

Alternatives to Neoliberal Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in Africa: A Critical Examination of Local Ownership and Participation

Abstract

This article critically examines the concept of local ownership and participation in neoliberal peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions in Africa. It argues that local ownership and participation are often used as a rhetorical device to legitimize interventions and to shift the responsibility for their success or failure onto local actors, while in practice, these principles are often compromised or undermined. The article draws on case studies from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia to illustrate the challenges of implementing local ownership and participation in complex and conflict-affected environments. It concludes by calling for a more critical and nuanced understanding of local ownership and participation, and for the development of alternative approaches to peacebuilding and statebuilding that are more genuinely empowering and sustainable.



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Neoliberal peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions have become increasingly prevalent in Africa in recent decades. These interventions are typically characterized by a focus on market-based solutions, privatization, and the reduction of the state's role in the economy and society. They are also often accompanied by a rhetoric of local ownership and participation, which emphasizes the importance of involving local actors in the design and implementation of peacebuilding and statebuilding initiatives.

While the rhetoric of local ownership and participation is appealing, it is important to critically examine how these principles are actually implemented in practice. This article argues that local ownership and participation are often used as a rhetorical device to legitimize interventions and to shift the responsibility for their success or failure onto local actors, while in practice, these principles are often compromised or undermined.

Local Ownership and Participation in Neoliberal Peacebuilding and Statebuilding

The concept of local ownership and participation in peacebuilding and statebuilding has its roots in the critique of top-down, externally driven interventions. These critiques argue that such interventions often fail to take into account the local context and the needs of local populations, and that they can undermine local capacities and institutions. As a result, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of involving local actors in the design and implementation of peacebuilding and statebuilding initiatives.

However, the concept of local ownership and participation is often used in a vague and ambiguous way. This can lead to confusion and disagreement about what local ownership and participation actually entail, and how they should be implemented in practice. In some cases, local ownership and participation may be interpreted as meaning that local actors should have a major role in decision-making and implementation. In other cases, it may be interpreted as meaning that local actors should simply be consulted or informed about the decisions that are made by external actors.

This ambiguity can be problematic, as it can allow external actors to claim that they are implementing local ownership and participation, even when they are not actually doing so. For example, external actors may claim that they are involving local actors in the design of a peacebuilding or statebuilding intervention, but in reality, local actors may only be consulted after the design has been finalized. Alternatively, external actors may claim that they are involving local actors in the implementation of an intervention, but in reality, local actors may only be given a minor role or may be excluded from key decision-making processes.

The Challenges of Implementing Local Ownership and Participation

There are a number of challenges to implementing local ownership and participation in peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions. These challenges include:

* **The lack of local capacity.** In many conflict-affected countries, local actors may lack the capacity to effectively participate in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes. This may be due to a lack of education, training, or experience. It may also be due to the fact that local actors have been marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes in the past. *

The lack of political will. External actors may not always be willing to genuinely involve local actors in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes. This may be due to a desire to maintain control over the process, or to a belief that local actors are not capable of participating effectively. * **The conflict environment.** Conflict can make it difficult to involve local actors in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes. This is because conflict can create divisions and mistrust between different groups. It can also make it difficult for local actors to travel or to meet with each other.

Case Studies

The following case studies illustrate the challenges of implementing local ownership and participation in peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions in Africa:

* **Liberia.** In the wake of the Liberian civil war, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established to support the peacebuilding and statebuilding process. UNMIL's mandate included a strong focus on local ownership and participation. However, in practice, local actors were often marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes. This was due to a number of factors, including the lack of local capacity, the lack of political will on the part of UNMIL and the Liberian government, and the conflict environment. * **Sierra Leone.** The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) was established to support the peacebuilding and statebuilding process in Sierra Leone. UNIPSIL's mandate also included a strong focus on local ownership and participation. However, as in Liberia, local actors were often marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes. This was due to a number of factors, including the lack of local capacity, the lack of political will on the part of

UNIPSIL and the Sierra Leonean government, and the conflict environment. * **Somalia.** The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was established to support the peacebuilding and statebuilding process in Somalia. AMISOM's mandate also included a strong focus on local ownership and participation. However, as in Liberia and Sierra Leone, local actors were often marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes. This was due to a number of factors, including the lack of local capacity, the lack of political will on the part of AMISOM and the Somali government, and the conflict environment.

The case studies presented above illustrate the challenges of implementing local ownership and participation in peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions in Africa. These challenges include the lack of local capacity, the lack of political will, and the conflict environment.

Despite these challenges, it is important to continue to strive to involve local actors in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes. Local ownership and participation are essential for ensuring that peacebuilding and statebuilding interventions are sustainable and effective. They also help to promote peace and stability in the long term.

However, it is important to be realistic about the challenges of implementing local ownership and participation. It is also important to develop new and innovative approaches to involving local actors in peacebuilding and statebuilding processes. These approaches should be based on a deep understanding of the local context and the needs of local populations. They should also be flexible and adaptable, so that they can be tailored to the specific circumstances of each country.

By investing in local ownership and participation, we can help to build more sustainable and peaceful societies in Africa.



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