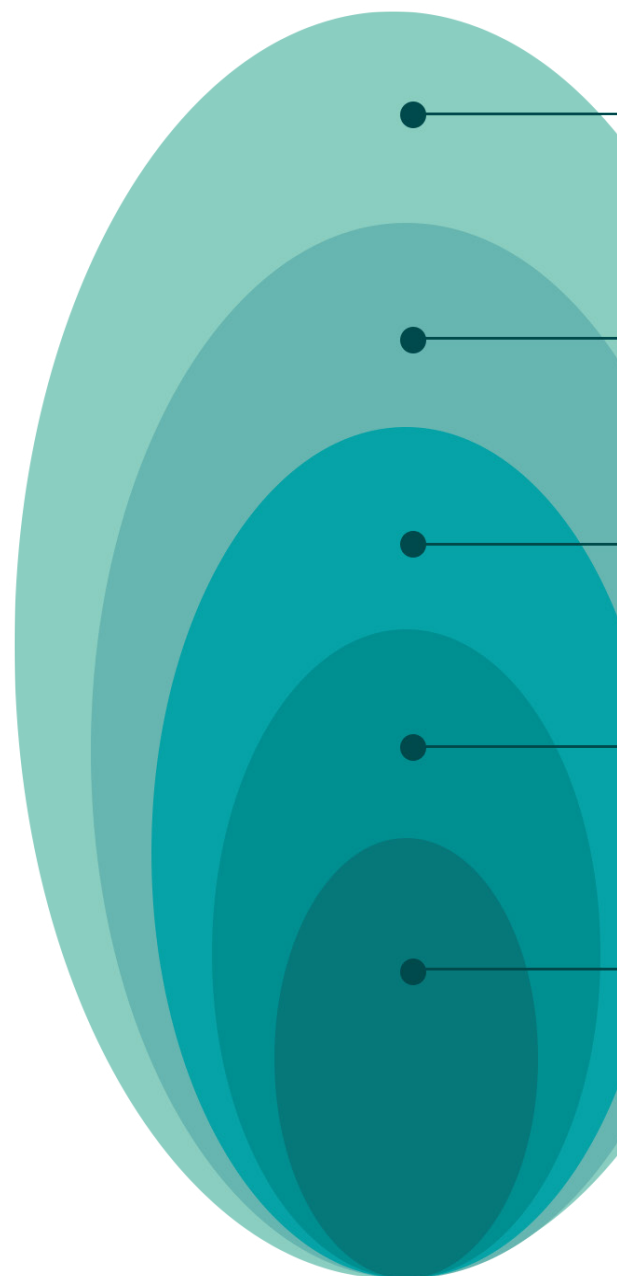
The current aid system is not likely to change significantly through existing change efforts – by talking about it, by developing progressive policies, or through innovations in discrete parts of the system. Crucially, the system is also not transforming fast enough to meet the urgent need for change in our rapidly shifting world. Rather, the global conditions that negatively impact international peacebuilding and the aid infrastructure more generally will most likely intensify, rendering this system less equitable and less relevant to those who are best placed to promote sustainable peace and development. These dynamics and the persistent inability of the international community to operationalise its commitments to local leadership, equity, and peacebuilding signify a need for radical rethink and transformative change beyond piecemeal solutions.
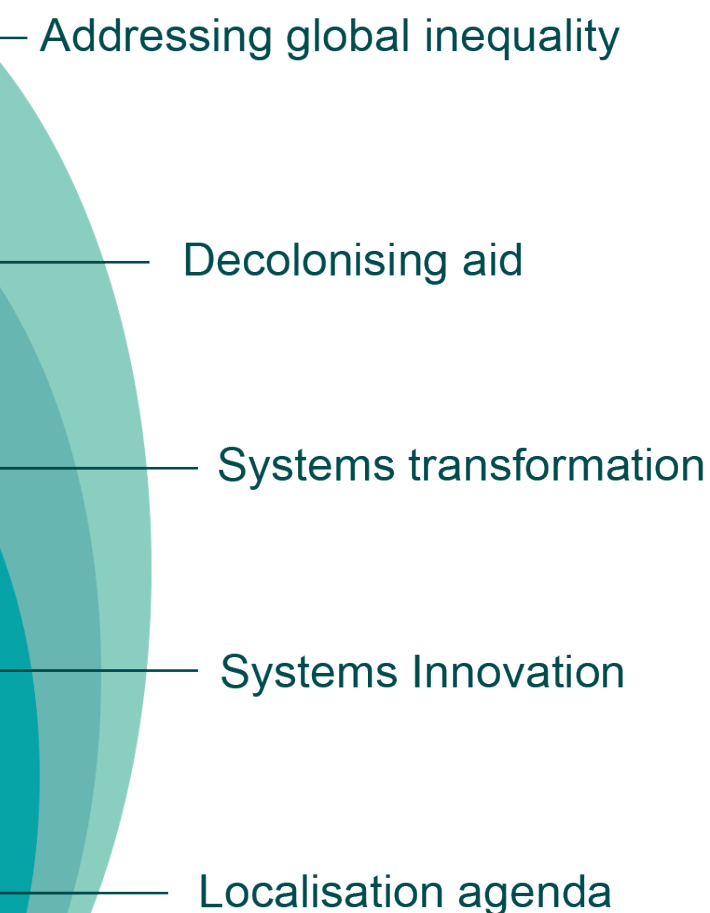
MULTIPLE OVERLAPPING SYSTEMS CHANGE AGENDAS

The localisation agenda is often used by donors to demand or encourage international organisations to better enable local leadership. The agenda is widely contested, however, because its operationalisation means that initiatives driven by internationals are 'made local' by leaving it to local organisations to implement them, without actually changing the underlying power asymmetries. Also, the term 'localisation' is often used in policy frameworks, but less so in actual change initiatives.

Moving beyond policy, many organisations are pursuing systems change by applying innovative practices to prompt the system to better enable local leadership. While innovative practices often refer to mechanisms such as participatory grant making facilities, they rarely involve systems-wide change. For systems-wide change to occur, it is necessary to have a systems transformation lens that implies transforming structures, practices, and attitudes in a way that radically changes existing power asymmetries. This now moves 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 and movements, some of whom want to see the aid infrastructure abolished and most of whom see clear links to broader global inequities. In this perspective, it is not enough to try to address inequities within the system as the system is part and parcel of global structures and practices that continuously reproduce inequity and oppression. This is, of course, a crude summary of an evolving discourse and practice.

Addressing global inequality

Decolonising aid

Systems transformation

Systems Innovation

Localisation agenda

In the 2024–2026 CSP strategic framework, we position ourselves among those pursuing systems transformation and decolonising aid. CSP does not focus on policy or other types of change that only pay lip service to systems change. CSP is also not engaged in innovating specific funding mechanisms that address challenges in the system. Instead, we create space for innovators and other change agents to come together to pursue broader systems transformation and address the underlying power asymmetries embedded in the system. The CSP 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. At CSP, we intend both to propose alternative infrastructures for peace and to contribute to redefining the systems change landscape as we know it today (as illustrated in Figure 1).

Figure 1: Nested Systems Change Agendas

THE SYSTEMS CHANGE LANDSCAPE

As of 2024, the landscape for systems change in peace-building and development has shifted significantly. Less than a decade ago, systemic challenges and inequities in peacebuilding and beyond were seldom highlighted, with little drive for comprehensive systems change. To-day, acknow-ledging the importance of locally led peace-building for sustainable peace and the need for broad systems transformation has moved to the forefront of global discourse. CSP has played an active role in pro-moting and developing traction for this agenda since the organisation was founded in 2016.

Transforming the global aid and peacebuilding systems necessitates multi-layered change involving diverse ac-tors, utilising the strengths of various change strategies. While local actors in conflict-affected contexts bear the brunt of the systems dysfunctions, they need support beyond their influence to drive this transformation. In-ternational organisations – including donors and NGOs – must therefore engage in internal change processes to shift power to local actors and address the inequities of the international systems for global collaboration.

Efforts to shift power to local actors in international peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian aid in-volve various strategies from different types of actors mostly targeting system dysfunctions and inequities in existing ways of working. CSP has mapped and clustered these efforts along three emerging patterns, highlighting innovations in funding, accountability and learning, and

partnerships. These efforts are, however, often isolat-ed within specific projects or locales, and they seldom spark broader change across organisations or systems, limiting their potential for widespread transformation. In the end, systems innovations rarely translate into fun-damental systems transformation.

While numerous, systems innovation efforts are often disconnected and do not inspire a widespread adapta-tion of alternative ways of working. This is due to the lack of institutional knowledge about how to conduct such change processes and an absence of readiness to embark on such processes. The lack of structural condi-tions to enable cross-pollination exacerbates this dilem-ma. Hence, momentum for and talk of change may have increased dramatically, but this has not yet translated, much less materialised, into large-scale institutional and systems transformation.

At the same time, social movements 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 ex-amining how these inequities are embedded in the pres-ent-day institutional frameworks that govern relations between the Global North and Global South. Deep-seat-ed prejudices and structural racisms translating to atti-tudes, practices, and institutional structures continue to prioritise Western knowledge and expertise over local knowledge.

THE CSP CHANGE APPROACH

The 2024–2026 CSP strategic framework is grounded in our evolving theory of change, which acknowledges the inadequacy and fading relevance of the current international system, particularly the aid infrastructure, to address violent conflict, polarisation, and inequity. Although the current system is increasingly under pressure, it is impossible to predict exactly how change will unfold over the next five to ten years. The only thing we can be almost certain of is that the world will see the further unfolding of multiple overlapping crises, and the space for civil society engagement in peacebuilding will shrink and become increasingly difficult to navigate. At the same time, the instability of the current systems also opens up spaces to co-create more equitable global infrastructures for sustainable peace. The CSP theory of change is designed as a constructive response to this situation.

Change agents are pivotal in creating change – both in reforming existing systems and in shaping new systems for the future. A core CSP ambition is for change agents to come together to be inspired, grow wiser, and get energised to drive change processes together.

Drawing inspiration from natural phenomena such as the dragonfly, dandelion, and beehive, CSP stimulates innovative and transformative thinking in networks of change agents for our collective pursuit of shifting power and enabling local leadership in peacebuilding.

The processes of CSPs engagement with change agents move between convergence – co-thinking and co-creation – and divergence – reaching out to other stakeholders in the system to test ideas, sense the environment, and mobilise people for change. The process of convergence is somewhat akin to a beehive: Change agents come together to explore and create, then move out to collect more food for thought and come back together to share and further co-create, and to strategise. The process of divergence on the other hand simulates the life of a dandelion: Change agents disperse like the pappus of a dandelion in the wind. These parachute seeds will always find cracks in which to grow. They will spread widely, even to unfertile grounds, to grow new initiatives and networks, all in the pursuit of a more equitable and effective peacebuilding system.

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 CSP strategic framework envisions two overall outcomes with two corresponding pathways to change. The first outcome pursued by CSP is that "international institutions are transformed to better enable locally led peacebuilding and development". In doing so, CSP takes action, together with other change agents, to transform the current system through innovative systems thinking, convening of space for collective sharing and learning, and accompanying organisations in their systems change processes. The second outcome pursued by CSP is that "global collaboration for peace is reimagined in ways that are equitable and relevant in a radically changing global context". The pathway to reimagined future 'systems' mainly consists of the RESPACE initiative (see section on Outcome 2 on page 11) where future scenarios for global collaboration on peace are developed and collaborative action towards more equitable and effective peacebuilding undertaken.

CSP has always been committed to, on the one hand, transforming the current system and, on the other hand, creating space for future systems to emerge. While CSP has previously focused more on changing the current system and working with change agents inside international institutions, we are now shifting the gaze to look more towards the future in order to shape transformative action and new forms of equitable global collaboration for sustainable peace. The reason for this strategic shift is that the global context within which conflict and peace develop is shifting at an unprecedented pace. It is now becoming evident that the current system will not be able to change as rapidly and as radically as the demand for change suggests. In recent years we have seen much talk but little action in shifting power. In addition, the militarisation among countries who have historically been promoters of the structures of peacebuilding within the global governance framework is rising at an unprecedented scale and speed, and closing the space for 'civilian' peacebuilding.

It is the ambition that the 'reimagined global spaces and infrastructures for peace' will reach beyond what we know today. However, whether the 'spaces and infrastructures' for global collaboration will replace the existing international systems, or they will serve as complementary drivers of change toward equitable global collaboration remains in the unknown. The aspiration is for global civil society to lead the way and to 'claim' and create space for equitable global collaboration on sustainable peace possibly reaching out to multiple types of actors that are critical for pursuing sustainable peace.

Importantly, CSPs work on systems change, at the current and at the future level, are intertwined and will continue to inspire one another. The Dragonfly Model has created the foundation for both CSP and other change agents to understand the interlinkages between different types and levels of systems change efforts that are oriented towards the current system and a reimagined system, illustrated by the wings of the dragonfly. In the dragonfly model the approaches to changing the current system and reimagining alternative 'systems' are illustrated as two different types of efforts, using different approaches and achieving different goals. The distinction between these strands of work still stands. However, CSP is moving toward a realisation of a new future system leading the scope and direction of change, and where the current system plays an increasingly smaller role as it is becoming less relevant in promoting peace, equity, and cohesion. CSP suggests viewing the broader peacebuilding system as one inspired by a butterfly where the current system is represented by the much smaller back-wings that are becoming less important for setting the direction. The current system remains a potential steppingstone for a new system to emerge, however for this to happen, the current international system would need to undergo a radical transformation.

Both understandings of the global system, the dragonfly and the butterfly, carry an embedded condition that any future system must hold local civil society at the centre of change, illustrated by the 'core' of both 'insects'.
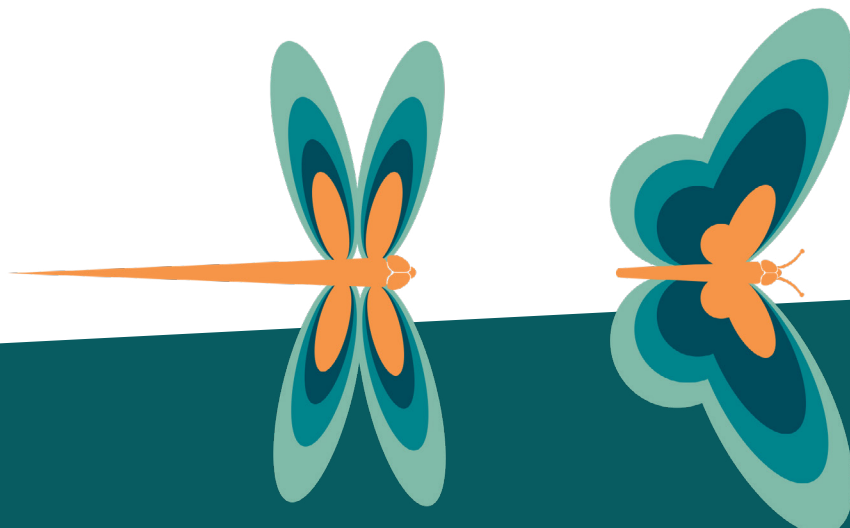
OUTCOME 1

> **International institutions are tranformed to better enable locally led peacebuilding and development**

Since 2016, CSP has contributed significantly to the rise in momentum for change. Our approach has included collaborating with local civil society and international organisations, producing new know-ledge on systems change and creating innovative frameworks; for example, the dragonfly and chain of influence models. Our influencing efforts have been aimed at decision makers in international organisations. This has included facilitating workshops to advance understanding of the need for and approaches to systems innovation and transformation to shift power and better enable local leadership. With growing consensus on the challenges and need for change, CSP will move beyond building momentum for change to focus more on taking transformative action. We will continue to provide new ways to understand and navigate challenges, and leverage opportunities for change. Under the first pathway to change, CSP will pursue three types of activities designed to support the achievement of Outcome 1.

Develop new conceptual thinking that inspire change agents for transformative action

Drawing inspiration from natural phenomena, arts and culture, and the wisdom of local peacebuilders, CSP will continue to develop new thinking on systems change that can inspire change agents for transfor mative action. Conceptual frameworks on systems thinking can

serve as a means throughwhich change agents can understand their own role and their potential collaboration with other change agents. They are intended to open up the scope for multiple approaches to change to complement one another rather than compete with one another.

Convene spaces for collective learning and innovation among change agents

CSP addresses the challenge of insufficient know-ledge-sharing among innovators in systems transformation by acting as a convener, uniting change agents from various sectors in workshops for experiential learning. Our role is to facilitate complementary efforts and inspire mutual support, thus driving the translation of local innovations into wider system change. Supporting these spaces, the Innovators Hive provides a platform for sharing, learning, and networking among peers dedicated to fostering systems change and enhancing local leadership.

Accompany organisations in their systems change processes

CSP supports change agents in addressing systemic power imbalances, going beyond scaling innovations to transform top–down structures. We facilitate understanding of systemic challenges and opportunities for change through local-to-global conversations, starting with local civil society in conflict zones and then prompting international actors to adapt their practices to local needs. This involves donors and INGOs reassessing their roles to match the needs of local peacebuilders. CSP local-to-global change processes aim to shift power dynamics both within and among global peacebuilding and development organisations from other sectors seeking transformative change.

OUTCOME 2

> **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**

In 2021, CSP and Humanity United launched the Reimagining Peacebuilding initiative, engaging 25 peacebuilders from multiple conflict zones in a participatory process to reimagine the future of peacebuilding. Recognising that sustainable peace requires local leadership instead of distant decision makers, this initiative aimed to transform peace-building by amplifying local voices. The initiative comprised 12 virtual workshops utilising futures and design thinking to reflect on the challenges of peace-building to identify emerging trends and prioritise local actors in pursuing a collaborative vision for peace.

Under the second pathway to change, CSP will pursue two types of activities designed to support the achievement of Outcome 2. The RESPACE initiative will be the main activity in the first year of this strategic period, and other activities will either flow from the RESPACE process or will emerge as innovations sparked by continuous sensing of the radically changing global context for peace.

RESPACE – Reimagining equitable global infrastructures and spaces for sustainable peace
Building on the 2021 process, we will elevate the Reimagining of Equitable Global Spaces and Infra-structures for Sustainable Peace (in short, the RESPACE initiative) project to a global level. With this new approach, participants from various positiona-lities in the current system and with diverse backgrounds will imagine plausible visions of the future and then retrace steps back to the present to explore how the desirable change can be realised. RESPACE will employ the Transformative Scenarios Process (TSP) as its cornerstone methodology, enriched by other techniques throughout the progression of the initiative.

RESPACE will assemble a team of 30 change agents, who will come together to share experiences and perspectives, reimagine possible futures, and strategise toward building an alternative and desirable future for peacebuilding. The reimagined scenarios will represent 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 scenarios, as they may possibly become stepping stones for pursuing these visions in collaborative ways.

Innovating new forms of collaboration that can counter polarisation and promote equitable peace
In the vein of continuous innovation to challenge the status quo and shape future collaboration for peace, CSP will co-create and test new forms of global and local collaboration that put civil society actors at the centre. This entails creating space for unusual suspects to come together, bringing in inspiration from different forms of art, and connecting to the creative power of human nature.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Global North and Global South

CSP employs the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' because they are the most widely used and understood in the peacebuilding and development fields at present. We are aware of the problematic assumptions and history of the various terms, their broad generalisation and implied uniformity, when in fact they refer to widely diverse peoples, countries, and regions. Alternative terms, although sometimes more nuanced, are also subject to debate.

Local, global, and trans-local

CSP uses the term 'local actor' to refer to civil society actors with lived experience in their country, whether in the Global North or Global South. The term 'local' does not simply designate a level of intervention, but it indicates the local rootedness of anyone. This strategic framework is located at the intersection between local embeddedness and global connection, promoting a reciprocal and equitable understanding that spans local and global spheres. In this context, the term 'global' denotes connections that transcend diverse localities beyond the usual state-centric global relationships that are imbued with power asymmetries. In this trans-local space, the global-to-local, local-to-global, and local-to-local linkages represent the driving forces for change.

Change agent and change agent networks

Change agents are individuals who recognise the need for systems change and challenge the status quo through their actions. Systems are made up of individuals, and through their actions shifts in those systems can occur. Change agents can stand together and form powerful social movements, networks, and organisations. Recognising the key role change agents play in systems transformation, CSP develops new thinking on how we can strategically support them in standing together to catalyse change.

Peacebuilding system and aid infrastructure

There are at least three interconnected systems influencing international peacebuilding: the aid architecture, which encompasses global funding structures; the global governance system, including the UN; and the regional and domestic political environment of countries engaged in peacebuilding. The aid infrastructure is particularly concerned with the global arrangements that facilitate development assistance or aid, which also provide the framework within which funding of peacebuilding efforts is embedded.

Global infrastructures vs global systems

When discussing the future of global peacebuilding, CSP prefers the framing 'global infrastructures and spaces for peace' over 'global system'. In this context, the term 'global' encompasses all actors, extending beyond the current international system. The notion of 'infrastructures' (for peace) refers to structures and processes of collaboration, anchored in webs of relationships, motivated by a shared humanity, and guided by principles and values of equity, dignity, and respect.

Change agent and change agent networks

CSP borrows its understanding of systems innovation and systems transformation from Robert Ricigliano (2012) with the term 'systems innovation' understood as systems change efforts that address dysfunctionalities in a system to make it work here and now, but without changing the underlying structures, practices, and attitudes across the system. 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.