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PANEL 3

*Working with Different Target Groups:
Successes and Challenges*

Moderator



Safiya
Ibn Garba

Panellists



Bashar Shweiki



Fauzia Nayaon



Zhanyl
Baigabylova



Abdiel Kude

Locally-driven peace building takes many forms, varying in terms of what different programmes seek to achieve, how these programmes are implemented in practice and who these programmes work with. Community-based peace-building and conflict transformation efforts are in fact remarkable in their diversity. What unifies these different types of programmes? What lessons can be learned from community-based initiatives in different parts of the world?

Critically important in peace-building programmes are the people that such programmes target. The individuals at the receiving end of a peace-building intervention are crucial to its success. Most importantly, different target groups necessitate a separate set of strategies - and bring with them their own kinds of challenges. To address this, this panel zoomed into the composition of target groups in Generations For Peace's programmes - an element that varies significantly across GFP programming in Asia, Africa and Europe. The panellists discussed four major categories of target groups that GFP volunteers work with: persons with disabilities, youth, ethno-religious groups, and girls and women (though target groups in GFP programmes also include - amongst others - children, Internally Displaced Persons, refugees, and host communities).

While these different target groups were necessarily diverse and required different approaches, there were a few commonalities to be found. All the panellists noted that it was important to cater to the specific needs of the target group - whatever their age, gender, or physical abilities. This insight applied specifically to sport and sport-based games as a vehicle of change, as these needed to be designed to ensure maximum participation and inclusiveness. This was particularly important when considering persons with disabilities; Bashar Shweiki, drawing on his experiences in the West Bank, noted that it was essential for programme implementers to not group all persons with disabilities as one "category," stating instead that, "It is important for facilitators to care for each individual participant and each individual disability." Approach, resources and facilities needed to be adapted or arranged to account for these differences.



Panellists also agreed that any activities conducted with different target groups needed careful facilitation so that they provided a safe environment in which to experience new interactions and build relationships. Fauzia Nayaon, drawing on her experiences working with youth in Indonesia since 2009, stated that it was important to create sessions and programmes that engaged with youth in a way that was meaningful and relevant to them. Bashar Shweiki added, "[it is important to think about] designing the sessions so that no one is offended or scared of taking part. If that would happen, the programme would have bad results." Carefully planned facilitation was crucial in making sure that programme activities would not be counterproductive.



The discussion in this panel also shed light on another facet of working with different target groups. Panellists stressed the fact that peace building was a holistic activity, not to be carried out in a vacuum. This meant that many panellists recognised that it was not only the composition of the target group in their programme that mattered; the broader community that engaged with localised peace-building programmes was also incredibly important - whether as opponents of a particular kind of peace process or as beneficiaries of peace-building interventions. Panellists stated that it was important not just to deal with the attitudes and feelings of the individuals in the target group, but also to work towards engaging the broader community in peace efforts.

This built on another important understanding: recognising that change was a long-term process that entailed a struggle against entrenched stereotypes prevalent in the community. Abdiel Kude spoke of his experiences in northern Nigeria, discussing the reduced opportunities for education for girls and women and the deep-seated prejudices that accompanied women's participation in public life. He noted that these stereotypes were not just a product of men's attitudes - women themselves were complicit in perpetuating certain forms of disempowerment. He stated that it was important to recognise that "We are not solving the problem of gender-related issues, but we are achieving small successes. We have to acknowledge that it is a long-term process and be grateful for the steps we take." Zhanyl Baigabylova, drawing on her experiences of addressing interethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan, made a similar point, noting that youth from different ethnic groups were often not willing to interact with each other at all; changing their perceptions of one another was therefore necessarily a gradual process.

What this panel demonstrated was the sheer diversity of target groups that GFP volunteers worked with, whether in terms of age, gender, ethno-religious background, or physical abilities. Despite this diversity, the different experiences the panellists shared shed light on the importance of careful planning and facilitation, including tailoring activities to suit the needs of target groups; identification of the role played by the wider community; and recognition of the fact that any process of normative change within the target group and the community as a whole would always be gradual. Future community-based peace-building programmes would benefit from taking into account some of the practical issues raised by this panel, and adjusting programme design and implementation accordingly.





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