

Discussion on the Peacebuilding Fund's 2019 Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative

I. Introduction

On 23 April, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) partnered with the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) to convene an informal, off-the-record discussion with civil society on the Peacebuilding Fund's (PBF) Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) for 2019. The Gender Promotion Initiative is in its sixth year as a funding call to support peacebuilding programming focused on gender empowerment, and the Youth Promotion Initiative was started in 2016 and is currently in its fourth year. It is the fourth joint GYPI Special Call, which was formally established within the PBF Strategic Plan for 2017-2019.

This meeting provided an opportunity for further conversation between civil society and PBSO colleagues to discuss the 2019 GYPI funding calls, as well as reflect on experiences during the 2017 and 2018 Special Calls. Additionally, the convening was a space for learning about the focus and goals, as well as eligibility and application process, for the 2019 GYPI Special Call. Participants also used the space as an opportunity for peer to peer learning by sharing best practices and challenges drawn from the experiences of past and current recipients.

II. Overview of the Discussion

Shift to innovation

While past application processes for the Special Calls included an emphasis on innovative methods for building peace, a key shift for 2019 is the sharpened focus and call from PBSO for applications that articulate innovative and timely programming. This focus on innovation will also shape future initiatives, as the Peacebuilding Fund will enter its new strategic plan for 2019-2022. With regards to the Gender Promotion Initiative, it was emphasized that PBF funded programming has surpassed the required gender marker within the UN system. While that goal has been met, it is key that further efforts are undertaken to fund innovative programming that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. Across both initiatives, ideal applications will conceptualize catalytic and timely projects that seek to impact peacebuilding dynamics through clearly articulated innovative programming. The emphasis on innovation also works to further uplift the unique role for the Peacebuilding Fund, as the Fund serves to support programming that other funding instruments may not yet be able to invest in.

Eligibility

The 2019 GYPI, which provides funding for projects up to eighteen months, is open to UN agencies and civil society organizations; however, the discussion convened at Quaker House centered on eligibility for prospective civil society applicants. There are twenty-five countries in focus for the GYPI funding call, including the five countries with Country-Specific-Configurations in the Peacebuilding Commission. Organizations applying must have a legally registered office within one of the twenty-five identified countries and have shown a minimum of three years of work in the country.

Programming submitted in the application must be country focused as regional or cross-border projects do not qualify for the GYPI funding call. Additionally, organizations wishing to apply must

meet GYPI budgetary requirements, which call for organizations to have an annual budget that is a minimum of two times the amount being requested through the Fund. The minimum budget for all organizations applying is \$400,000 USD for the past two fiscal years.

While the GYPI Special Call encourages partnership for peacebuilding initiatives, there must be a single civil society organization applicant per application that will serve as the funding recipient if the submission is successful. Organizations are permitted to submit up to two applications per initiative, however federations will be viewed as a single organization. This means that if a country branch of a federation submits a proposal, that proposal will then count as one of the up to four proposals the entire federation can submit. Organizations that applied in the past but were unsuccessful are welcome to reapply if their 2019 application meets the eligibility criteria. It is key to note, however, that the GYPI is a funding tool for new programming and cannot be applied to scale up existing projects. Lastly, it was raised that civil society organizations already working with UN agencies are eligible to apply.

Application process

The GYPI Special Call has a two-stage application process, all of which takes place online. All application documents must be submitted in English, French or Spanish. The first stage for all applicants includes the submission of a concept note articulating the proposed project. A concept note should demonstrate capacity to implement a strong Theory of Change with a clear description of its stages, as well as thorough conflict analysis and proper identification of specific drivers of conflict. Organizations will need to submit their annual report, proof of tax exemption status, legal registration, and annual budget. The deadline for submitting concept notes is 20 May 2019.

Once a concept note is accepted, it moves to the second stage of the application process, in which the submission of a full proposal is required. The full proposal requires the signature of a government official from the country in which the project will be implemented, as well as the signature from UN representation in that country. Prospective applicants may benefit from seeking to build a relationship with government stakeholders early in the application process in preparation for this second stage. It is also encouraged that applicants engage with the PBF focal point and UN Country Team. All final decisions are then made by the Peacebuilding Support Office.

III. Learning, best practices and challenges

As the PBF has now worked to fund civil society for three years through the GYPI, the discussion also served as an opportunity for sharing of best practices and challenges, and for peer to peer learning based on the experience of past and present recipients.

Reaching local partners

The challenge of reaching and supporting local level organizations was recognized during the meeting and it was noted that this subject will be further considered in the PBF's next strategic plan. When discussing this challenge, participants brought forward the following key issues:

- The administrative process for GYPI applications and reporting may be too extensive for smaller organizations who may lack the personnel capacity and administrative experience to meet the requirements. It was raised that it may be useful to consider if and how innovative methods for monitoring and evaluation can be used as a means of addressing administrative capacity constraints for organizations, as well as the complexity of the environments in which activities are implemented. For example, some participants brought forward the idea of using

photos or media as tools to submit for reporting processes. It was noted that PBSO is flexible to the needs of organizations with regards to reporting processes (e.g. does not require receipts for every aspect of the project) and encourages innovative approaches.

- The requirement of government signature on all proposals may prove too difficult for some organizations based on the environment they work in, or the nature of their work, thus disqualifying them from applying.
- Funding requirements automatically exclude locally or community-based organizations as they will not meet the budgetary and administrative criteria. Some participants raised concerns that the PBF, because of the annual budgetary criteria for prospective applicants, may risk serving as a fund only for the largest international peacebuilding organizations. This may result in the Fund only supporting a small subset of the global peacebuilding programming taking place.
- Networks are essential at the local level for peacebuilding initiatives as they connect smaller organizations in a strategic way to coordinate work, amplify messaging and programming, and uplift capacities. However, such networks do not fit the PBF criteria for eligibility.

It was noted that the PBF suggests that successful applicants redistribute at least 40% of funds to local organizations as a means to foster partnerships, support inclusivity, and build the capacities of national civil society actors.

Gathering learning

It was raised that PBSO has struggled to gather the knowledge, experiences and lessons learned from past initiatives. To start addressing this challenge, PBSO is currently undertaking a study on youth programming that will inform initiatives through feedback and assessment of successes and shortcomings. It was also noted that discussions such as the one held at Quaker House provide an opportunity for learning and exchange amongst civil society partners, and between civil society and UN actors.

Implementation in complex environments

It was recognized that the PBF's high risk funding allows for programming in situations where work may otherwise not take place, or where environments are not yet conducive for other donors. Participants reflected on the experience of implementing PBF-funded programming in practice in such environments, bringing forward the challenges and opportunities that have been encountered. It was noted that it is important to allow for administrative and programmatic flexibility in such contexts, as fragile or dynamic environments may impact the timeline and implementation of funded projects. The requirement of government signatures for proposals was raised as a challenge in complex or fragile situations, as was the maintenance of government engagement in the work. The role of and partnership with PBSO and other UN staff, both at headquarters and the country level was key in providing support to civil society organizations working in complex contexts. Participants raised that UN colleagues helped civil society engage with government officials and navigate the administrative and bureaucratic challenges that arose as a result of dynamics in the country.

Impact on civil society

Some participants shared that they found being a recipient of PBF funding improved their organization's proposal and reporting methodology. The proposal and reporting processes worked to enhance their capacities for monitoring and evaluating program impact and articulating succinct theories of change and program objectives. Some participants also raised that being a recipient positively impacted their organizational reputation, and lessons learned through the initiative are now being applied to other grant processes.

While such experiences illustrate the potential positive impact being a PBF recipient can have for some organizations, some participants also brought forward concerns that should be considered on the potential impact for smaller or more local level peacebuilding organizations. It was noted that for some peacebuilding actors, their strength, impact, and access is precisely because of the informality of their structure or working methods. Thus, there could be the unintended consequence of bureaucratization of such organizations through PBF funding or partnerships. It was raised that it is crucial to remember the ‘do no harm’ principle, and some pointed to the value of reflecting on the findings of the recent Youth Progress Study for further insights on such issues.

Impact of work

The discussion also provided a space for some participants to share the impact of their PBF funded programming. Drawing upon their learning and experience, participants noted the importance of working through existing, local structures where possible as such structures provide a pre-existing entry point for community engagement and increase the likelihood of sustainability. The example was given of working through existing local women’s groups to implement women’s inclusion and empowerment work. The participant found that partnering through such groups enabled the program to sustainably empower women as stakeholders in peace processes and conflict prevention. Participants and past recipients of PBF funding also agreed that the help received by the UN Country Teams on the ground is crucial for the implementation and sustainability of a project.