Creating Sustainable Peace Through Youth Involvement:

An Assessment of Best Practices in Peace Education Programs in Post-Civil War West Africa

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# Introduction

The region of West Africa has a long history of armed conflict and instability marked by multiple instances of civil wars, coup d’états, and the rise of insurgent groups. The region also has a long history of efforts to promote peace and reconciliation among various parties and states. There is a persistent threat of violence spilling across borders into other West African states as well as undermining the often-fragile peace that exists within states recovering from civil wars. Recent attacks along the northern borders of Côte d’Ivoire, Benin, and Togo and the rise of armed extremist groups in the Central Sahel illustrates the necessity to develop new strategies for building sustainable peace in the region (United States Institute of Peace 6).

Much of the literature on armed conflict focuses on security concerns at the state level. It emphasizes the use of military interventions along with state-led governmental and economic reforms to build peace in a country or region. The security focus of these theories tends to either overlook the youth population or treat them as a security threat. West and Central Africa are some of the world’s youngest regions with a combined 32 percent of the population between the ages of 10 and 24 (United Nations Population Fund 17). The regions also suffer from high rates of youth alienation due to socioeconomic factors such as poor education and low employment opportunities. These high rates of youth alienation in West African countries contribute to the violence occurring in the region because youth are susceptible to recruitment by armed groups (United Nations Population Fund 25). Struggling education systems cannot support students and many young people stop attending school as a result. As of 2018, West and Central Africa accounted for 36 percent of the world’s out of school children, a 14 percent increase from 1999 (United Nations Population Fund 64). This can be attributed to the conflicts occurring in the regions as well as inequality in the education sectors. While security theories highlight the potential threat caused by out of school youth, they rarely ask important questions about how young people might be a force for peace in a country. There is a critical and overlooked need to examine peacebuilding programs focused on young people that encourage peaceful and stable societies. To center young people in the peacebuilding process in West Africa, peace practitioners must concentrate on providing quality education that reduces feelings of youth alienation that promote further violence. In this sense, peacebuilding interventions focused on peace education show a great deal of promise to counter rising instability in the region. Peace education programs aim to place young people at the forefront of the peacebuilding process by teaching them about the effects of violence and how to resolve conflicts through nonviolent means.

This research project aims to look at the potential that peace education has in building sustainable peace through the analysis of six peace education programs in the post-civil war contexts of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire. The two questions guiding this research are what are some common themes between peace education programs which can create a basis for best practices in post-civil war West Africa; and how do these best practices affect the discussion on peacebuilding theory in general? This paper will start by discussing the existing literature about this topic, particularly dialogue on peacebuilding theories and possible best practices that have been already established. The analysis section will use data from secondary sources to understand how the development and implementation of peace education programs interact with the best practices outlined in the literature review. Finally, the discussion section will examine how the pre-existing best practices fit into the real-life experiences of peace education programs in West Africa, and how practical approaches to peace education interact with liberal peacebuilding discourses.

# **Literature Review**

Historical Context

The history of rampant political instability in West Africa starts with the development of the extractive institutions of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism, led primarily by France and Britain. Before this time, the histories of the many powerful precolonial kingdoms in West Africa tell a different story of African civilization. The region of West Africa is home to some of the most powerful ancient African kingdoms including Mali, Ghana, Songhai, Asante, Oyo, Dahomey, and many more throughout history (Adegbulu 172). The history of Africa, as colonized by European historians, tends to minimize the social, political, and cultural achievements of these ancient kingdoms, which were not very different from the organization of the European kingdoms. One of these neglected achievements is the institution of diplomacy that occurred in the formation of these kingdoms. The creation of state-systems in precolonial West Africa required leaders to create diplomatic relations and reconcile relationships with rival states, and bring together multiple different groups of people into a state society (Adegbulu 172). Adegbulu offers examples of Asante diplomacy bringing together different communities and states of Akan peoples into one political unit with a constitution in the region of modern-day Ghana. The nation-states of the Yoruba people, modern-day Nigeria, and the kingdom of Benin also showcased political skill in maintaining diplomatic ties between the many communities that made up their respective empires (Adegbulu 172). Finally, there are also examples of inter-state diplomacy in precolonial West African history. Primarily, the western kingdoms of Mali, Ghana, and Songhai maintained diplomatic relations with the Islamic caliphates of the Maghreb. One of the most famous examples of this type of diplomacy is Mansa Musa’s infamous pilgrimage from Mali to Mecca in the 14th century (Adegbulu 172).

If West African states were able to maintain diplomatic relations with the many different ethnic groups in and outside their kingdoms before European contact, why is the state of West African political stability so hard to maintain now? Nunn and Wantchekon argue that the current inherent distrust in African society is due to the African slave trade. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, which encouraged African leaders to sell fellow Africans to European slave traders, “altered the cultural norms of the ethnic groups exposed to it, making them less trusting of others” (Nunn and Wantchekon 3223). Another long-term effect of the slave trade on trust is the deterioration of traditional African political and legal institutions which made it more easy for individuals to cheat other people (Nunn and Wantchekon 3223). This phenomenon is unique to the African context of conflict because for centuries Africans learned that they could protect their interests by turning against others in their communities or in neighboring communities (Nunn and Wantchekon 3225). This is important to understand in the context of peacebuilding because this mistrust is built into African populations, which makes inter-group conflict much more common and hard to resolve due to the deep, historical traumas associated with slavery. The end of the slave trade did little to help this problem because much of the colonial policy of the British and French was to pit certain ethnic groups against each other to maintain power over the whole area. The harsh and extractive colonial rule that lasted up until the 1960s continued to degrade the traditional African institutions that once flourished in precolonial times. Now, African instability is due to many different causes which are discussed further in the literature review, but the true root causes are due to the legacies of slavery and colonialism that have irreparably changed West African society.

## Civil Wars

A civil war is defined as a sustained conflict occurring within a state between military forces and other insurgent forces. Henderson states that there are three standards a war must meet for it to be a civil war. The first is that the conflict must be internal, the second is the involvement of government forces against an insurgency, and the third is that the insurgents must be able to effectively fight back (Henderson 1). Civil wars are the most frequent type of armed conflict since World War II, and this is primarily due to the number of internal struggles in states that went through decolonization struggles and processes. Consequently, civil wars became prominent in regions of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Central and South America (Henderson 1). According to Henderson, these postcolonial governments did not have the political, financial, or social institutions in place to provide adequate services to their citizens, nor were they prepared to deal with the cultural and ethnic diversity existing within the state boundaries drawn by former colonial rulers (Henderson 2).

The escalation of civil wars specifically in Africa is of interest to many scholars. Kalu outlines the many arguments scholars have made as to why civil wars in Africa remain so persistent. The viability of civil conflict being based in ethnic or ideological differences is regularly highlighted as a source of conflict, but the sources of violence are more complicated. Social identity theory helps explain how ethnic and ideological divisions can provide citizens with a more reliable group identity in conflict settings. However, studies show that ethnic or ideological explanations do not account for the root causes of many of these conflicts. Rather, identity groups are mobilized to fight against other identity groups over issues of poor governance or inequality (Kalu et al. 34). Identity differences are forces for mobilizing and recruiting citizens to a cause, rather than being causal factors for such a conflict (Souaré 35). While identity groups may not by the source of conflicts, once group identity becomes salient these group identities can be difficult to transcend in a post-conflict setting, especially in cases where ethnic or tribal identity is seen as more salient than national identity.

Political economists argue a different case for the cause of civil wars in Africa, specifically focusing on the role that control of natural resources plays in conflicts. Conflict-causing resources vary from diamonds and other minerals to access to water or arable land (Kalu et al. 34). Many civil wars in Africa include an aspect of environmental or resource-based conflict as resources are used to finance wars, both for insurgents and governments. However, studies show that resources are also not the primary cause of civil war. Kalu argues for a deeper reason behind civil wars: the failure of African leadership to build strong institutions of governance. This failure allows for issues such as ethnic or ideological differences and natural resource management to fester into civil wars, particularly if the state is seen as only favoring one ethnic or tribal group (Kalu et al. 35). Kalu also argues that issues of individual power and external influences from post-colonial powers are more plausible causes for civil wars on the continent (Kalu et al. 38).

Such insights follow the arguments laid out by West African scholars. To explain civil wars in West Africa specifically, Souaré outlines three internal factors and three external factors. The internal factors: bad governance, greed and personal ambitions, and, to a lesser extent, poverty and illiteracy are seen as the most influential causes of civil war in West Africa (Souaré 42). For example, the civil wars in Liberia occurred primarily because of a history of bad governance and apartheid-like rule by former enslaved African Americans who returned to Liberia over the native ethnic groups of the country (Souaré 44). Important figures such as President Samuel Doe and rebel warlord Charles Taylor preempted the start of civil conflict in Liberia particularly by drawing on identity divisions. In Côte d’Ivoire, the civil war came about due to the discrimination and human rights abuses against Ivoirians living in the predominantly Islamic north of the country, again emphasizing the use of identity as a way to marginalize other groups (Souaré 46-47). Finally, in Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) recruited underpaid soldiers and isolated young people with the aims of looting the country and stealing diamonds rather than using any real political grievance (Souaré 52).

External factors to civil wars in West Africa, foreign interference, small arms dealers, and outside media, have a weaker influence but are worth appreciating. Of the three, foreign interference has the most influence because leaders will look to other foreign interventions in the region as inspiration for their own security dilemma (Kalu et al. 38). Foreign intervention into the conflict is also greatly influenced by the economic or financial interests of the intervening power, therefore this can push conflict to escalate rather than stop (Souaré 60). Using these arguments, civil wars in West Africa have developed from the internal factors of the histories of bad governance and the ambitions of individual actors, along with the external factors of foreign intervention and influence that promote civil conflict. Ethnic and ideological differences and natural resources are more often points of commonality that groups can rally around, but they do not specifically impact the direct causes of civil wars.

The societal impacts of civil wars are immense. A key aspect of civil wars is the high rate of violence against civilians, particularly civil wars in West Africa. Multiple studies of the social consequences of civil wars shows that civil wars break down social trust in communities, particularly in members of out-groups that are connected to the perpetration of violence (Price and Yaylaci 288). This correlation is particularly relevant when ethnic differences play a part in the conflict. Studies on prosocial behavior (actions that are positive and promote social relations) show the rise of parochial altruism (the act of supporting members of an in-group at the expense of out-group members) in post-civil war societies (Price and Yaylaci 291). This is especially true for civil conflicts in which social identities are important divisions in the war.

In West Africa, the civil wars that have occurred have been extremely violent and resulted in massive loss of life, capital, and money. Rebel factions in Sierra Leone and Liberia were especially violent, and the violence led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people as well as the displacement of millions more (Souaré 129-130). Much of the displacement is due to the destruction of social institutions that provide services to its citizens, such as the education system. Schools may be destroyed over the course of a war and governments tend to take away education funding to fund military costs. This increases the cost of attendance and limits many families’ abilities to send their children to school (Souaré 134). The education systems of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the northern part of Côte d’Ivoire completely collapsed over the course of their civil wars (Souaré 134). Children often did not have the option to go to school either because they had been killed or injured, forced into the fighting as child soldiers, or forced to provide for their families (Souaré 134). Hence, the displacement of refugees and destruction of education systems within the West African countries contributes to the mass brain drain observed in these countries post-civil war. With refugees moving to more peaceful parts of Africa and elsewhere, they tend to not want to return to their home country, which hampers the rebuilding process after a conflict (Souaré 133).

## Peacebuilding

The concept of “peacebuilding” emerged in international discourses near the end of the Cold War as a response to the changing circumstances of many developing countries (Ryan 26). As relatively new area of practice and scholarship, scholars redefine and reconstitute the meaning o of peacebuilding according to international trends. While many definitions of peacebuilding exist, they generally follow what the United Nations (UN) defines as “a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development” (United Nations, *UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation 5*). In its infancy, peacebuilding was framed almost solely in terms of the deployment of United Nations Peacekeeping forces to post-conflict zones. Peacekeeping forces were instructed to deter further violence from conflicting parties but were not allotted any power to enforce peace beyond that to enhance social stability or support broader peacemaking efforts.

An explosion of peacebuilding activities occurred in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Attention was now being paid to the increasing amount of intra-state conflicts, especially those defined by ethnic or identity divisions. The international community found itself unprepared for the intensity of violence associated with these conflicts, particularly acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing (Ryan 26). These second generation of peacebuilding activities focused on protecting human rights and promoting democracy as critical to the concept of peace, beyond just maintaining what Galtung terms as states of negative peace. The failure of early peacebuilding work in civil conflicts such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, and Angola led to the adoption by the UN of the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Ryan 27). The Responsibility to Protect declares that all states have the responsibility to protect their citizens and other people living within their borders from human rights abuses such as genocide, massacres, and ethnic cleansing (Call 2; Ryan 27). These circumstances made it clear to the UN and the rest of the international community that peacebuilding could not simply rely on peacekeeping alone. Other methods had to be implemented to create lasting peace. With the triumph of the West in the Cold War, the focus on democracy and human rights as central to peacebuilding were often conflated with the belief that a liberal, market-based economic system was also central to peaceful societies; an idea that became known as the “liberal peace” (Ryan 27).

The liberal peace theory is the primary influence for the international peacebuilding model today. It emphasizes the promotion of Western approaches to peace by powerful states or organizations, which assume the US and Europe as aspirational models of peacefulness. MacGinty defines liberal peace as “the concept, condition, and practice whereby leading states, international organizations, and international financial institutions promote their version of peace” (MacGinty 143). Much of the liberal peace is based off the notion of the democratic peace theory, which states that democracies do not go to war against other democracies (Owen 87). In this sense, peace will come if states adopt the tenants of a liberal democracy: free speech, free and fair elections, and an open market economy (Owen 89). It is seen as a top-down model of peacebuilding since it focuses on institutions first, rather than the will of the population. Notable states promoting this view of peace include the United States, United Kingdom, and France. Such approaches are led through institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (MacGinty 144). Critics of the liberal peace focus on the assumption of the perceived superiority of the Western style of governance as the basis for stable peace. This means these institutions and states champion the ideas of an open market and liberal democracy as the only means of promoting and building peace, while dismissing other non-western approaches that center on more local and /or communal forms of governance. (MacGinty 144). Other criticisms of the liberal peace theory also highlight the process of economic and political liberalization as a tumultuous process that can disrupt the peace process in countries that have recently experienced civil war. Both democracy and capitalism are inherently competitive systems, and as such, are bound to create conflict as different interest groups compete with them. A country needs strong political, economic, and legal institutions that can handle these conflicts peacefully, as well as a generally accepted set of norms restraining the use of violence to settle political disputes, of which many worn-torn countries do not have. In this sense, the promotion of capitalism and democracy can increase inequalities and create more conflict rather than foster peace (Paris 75).

As a response to the critiques of liberal peacebuilding theory, theorists have developed a less orthodox approach called emancipatory, grassroots, or local peacebuilding. Scholars of this fourth generation of peacebuilding argue that it is an evolution of liberal peacebuilding which centers its concerns on the experiences and needs of local populations. The main concepts of emancipatory peacebuilding include emancipation, empowerment, ownership, and the everyday (Roberts 2537). Emancipation focuses not only on the political emancipation that liberal peacebuilding values, but also on emancipation from systemic structures of oppression which are often the main drivers of conflict (Roberts 2583). Liberal peacebuilding discourses tend to ignore these structures of oppression because they assume social impacts of economic or political changes will have a net positive effect on society in the long-term. The fourth generation of peacebuilding emphasizes the concept of the everyday, which are the practices of a group of people as they relate to their socio-cultural institutions (Roberts 2541). Including the everyday into peacebuilding involves working with traditional social structures or authorities and customary law, particularly with rural or poorer populations. The other two concepts can be defined together in that local populations should have the power to claim ownership of their peace process and to ensure that their needs are being met (Roberts 2541). This form of peacebuilding requires international organizations to elevate community goals as paramount in program design and aims at providing a more sustainable peace through tackling structural violence and oppression (Richmond 572).

Current scholarship and other discourses on peacebuilding accentuate this change from the liberal peace to emancipatory peace. As early as 2010, the UN acknowledged the importance of national ownership of peace processes as well as the importance of building national capacities for peacebuilding (United Nations, *UN Peacebuilding: An Orientation 5-6*). Other scholarship highlights the importance of using peacebuilding outside of the military and political structures that was the main area for peacebuilding in the 1990s and early 2000s. Particularly, practitioners use peacebuilding to break down structures of gender inequality, to promote justice and human rights, and to combat inequality in education (Clough Daffern 1).

A consequence of the development of emancipatory peacebuilding as a major international peace theory has been the increasing acceptance of the role of youth in peacebuilding. In 2015 the UN Security Council released UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250), which recognized youth (18-29 years old) as crucial elements to sustainable peacebuilding and prioritized the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding processes (Poddar 554). Prior to UNSCR 2250 and other recent scholarship, the youth population in conflict situations was seen as perpetrators of violence rather than as people who face high rates of societal exclusion and victimization (Poddar 554). This resolution placed youth at the forefront of building positive peace and provided them greater capacity to participate in local peacebuilding, gain an education, and heal from the traumas they may have experienced during the conflict (Poddar 558).

## Non-Governmental Organizations in Peacebuilding

With the rise of intrastate wars in weak states at the end of the Cold War, the role that international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played in conflicts and peacebuilding increased, as the need for a different type of humanitarian intervention was required that the UN was not capable of or prepared to deliver. The UN defines NGOs as “any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group which is organized on a local, national, or international level” (United Nations, “Civil Society” para 2). In conflict situations, international NGOs are valuable parts of peacebuilding processes as they can provide essential services that weaker state governments do not have the capacity to provide. International NGOs play three main roles in peacebuilding. First, they can better disseminate information and common practices for peacebuilding throughout local communities, not just in a governmental setting (IRRERA 99). Second, international NGOs have a greater role in mediation efforts and act as a bridge between the UN peace missions and work on the ground (IRRERA 101). Finally, they have a commitment to advocating for the interests, needs, and wants of local communities which larger-scale peacekeeping missions fail to recognize (IRRERA 102).

The growth of international NGOs working in conflict situations precipitated the rise of local NGOs working in their communities to provide support (Natsios 409). The recent increase in local NGOs working in conflict situations exemplifies the fourth generation insights around peacebuilding, and provides more local insight into the conflict which most international NGOs do not have (Natsios 410). These local NGOs tend to concentrate their efforts at the grassroots level of development and only interact with regional or provincial level governments, while international NGOs and the UN system tend to concentrate on cooperating with governments (Natsios 412). The philosophy surrounding local NGO peacebuilding work is a commitment to “empowering people at the lowest level of social organization – the family and the village – to work collectively towards the sort of social and economic services that would typically be run by municipal government” (Natsios 413). Consequently, their focus on the village and family limits the ability of local NGOs to create change in the larger structural problems of a country that lead to conflict. This limitation can sometimes “cancel out overnight any grassroots successes their programs may have enjoyed” (Natsios 413).

The international peacebuilding system run by the UN works differently compared to these NGOs. The “big four” UN organizations that participate in humanitarian emergencies and conflicts are the World Food Program, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (Natsios 410). The way these organizations work is through a centralized and bureaucratic approach working with the host government to provide most public services to citizens in an emergency situation (Natsios 413-414). In some cases, UNICEF tends to work in closer communication with grassroots NGOs and local governments because its mandate to focus on the needs of women and children means it must work at the community level as well (Natsios 411). Since international NGOs work closely with international organizations such as the UN, they often work under the umbrella of liberal peacebuilding, by providing basic services and promoting the strengthening of political institutions. Local NGOs, on the other hand, adopt the principles of emancipatory peacebuilding through their work in local community contexts. While there are attempts to increase partnerships between INGOs and local NGOs, INGOs tend to have more resources and more access to international donors which opens the possibility for conflicts of interests between donor demands and the wishes of local populations.

## The Role of Education in Peacebuilding

Little attention has been given to researching the role of education in peacebuilding up until recent decades. Typically, education programming in conflict situations is lumped together with other post-conflict peace and development programs. Education has been an internationally recognized human right since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, but much of the developing world still lacks the capacity to provide it on an equal basis. Quality education allows children to develop critical thinking and socioemotional skills which improves their ability to contribute to society (IIASA 2). In the international development sector, quality education provides a backbone for the country to grow economically and reduces income inequality, increases political knowledge, promotes political participation, and increases understanding of environmental issues (IIASA 1). Education is therefore also essential in creating stability in post-conflict situations, particularly in situations where social identity divisions were part of the conflict.

At the start of this century, more focus has been placed on studying the effects of education in conflict contexts and the extent to which education is a factor that can help or harm peace efforts. Bush and Saltarelli explore the negative and positive effects of education in conflict-ridden societies. On the negative side, the authors argue education can contribute to conflict through its uneven distribution, use as a weapon of cultural repression, and possible manipulation of history. Education can also encourage hate for people of other ethnicities and ensure inequality and stereotypes through segregation. Finally, textbooks used in certain education systems can manipulate information to favor one group over another (Bush et al. 9-16; Kagawa 490). When education systems take on these negative aspects, children learn to hate others in their communities and the histories and cultures of those who are not in the preferred in-group are degraded. Thus, the potential for an outbreak of conflict along the lines on in-groups and out-groups is much greater. However, when education systems are designed to address these structural inequalities and seeks to bridge group differences, it creates far more positive outcomes. Some of those outcomes include preventing ethnic discrimination against children and their families, encouraging a human rights approach which focuses on peace and tolerance, and protecting children from physical and mental violence (Kagawa 495).

During the Cold War, the concept of peace education grew through the development of curriculum and pedagogies based on the promotion of peace and conflict resolution in schools and universities (Bermeo 460). Peace education programs sought to challenge Cold War paradigms about the necessity of violence to resolve problems, and how to proactively handle differences among groups in conflict. Peace educators were inspired by actions to end the nuclear arms race, the US Civil Rights Movement, and the anti-war movement against US involvement in Vietnam. Peace education as a concept includes many aspects of emancipatory peacebuilding, and it focuses on dismantling societal structures that promote violence and how to rebuild them through a lens of peace. A broad definition of peace education is a set of practices that aim to reconstruct the values, beliefs, and emotions of conflicting parties into ones which are more willing to resolve conflict peacefully and create conditions for further peace (Samura 27; Bar-Tal and Rosen 559). These practices are effective in both the formal education sector (schools) and the informal sector (the greater community) (Bermeo 462).

The two main elements of peace education programming are educating about peace and educating for peace. Educating about peace refers to students learning about violence and peace, while educating for peace refers to the skills and techniques students learn to live more peacefully (Bermeo 462). The combination of these elements provides students with the knowledge of how violence and war affects their society and the skills to resolve conflicts and promote peace (Bermeo 462). The broad scope of peace education allows for multiple approaches to exist in the development and implementation of peace education programs. Examples of these approaches include: conflict resolution trainings, human rights education, intergroup contact and integration, transitional justice, promoting safe school environments, and social-emotional learning (Bermeo 463). These approaches are applicable in both the community level and the national level (Bermeo 464).

Peace education is not without its challenges. As with liberal peacebuilding, peace education has at times assumed Western norms as the foundation for its work. Criticism of peace education has led to the formation of critical peace education; an approach that maintains the standard that peace education does not become too universalist or ignorant of non-Western voices (Bermeo 463). Critical peace education chooses to incorporate more elements of emancipatory peacebuilding by concentrating on the local contexts of conflicts and how local actors can participate in peace education (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos 5). This approach also promotes the use of conflict analyses to understand the structural elements to a conflict (Bajaj and Hantzopoulos 5).

Another criticism of peace education, which is shared with many development and peacebuilding programs, is the limited funding for such programs. When countries emerge from a conflict, there is not much funding available for government-led implementation of peace education programs because they are more focused on physical reconstruction and rehabilitation (Samura 30). Again, this shows the preference for top-down, institutional priorities. As such, those interested in supporting educational efforts after conflict are often lest to seek external funding and to rely on support from international and local NGOs. One of the most successful ways to introduce peace education into a post-conflict situation is through community-based approaches rather than solely governmental approaches (Samura 32). Such approaches cause a shift from an individualist perspective concerned with personal gain to a community-focused perspective where people are more inclined to deal with problems peacefully (Samura 33). In this sense, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are uniquely capable at providing these community-based programs using international peacebuilding funding and other types of fundraising.

## Best Practices in Peace Education

A best practice is generally understood as a set of guidelines, that when followed, produces the best outcome. Defining a set of best practices for peacebuilding programs is tough given the wide scope of practices that can fit into peacebuilding and the different priorities of the organizations running the programs. It becomes even more difficult to find any best practices related specifically to peace education. Much of the literature on conflict intervention and peacebuilding is guided more by ethical principles, such as Mary Anderson’s concept of “do no harm”, than by a universal set of guidelines that must be followed when carrying out activities. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that a situation and the people who live there are not worse off because of a peacebuilding intervention. The United Nations, the world’s largest peacebuilding organization, provides multiple sets of guidelines for peacebuilding programming, however, nothing that is specific to peace education. The lack of guidelines on what makes for effective education in peacebuilding raises challenging questions about the extent to which peacebuilding reflects assumptions rooted in different eras of peacebuilding and importantly, the extent to which these programs are based on the needs and wishes of the community.

The aim of my research is to understand the use of best practices in peacebuilding education programs in civil war contexts. However, one of my discoveries is that there appears to be no such existing document. Therefore, to create a set of best practices in peace education programs to use for my analysis, I am combining two UN guidelines that focus on community engagement and youth peacebuilding. The “United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace” and the “Peacebuilding Fund Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding” were released in 2019 and 2020 and, when combined, highlight certain best practices in UN programming that can be used to assess peace education programs outside of the UN system as well.

The UN Community Engagement Guidelines establishes seven recommendations for peacebuilding programs that want to prioritize community engagement. The report defines community engagement in peacebuilding as a process involving local populations in direct participation with program decision-making and implementation with the goal of building local capacities to continue sustainable peacebuilding (United Nations 1). The focus on community engagement in recent years is due to a report released by the UN Secretary-General in 2018 that stated that community engagement in peacebuilding is an integral part of building sustainable peace (United Nations 4). The seven recommendations outlined in this report are as follows:

1. Understanding of the local situation through a comprehensive conflict analysis.
2. Streamlined operational coordination throughout the program.
3. “Do no harm” and conflict-sensitive safety approaches.
4. Inclusive participation of local actors that is people-centered and bottom-up.
5. Provision of capacity-building techniques for the greater community and marginalized groups.
6. Participation of local women actors.
7. Participation of youth in peace efforts (United Nations 2-3).

The Peacebuilding Fund Guidance Note for Youth and Peacebuilding aims at providing guidance on how to develop a peacebuilding program involving young people. The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the funding hub for many UN peacebuilding programs, states that “youth exclusion, real or perceived, is a critical root cause of violent conflict” and prioritizes the inclusion of youth into their program development (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 1*). In 2016, PBF started the Youth Promotion Initiative to support the statements of Security Council Resolution 2250, and has become an important part of PBF’s funding profile (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 2*). In the guidance note, PBF outlines four aspects of program development that are important for youth engagement in peacebuilding. Those four aspects are:

1. Include the participatory involvement of young people.
2. Programs should have an element of peacebuilding, not just youth empowerment.
3. Programs should focus on a specific area of engagement rather than on multiple ones, so that the program’s impact can be more effective.
4. There should be a conflict analysis that specifically assesses the role of young people in the conflict and its effects on them (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 2-8*).

To create a functional framework for analyzing other programs, both sets of guidelines are useful. Both recommend conducting a comprehensive conflict analysis, which should also include specific information on young people in the conflict. Prioritizing the participatory involvement of youth is also a recommendation by both reports. Using the insights of fourth generation peacebuilding as the overarching theoretical lens, my combined best practice framework for peace education programming is as follows:

1. Participatory involvement of young people and other local actors, particularly women.
2. Conflict analysis focused on the role of young people.
3. Focus on capacity-building for the greater community.
4. Focus on peacebuilding and teaching peace not just youth empowerment.
5. Specific area of engagement.
6. “Do no harm”

These six best practices serve as categories through which to analyze different peace education programs because they are broad enough to apply outside of the UN system, while also touching on important aspects of emancipatory peacebuilding. The first best practice, participatory involvement, is one of the most important. Young people can become a driving force for peace, however, many discredit their efforts on the basis of being young (United Nations, *UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace 22*). Therefore, in the case of peace education programs, young people need to become active participants in promoting peace and should be a part of program development and implementation. Outside of youth participation, other local actors are the main agents of change in their communities. Project development should work with other local groups to ensure full representation and a people-centered approach to ensure national ownership over the peace process (United Nations, *UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace 14*). The second best practice acknowledges that each conflict has different roots, and an in-depth conflict analysis is necessary to create an effective peace education program. This analysis should include a contextual analysis and mapping of local actors in the community that can contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The conflict analysis should also fully understand the role of young people in the conflict and how they feel about certain aspects of the conflict analysis (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 7-8*). Finally, the conflict analysis should also investigate the diverse experiences of those in the conflict area, especially marginalized groups (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding. 7*).

The third best practice highlights the need for NGOs to provide certain capacity-building services to local actors. These services include providing skills trainings, support for financial management, helping with grant applications, and other learning opportunities to support local actors’ work in peace education (United Nations, *UN Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace 18*). In terms of peace education, this means providing young local actors with the trainings and continued support to act as peace promoters in their communities. To ensure local participation in peace education, the organization running the program needs to be available to provide further guidance and support. This will build the capacity of the whole community to continue working for peace rather than falling back into conflict. The fourth best practice states that peace education programs must be based on a peacebuilding rationale and must have expected outcomes to build peace (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 3*). While peace education programs can fit under the umbrella of youth empowerment programs, not all youth empowerment programs are peace education programs. There must be a specific focus on empowering young people to be actors for peace, not just a focus on capacity building for young people (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 3*).

The fifth best practice focuses on the efficiency of peace education programs given the often-limited amount of funding these types of programs receive. Peace education programs should focus on a select few areas of intervention so that they can have a greater impact on peacebuilding efforts (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 4*). Peace education can cover a wide variety of community interventions, from the formal education sector to the informal and using the different groups of local actors involved in civil conflicts. A program that tries to cover this vast range of possibilities will provide lower quality services and support to all parts of the program. Finally, the sixth best practice is to “do no harm”. The “do no harm” policy, as discussed above, is a UN staple for peacebuilding and requires approaches to limit the negative effects an intervention can have. This means that approaches should be conflict-sensitive and involve the consultation of affected groups on the actions the program will take (United Nations, *PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding 12*). In terms of peace education programs, this means that program developers should consider the psycho-social impacts of conflict on children and their families. Any program action to teach peace in a community should not make the impact of the conflict worse on the young people and other community members involved.

# **Methodology**

This research project took a case study approach by looking at six peace education programs run in the three West African countries of Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. I chose to investigate peace education in the region of West Africa because of the reoccurrence of violence and instability in the region, and the use of peace education programs in each of these contexts as part of the post-conflict peacebuilding process. The cycles of conflict in this region brings to question how effective past peacebuilding processes in the region have been in establishing long-term peace and stability. West Africa also has a high population of alienated youth who contribute to violence, which provides peace education programs with an excellent arena to build a culture of peace within youth populations and limit their use of violence within their communities. With the growing importance of young people in international peacebuilding discourses and the continued development of peace education as a field, peace education programs can provide sustainable peace to the region.

I chose to focus on Côte d’Ivoire, Libera, and Sierra Leone because they experienced civil wars that ended within the past twenty years, allowing ample time for the development, implementation, and assessment of peace education programs in the region.[[1]](#footnote-1) The decade-long civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia defined the instability facing West Africa in the 1990s and early 2000s, making them ideal case studies for this project due to the large amount of attention received from peacebuilding organizations. These conflicts were extremely violent, characterized by many human rights violations committed against civilians and the high numbers of child soldiers involved. Understanding the impact peace education programs have on a group of youth who grew up as both victims and perpetrators of violence is important for the development of best practices for this conflict situation. The civil war in Côte d’Ivoire is not as closely related to those in Liberia or Sierra Leone because it occurred in the decade after the peace agreements were signed and the war was less interconnected with other countries in the region. However, it makes a strong case for this project because the conflict was rooted in the inequalities of the education system between the northern and southern parts of the country. Violence in schools, from both teachers and students, is a common occurrence in Côte d’Ivoire and I wanted to investigate how peace education programs can affect such inherent violence. Internationally, these three countries have been touted as post-conflict peacebuilding successes in the region. Therefore, they are more likely to showcase strong examples of best practices for peace education in post-civil war contexts and in the West African context.

I chose to examine four peace education programs for this research project: UNICEF’s Learning for Peace program, Graines de Paix’s apprendre en paix, éduquer sans violence (APEV), Camp for Peace’s active non-violence and peace education program, and Peaceful Schools International’s member school program. These fit the criteria of a peace education program because they explicitly stated their goal of peace education, and the programs involved a form of training based on the principle of teaching peace. The programs run by NGOs, Graines de Paix, Camp for Peace, and Peaceful Schools International, work in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. I also wanted to find three NGOs that worked in each country so that there is an even analysis throughout the whole project. The Learning for Peace program had slightly different selection criteria because it encompasses a far larger spectrum than the other programs. This program is run by the United Nations International Children Fund (UNICEF), which runs programs in all three countries. While the Learning for Peace program is not run by an NGO, its work from 2012 to 2016 earned acclaim in solidifying certain best practices in peace education. In this sense, it stands as an interesting reference point for the efforts of the other NGOs working in peace education and that is why I chose to include it in this project. In total, I analyzed six peace education programs, two for each country case.

The data collected for this project consisted primarily of secondary sources in the form of reports, video testimonies, and other supplemental web sources published by the NGOs, United Nations, or programs I chose to investigate. I also conducted an interview with a representative from Peaceful Schools International and used those responses to provide data on that program. The Learning for Peace program sources for each country were published by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), which is a global network that facilitates cooperation among peacebuilding organizations in global emergency education initiatives. As a part of INEE’s extensive collection of resources surrounding peace education, the Learning for Peace resources included final assessment reports for the program overall and for each program run in each country. The information for Graines de Paix, Camp for Peace Liberia, and Peaceful Schools International came from information and assessment reports published on their websites and one interview.

The Learning for Peace reports I used were either officially published by UNICEF or program assessments conducted by an outside organization called InsightShare. This validates the information because outside evaluation provides more unbiased data on the outcomes of the Learning for Peace programs. Graines de Paix is an internationally recognized NGO with partnerships with government ministries and other UN-sponsored institutions. The organization also used outside assessment of their APEV program, and the other resources I used were official activity reports published by Graines de Paix. Camp For Peace Liberia is an officially recognized non-profit and I used its annual activity reports as sources of data to ensure the highest possible standard of transparency in its program reporting. Finally, my data collected for Peaceful Schools International was through an interview with a high-ranking representative from the organization which provided me with reliable insight from the source.

I analyzed these sources for best practices through a framework I created based off certain best practices in peacebuilding established by the United Nations and described previously in the literature review. Two reports, the UN Community Engagement Guidelines and the PBF Guidance Note on Youth and Peacebuilding, outlined best practices for greater community engagement and youth participation in peacebuilding programs. I used these two guidelines because the two main priorities of peace education are to teach peacebuilding techniques to the youth population so that they can promote peace throughout their communities. The six best practices I created from these two guidelines, as stated above, are:

1. Participatory involvement of young people and other local actors, particularly women.
2. Conflict analysis focused on the role of young people.
3. Focus on capacity-building for the greater community.
4. Focus on peacebuilding and teaching peace not just youth empowerment.
5. Specific area of engagement.
6. “Do no harm”

Using this framework, I examined the development and implementation of each of the six chosen programs in order to determine which ones implemented which best practices. Then, I used the program assessments to evaluate the impact each applicable best practice had on program outcomes. The first part of the analysis allowed me to see how NGOs interpret the standards of peacebuilding into their peace education programs, while the second part provided information on how effective internationally set best practices are in local conflict contexts in West Africa.

Due to the nature of the data collection, there are a few limitations to this study. The main limitation is that because the data consists of secondary sources, the amount of information available for my analysis differs from source to source. Relying on what other authors deem important means that some information on aspects of program development, implementation, and assessment that I am investigating may be weak or missing. This is particularly true for resources from the smaller NGOs because they have a more limited ability to both conduct evaluations of their programs and release in-depth reports on their activities.

# **Results**

## *Liberia*

Liberia experienced two civil wars in quick succession. The first occurred from 1989-1997, and the second from 1999-2003. The instability that led to the first war was created by decades of continued underdevelopment as well as a military coup in 1980 that failed to deliver on its promises for democratic transformation. Samuel Doe led the military regime, and later the civilian presidency, but committed multiple human rights abuses, particularly limiting freedom of speech. On the other side of the conflict was the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor. Multiple warlordist militias also joined into the fighting, committing atrocious war crimes. In total, these militias, including the NPFL, recruited about 15,000 child soldiers. By the end of the war about 250,000 civilians had been killed and millions more displaced either internally or to neighboring countries (Kieh 210). The second civil war occurred due to the failure to complete a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) program. Many militia groups did not give up their weapons, and that combined with the poor performance of the new Charles Taylor regime created enough dissatisfaction across Liberia to encourage former fighters to create new militias against the Taylor regime. Again, these militias used approximately 11,000 child soldiers through the war and caused the deaths of a further 50,000 civilians and more displacement (Kieh 209-213).

Programs

The peace education programs working in Liberia are the National Youth Service and Junior National Volunteer Programs run by Learning for Peace, and the Active Non-Violence and Peace Education Program run by Camp for Peace Liberia. The development of the Learning for Peace initiatives started with a conflict analysis that identified specific conflict drivers that could be tackled through peace education programming. The conflict analysis reached 1,006 people across the country, including 384 children and involvement of multiple groups of marginalized stakeholders such as out-of-school children, women, people with disabilities, traditional leaders, and ex-combatants (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace* 56). The conflict analysis identified four key drivers of the conflict: education that does not lead to employment which leaves youth dissatisfied and isolated, multiple inter-ethnic conflicts, unequal access to education and jobs, and a misuse of governmental power at the central and local levels (UNICEF *Lessons Learned for Peace* 56). The two initiatives that originated from the conflict analysis were the National Youth Service Program (NYSP) and the Junior National Volunteer Program (JNP).

The National Youth Service Program encourages the participation of young Liberians in healing the nation after Liberia’s 14-year civil war. These volunteers must be under the age of 35 and have a university education. They are then selected and trained to provide support in either education, healthcare, agriculture, or youth development (Griggers). In addition, the program trains National Volunteers in conflict resolution and peacebuilding promotion at the community level (Griggers). Then, NYSP volunteers deploy for one year in either youth support for sexual and reproductive health, at-risk youth support in agriculture, or as teachers’ assistants (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace 36*). After their service, the expected program outcome is that volunteers have more career opportunities and the work volunteers have done in their communities has promoted the use of peaceful conflict resolution techniques.

The Junior National Volunteer Program focuses on training younger youth who have received a high school education on peacebuilding activities and conflict resolution skills for use in their communities. (Griggers). These volunteers work with community groups to create alternative dispute resolution (ADR) practices for resolving civil conflicts within their communities (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace 38*). One program facilitator described their duties in the community as “resolving conflicts, land disputes associated with boundaries, [or] associated with natural resource[s]” and the promotion of “relationships between those divided parties” (*PBEA JUNIOR NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 0:52 - 1:13*). The program goals for the JNV are like the YNSP in that the trainings volunteers receive builds skills necessary for the job market while also promoting peace in the volunteers’ communities.

By 2016, the YNSP had placed over 259 National Volunteers in support positions in schools and youth centers across the country (*PBEA NATIONAL YOUTH VOLUNTEERS 0:10*). A video produced by UNICEF Liberia highlights stories and testimonies from students, National Volunteers, and community members on how the program has affected them. These volunteers provide much needed educational support to schools and act as mentors to help students resolve minor conflicts (1:05 – 1:15). Multiple people in the video discussed the effect of having mentors around the same age as the students. One volunteer named Nyenati said “most of [the students] are getting studious and taking their lessons serious because when they see us in the classroom, young men like themselves they feel moved” (1:47 – 1:55). Another volunteer named Leona said, “my being here is a great help to the young people first because seeing a young woman coming from Monrovia to Maryland, they feel very happy and they feel encouraged” (2:34 – 2:46). One student was quoted in stating that because of the National Volunteers, he is inspired to continue his education beyond high school and get a master’s degree (1:58 – 2:11). While yet another student said that because of the National Volunteers, she has been able to understand and solve physics problems, something she could not do the year before (2:17 – 2:31). Additionally, the peacebuilding training the volunteers received have helped improve social cohesion. One volunteer, Mardea, used dramas and role plays with her students to understand and heal some of the relationships in the community (Griggers). In assessment of her intervention she said “I know that we were able to change some negative attitudes because we saw people getting along who hadn’t been able to before” (Griggers).

In terms of community impact, the National Volunteers have helped solve the critical problem of a lack of teachers in many counties across the countries. A principal of one school said that before the volunteers came in, there were many challenges regarding the lack of teachers in the school (1:34 – 1:38). However, with the volunteers “some of the gaps have been filled” and the teaching challenges are not as intense as they were previously (3:13 – 3:20). Over the course of a year, 52 schools where National Volunteers worked reported an increase in the quality of teaching, number of enrolled students, and the percentage of teachers holding a university education (Griggers). Schools also reported having the capability to teach math and science or add extra grade levels with the help of the National Volunteers (Griggers).

The JNV program reveals even greater success at the community peacebuilding level. By 2016, the program had trained about 90 volunteers to work in 100 communities in Liberia (*PBEA JUNIOR NATIONAL VOLUNTEERS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 0:34*). UNICEF Liberia also produced a video about the impacts of the JNV program. In this video, a woman named Kamah described a conflict she had with another woman named Alice, where Alice had hit Kamah’s child and then both women started fighting each other (1:33 – 1:43). A couple JNVs broke up the fight and brought them to the elders, who helped them resolve the conflict and become friends again (1:43 – 2:07). Another JNV said that “cases are not going to court like before, and most of our cases [have] been resolved in this community by the JNVs” (2:33 – 2:37). Yet another man from the community described how his community and another town were having conflicts, and when the JNVs found out, they discovered the core problem and helped both communities mend their relationships with the other (3:02 – 3:28). Now, the two communities are working on a cleanup project together rather than separately (3:28 – 3:45).

The Active Non-Violence and Peace Education Program run by Camp for Peace Liberia (CFP) is another informal peace education program. This program offers a series of training workshops that focus on using dialogue processes to find alternative solutions to violence (Camp for Peace, *Youth Rehabilitation 3*). The program describes the workshops as “geared towards building trust, re-establishing, and consolidating relationships between youth groups who have been in conflict by bringing them together through dialogue on areas of common interest” (3). These trainings also encourage youth to act as peer mediators in their greater community and they can join a larger Peer Mediation Committee to further promote peaceful conflict resolution skills (*CFP Liberia 2016 Annual Report 7*).

Camp for Peace Liberia is an NGO created by a group of young people in 2005 with the mission of using community-based education practices to build sustainable peace and development in Liberia (Camp for Peace, *About Us*). An important aspect of the CFP mission is “to contribute to the empowerment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of former child soldiers, orphans, abductees, child mothers, and vulnerable women heading households” (Camp for Peace, *About Us*). The organization is run by a team comprised of 75% young people and prioritizes giving equal opportunities to women and people with disabilities (Camp for Peace, *About Us*).

Since 2012, CFP’s peace education workshops have reached over 5,000 youths and empowered them to use their conflict resolution skills in their own community (Camp for Peace, *Youth Rehabilitation 3*). After a workshop, one group of participants organized a group called “We can do it ourselves” and now they facilitate their own trainings on peer mediation and other methods of non-violence in their community (3). In 2016, the program conducted 12 workshops discussing a range of topics such as “community-based psycho-social support, trauma awareness, conflict resolution, methods of third party interventions, peace building, loss and grief, handling emotions, and stress management” (*CFP Liberia 2016 Annual Report 7*). Participants were invited to join Peer Mediation Committees, which undertake outreach campaigns to spread information about fostering peace in their communities (7). Some of these outreach activities include drama groups to reenact conflict resolution practices and radio talk shows to discuss ethnic discrimination among community members (8). In total, the workshops reached 489 people in 2016, 228 of which were females and 261 were males (8).

Table 1: Liberia Best Practices Framework

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Participatory Involvement | Conflict Analysis | Capacity Building | Peacebuilding | Specific | “Do No Harm” |
| Learning for Peace | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Camp for Peace | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |

As shown in Table 1, The NYSP and JNV initiatives from Learning for Peace meet each standard set for the best practices framework. To start, the conflict analysis conducted before the initiatives were created discovered specific structural problems that contribute to conflict in the country, therefore making the programs relevant to the conflict situation. It also focused on hearing the stories of young people and other marginalized groups, ensuring that the information is specific to the people these programs want to target the most. The participatory involvement aspect of these programs is strong. Both the NYSP and JNV programs used the full spectrum of the local youth population to promote peace in communities by training educated youth on conflict resolution techniques and sending them to communities to spread their knowledge and skills to younger children. As seen in the interview answers, prioritizing the participation of young women in these programs also led to improved educational participation of younger girls in school as well.

In terms of capacity-building, the programs improved the skills of older youth by providing them with work experience and trainings, helped improve school capacities to provide adequate education to students, and improved the capacity of the local communities to resolve conflicts peacefully. Both initiatives started with a goal to build sustainable peace in communities through the intervention of trained volunteers and was successful in many instances. While the conflict analysis highlighted four different conflict drivers, the programs that came out of it stayed focused on their goal of lessening the societal alienation that youth face, which made its impact far stronger. Finally, the program succeeded in doing no harm by ensuring that marginalized voices were considered during the conflict analysis and volunteers took initiatives to help heal relationships in their communities.

The Active Non-Violence and Peace Education Program run by Camp for Peace Liberia also met the requirements for all the best practices, except for the conflict analysis. This may be for a few reasons. The first, is that they did not publish the conflict analysis they conducted, and this is a limitation of the data I collected. The second, and more probable reason, is because CFP is a locally run NGO employing mostly young professionals and they already have a strong understanding of the conflict dynamics because they lived it. The program meets the standards for participatory involvement of youth because it provides them with a space to reconcile relationships with others and with the trainings and opportunities to be peer mediators in their communities. This is especially evident from the example of a group of participants forming their own peer mediation group. The program builds young people’s capacities as peer mediators during and after the initial workshops. By inviting participants to join peer mediation committees and do outreach for conflict resolution further spreads the impact the program has into other communities and to other people who the original workshops may have missed. The program specifically focuses on giving young people the skills to be peer mediators in the informal setting, meeting the standards for a focus on peacebuilding and on a specific area of involvement. Finally, the program succeeds in doing no harm because the workshops also discuss topics such as dealing with trauma, stress, and handling emotions such as grief and loss. Including these topics shows that program developers understood the possible psychological impacts that talking about conflict and violence in their society could have on young people and worked to remedy that.

## *Sierra Leone*

The Sierra Leonean civil war lasted from 1991-2002 and occurred in response to the continued democratic backsliding of the government led by General Joseph Momoh. Authoritarian rule in the country started with Momoh’s predecessor Siaka P. Stevens whose corrupt regime consolidated its political power and created mass poverty throughout the country (Kieh 215). The government’s opposition, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), started as a pro-democracy force but quickly turned into a militia focused on capturing the riches of Sierra Leone’s diamond mines. With support from the NPFL in Liberia, the RUF ran a brutally violent campaign using the amputation of civilians’ limbs as a tactic of electoral intimidation (Kieh 215). As in Liberia, the RUF recruited about 5,400 child soldiers, most of them by force. In total, the war cost 50,000 lives and displaced millions more (Kieh 215).

Programs

The programs operating in Sierra Leone are the Child Friendly Schools initiative run by Learning for Peace and the member school program run by Peaceful Schools International. As in the last case, the Learning for Peace program started with a conflict analysis that consulted youth in and out-of-school, women’s groups, local elders, government representatives at both the local and federal level, and NGOs and civil society organizations (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace 62*). The five conflict drivers that Learning for Peace used to develop their intervention were the inequalities in education services and the poor quality of the education sector, the failure of the government, tribal and regional sectarianism, and the alienation of adolescents (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace 62*). The peace education program created from the conflict analysis aimed to integrate the practices of UNICEF’s Child Friendly Schools (CFS) initiative with those of peace education to improve both conflict dynamics in communities and educational outcomes for students (UNICEF, *Case Study: Child Friendly Schools 6*).

The Child Friendly Schools initiative is a holistic approach to education which creates programming that focuses on creating intersectoral approaches for addressing issues in education (Wright 20). The CFS approach is primarily system-wide and emphasizes working with government institutions to create education sector models that include CFS standards, rather than working with local communities. When implemented properly, CFS can improve the educational prospects of far more children across the country than smaller sized interventions can achieve (22). A defining feature of the CFS initiative is that there is no set of characteristics required for a school system to be child friendly. Instead, CFS focuses on “applying certain principles to a particular setting and context” (32). Some key principles listed by the CFS Manual include inclusiveness, democratic participation, a child-centered approach, and rights-based education (41-44).

The CFS initiative in Sierra Leone worked with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology to create seven standards that would address the needs of children in schools, while also providing support for conflict resolution in communities and schools (UNICEF, *Case Study: Child Friendly Schools 6*). Those seven standards are:

1. Effective leadership and management
2. Rights-based and inclusive of all children
3. Gender-sensitive and girl-friendly
4. Child-centered teaching and learning
5. Healthy, hygienic, and nutritionally adequate
6. A safe and protective environment
7. Engaged with the community

(UNICEF, *Case Study: Child Friendly Schools 6*).

This led to the creation of a pilot program in 40 schools across the Pujehun and Tonkolili districts using new school materials, teaching pedagogy, and teacher trainings to implement the seven standards (*PV MSC Case Study in Sierra Leone 0:12*).

The assessment published of the CFS initiative in Sierra Leone is not comprehensive of the whole program. Instead, the assessment involves a participatory video (PV) case study on a conflict that occurred between a group of villages in the Pujehun district that share a school participating in the CFS program. This conflict developed over the rights to use the river Waanje which is the source of livelihood for four villages: Sawula, Baoma, Longo, and Kpetema (*PV MSC Case Study in Sierra Leone 4*). The four communities share a school and health center and have also established customary agreements over the sustainable management of their natural resources. One day, a man from Longo got caught fishing in an area that was reserved for only women to fish in, and this created a conflict between Longo and Sawula that turned violent as certain people tried to burn down the school and other villages, including the principal of the school (4). A year later, implementers of the CFS initiative in the area heard about the conflict from the children attending school and learned that it was harming the children’s access to education. This prompted a conflict mediation between the villagers, which was interrupted by a group of school children who called for peace from the adults. This interruption by the students caused the adults to find a resolution to the conflict (5).

To assess the effects of the conflict on education, the assessment team created six groups of stakeholders in the conflict to share in story circles and answer the question: “What has been the most significant change, in relation to peace of conflict, that you have experienced or observed in the last two years?” (7). In total, the assessment collected 87 stories from the points of view of children, girls and boys, as well as adults, both old and young (7).

According to the stories told, the conflict between the villages caused teachers and children to stop coming to school for fear of violence against them (18) The actions of the former headmaster, who tried to burn the school down and stole all the school’s educational materials, was also an influential educational blockage (18). However, the children did say that because of their CFS trainings on peace and conflict resolution they felt more empowered to speak up about the situation. One student said, “we mobilized ourselves demanding peace, we were able to meet with leaders and other community stakeholders to share our side of the conflict and explain how it was affecting us as children” (19). Another child shared “if I now see people fighting, I will talk between them and ask them to sit and make peace and work together” (19). 13 children reported that they feel they can play a role in conflict resolution, attendance levels have risen, and CFS replaced the school materials that were stolen during the conflict (19).

The other peace education program in Sierra Leone I chose for this study is the Peaceful Schools International (PSI) member school program. PSI is an NGO based in Canada that promotes peace in schools across the world through the provision of support and various learning materials to its member schools that have declared their mission to build a culture of peace (Peaceful Schools International). The goals of PSI are to ensure that peace education is integrated into the core curriculum in all PSI member schools, to provide support for a culture of non-violence in schools, to provide peace education resources that teachers in member schools can use, and promote the impact the PSI has on its member schools (Peaceful Schools International). PSI believes that the road to a peaceful school is unique, and each school has the freedom to use the PSI materials and support in the way that will best support their school. Currently, PSI has partnered with eight schools in Sierra Leone, six of them are primary schools, and two of them are high schools. I conducted an interview with a representative from the organization to better understand the goals, implementation, and results of the PSI program which is where I will be getting most of my information.

Over the years, the PSI member school network has taken a backseat so the organization can focus on running a peace education program in Belfast, Northern Ireland. However, PSI has recently made a commitment to providing greater support to their network of schools. According to the PSI representative, the member network consists of monthly activities that get students thinking about certain tenants of peace education. These activities could be “about peace, or about conflict resolution, or friendship, or active listening” (PSI Representative). The goal of these activities is to give teachers something they can read in their email and implement the next day. It should be easy and accessible so that students across the world can do it (PSI Representative). In the interview, the representative stressed that there is at least one activity in each monthly email that requires no additional resources. These usually include a skit or an activity to have students develop a skit. This type of activity engages the students into doing the specific action PSI wants them to learn and do in their normal lives (PSI Representative). An example the representative gave was an activity about apologizing which involved cue cards with ways to apologize to someone and had the students practice apologizing and then asking for forgiveness. Another important aspect of these materials and activities is that they can be changed to fit the local context of a school, so they are more meaningful to the students participating. When asked about how these partnerships are made, the representative said the main way these partnerships are made is by “putting the right people in the right places” (**Citation**). They pride themselves on their network of people who build relationships and visit schools to make connections. PSI is primarily a grassroots organization, and they rely on the work of volunteers across the world to build their network (PSI Representative).

Assessment of this program in practice is limited due to various reasons. First, since PSI is a smaller NGO than the others I have included in this study, there is less funding available to create the network of schools the representative would like to create (PSI Representative). Another reason why assessment is tough is because there is no real communication with the PSI network schools, so it is difficult to gauge the effect of PSI resources in schools. However, my interview did yield some interesting impacts that the PSI representative has heard from teachers throughout the network.

The main impact PSI sees from its work has been that they are an international friend who is there to listen and support their needs. Teachers have told the representative that “it is important for kids to know that other people in the world exist” (PSI Representative). The PSI program also shows kids that they have a friend outside of their classroom and greater community which helps teachers deliver messages about peace and non-violence they say they cannot deliver on their own. Teachers often talk about how they will write down the lessons they did and continue them in later weeks which has started setting the foundation for peace education programming within the schools itself (PSI Representative).

Table 2: Sierra Leone Best Practices Framework

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Participatory Involvement | Conflict Analysis | Capacity Building | Peacebuilding | Specific | “Do No Harm” |
| Learning for Peace | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | N/A |
| Peaceful Schools International | N | N | Y | Y | Y/N | N/A |

Table 2 shows that neither program met the standards for all six best practices in this framework. Learning for Peace started with a conflict analysis that included consultations with young people, women, and other local leaders. This ensured that the program that was developed would center on issues affecting these groups, leading to more local ownership of the peace process. The CFS program displayed the improved participatory involvement of youth in the case study assessment. The young students of the villages in conflict used their own initiative to ask for help in resolving the conflict and became an integral part of the resolution process by telling their parents they wanted peace. This example of youth involvement in the peace process shows the positive impact of the CFS peace education pedagogy on inspiring young people to work for peace. The capacity building aspect of this program is strong in that it supplies schools with enough school materials and trained teachers to improve educational outcomes. Students also grew in their confidence and ability to petition for peace, further improving communities’ capabilities to resolve conflicts peacefully.

While the original CFS guidelines do not pay particular attention to including elements of peace education, the goal of this program was to test how effective CFS can be when combined with peacebuilding. In this sense, the program succeeded in meeting the requirements of a peace education program and the peacebuilding part of the analysis framework. On the other hand, this program did not meet the specificity guidelines of peace education programming. The scope of this program in Sierra Leone was very large and this limited its level of effectiveness. For example, the seven standards the program tried to meet differed greatly. Implementing the program goals of providing a safe environment, while also aiming to improve nutrition and hygiene, and then teaching peace education in 40 different schools led to less effectiveness overall. The program assessment showed this through the example of a program school that was the main battleground of a village conflict for over a year before the program implementors found out about it. Finally, there is not enough information available for me to find a conclusion about whether the program met the standard of “do no harm”. On the one hand, the conflict analysis did ensure that marginalized voices were consulted, but using the one case study published does not show enough evidence that the program succeeded or failed in doing no harm overall.

Peaceful Schools International’s member school program also did not meet all the guidelines of the peace education framework. Due to the decentralized nature of the program and its limited funding, no conflict analysis occurred. Additionally, the program does not involve any elements of participatory involvement of youth in peace processes. The monthly materials are important peace education principles for children to learn, but the program does not keep track of how the resources are used by teachers or how students use the skills they learn. These materials do participate in capacity building by providing teachers with new resources to teach important skills they may not be trained to teach previously. The resources also build students’ social-emotional skills. The program’s focus on peacebuilding is evident through the organization’s requirement that member schools make a commitment to building a culture of peace in their schools. In terms of the specificity standard, the program does meet the standards, but still displays some inefficiencies in the program design. The area of engagement for this program is specifically in providing teaching resources based on peace education principles, however, the scope of the program is too vast for it to truly be effective. Outside of the eight schools in Sierra Leone that are part of the program, the program has hundreds of other partnerships in many different countries. This network does not allow for PSI to develop strong relationships with the schools, weakening the impact of their work. Finally, as in the Learning for Peace program, PSI does not have enough assessment information available to determine if the program succeeds in doing no harm to the populations it works with. This is also because PSI is a very small NGO with limited funding, and it is unable to manage such a task.

*Côte d’Ivoire*

The civil wars in Côte d’Ivoire occurred after those of its neighbors Liberia and Sierra Leone. The first war started in 2002 and ended in 2007. The second was short lived and lasted less than a year in 2011. The conflict started due to the poor economic performance of the country combined with the increasing politicization of a national Ivoirian identity (Sany 4). Civil war broke out when the discrimination against the predominantly Muslim north by government-run south became too divisive. The education sector in the country soon became a battleground of the conflict as schools in the north were shut down. By the end of the civil war, there was a large disparity in education between the North and South as most schools in the North were being run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Sany 6). This caused about 700,000 children, primarily living in the northern parts of the country to stop attending school, and many have joined gangs or other violent youth groups (Sany 6). In total, the wars caused the deaths of about 13,000 civilians and displaced close to a million more people (Kieh 218-220 ; Sany 5).

Programs

The final two programs that work in Côte d’Ivoire are the Peace Messenger Club and Peace Guardian initiatives run by Learning for Peace, and the Apprendre en Paix, Éduquer sans Violence (APEV) program run by Graines de Paix. As usual, Learning for Peace started its program development with a conflict analysis that involved interviews, surveys, and workshops with 1,500 participants from different stakeholder groups including students, teachers, community leaders, and other local parties (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace 50*). Using the results of the conflict analysis, program developers concentrated on tackling four key conflict drivers: the weakened education system which allows for much political abuse, ethnic and political divisions which have harmed community and family structures, the mass inequality of education between different regions, and that schools are seen as battlegrounds for the conflict (UNICEF, *Lessons Learned for Peace* 50).

Since education was seen as a battleground during the civil war and ensuing conflicts, violence in schools was an everyday occurrence. Gangs ruled most schools through tactics of bullying, intimidation, and vandalism that not even school administration and educators were safe from (InsightShare 4). Peace Messenger Clubs were created by Learning for Peace to combat such violence in schools and rebuild a new culture of peace in the education system. These clubs are based in schools and teach peaceful conflict resolution skills to students and in the greater community. Students then use those skills to promote peace both in school and their communities and discourage the use of violence and gang behavior. Another, similar, initiative created alongside the Peace Messenger Clubs are called Peace Guardians. Peace guardians work outside the school system and consist of older youth either in high school or out of school. Many of the participants also used to be involved in violence in schools but now work as guardians for peace in their communities (InsightShare 3). Both initiatives aim to encourage youth participation in peace activities and change the cultures of violence in schools to cultures of peace and learning.

The assessment for the Peace Messenger Clubs and Peace Guardians included a participatory video project combined with a Most Significant Change (MSC) evaluation. MSC involves asking a question which will allow researchers to understand what participants view as the most significant change in their community regarding the conflict. The MSC question asked during this assessment was: “What has been the most significant change in your life as a result of joining the Peace Club or being a Peace Guardian over the past year?” (InsightShare 5). Participants in the evaluation were young people who had been actively involved in the program and representatives from both Peace Messenger clubs and Peace Guardian groups in the city of Daloa, Côte d’Ivoire. The evaluation included the collection of 150 stories from 200 participants, 10 story circles, and the production of 11 videos for public sharing (InsightShare 7). Overall, eight stories were used to show the most significant change these two programs had on the community and youth overall.

One young man named Ange described himself as the leader of one of the school gangs and he would disrupt classes, offend teachers, and use violence. He first attended the trainings for the Peace Messenger club but gave up when none of his peers joined him. Finally, after some thought on the ideas surrounding the peace club, he decided to go back and rejoin the effort for peace. Since then, he has learned that he prefers to advocate for peace and has recommitted to get good grades in school (InsightShare 10). Many of the stories were like Ange’s, where young men joined or led gangs and were extremely violent in school and outside of school. This led to many of them being expelled, and they joined the peace effort either through recruitment from other Peace Guardians or trainers for Peace Messenger clubs. One young man said “My change has been gradual, but now I am out in the front driving the awareness campaign and acting in dramas to communicate peace” (InsightShare 11). Another participant said, “when there is trouble in the schools, we are called in to intervene and restore order, we are no longer the ‘disruptive ones’ – we are now Peace Guardians” (InsightShare 12).

The overall change for participants in the Peace Messenger and Peace Guardian program was a positive one which increased participant self-worth and dignity, and restored order to schools where the programs were active. Many participants stated that their behavior and world view have changed drastically to be more peace oriented and willing to create positive action (InsightShare 13). In terms of learning and school attendance, 90% of Peace Messengers have seen improvement in school results, and many Peace Guardians have gone back to school or want to receive some sort of vocational training in the future (InsightShare 14).

Graines de Paix is a non-governmental organization that started in Switzerland and has been working in Côte d’Ivoire since 2012. Its mission is “to design and implement transformative education solutions that foster learning fulfillment, violence and radicalization prevention, and societal peace” (Graines de Paix, “Vision, Mission, Goals”). The organization focuses largely on the epidemic of teacher violence in schools, which affects students’ ability to focus and learn in school (Graines de Paix, *Our Programs in Côte d’Ivoire 2*). Graines de Paix programs also implement goals outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 16: Peace and Justice (Graines de Paix, “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”).

Graines de Paix’s APEV program, which translates to Learning in Peace, Educating without Violence, “is a brief educational and behavioral intervention designed for teachers to reduce the use of violence as an educational method in their classrooms” (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 5). The program was created in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in the Tonkpi region of the country, and uses multiple classroom tools and professional development trainings on the use of non-violent classroom management techniques (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 5). To be able to implement APEV on a county-wide scale, the program uses a “train the trainer” model where Graines de Paix personelle spend four days training a group of teacher counsellors on the methods and practices of the program. Those counsellors then go into the field and conduct a two day teacher training combined with two days of individual observation and feedback sessions (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 5). This method can reach many teachers and children relatively quickly. For example, if twenty counsellors are trained and each counsellor trains eighty teachers in their area, they have already reached 1,600 teachers. When the teachers go back to the classroom with the Graines de Paix resources, this could reach 80,000 children (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 5).

The program also developed a theory of change for the short term as well as the long term. In the short term, APEV has hypothesized eight “intermediate outcomes” which are as follows:

1. Increased awareness of the consequences of violence in children
2. Increased motivation to learn and use non-violent discipline
3. Increased knowledge of non-violent discipline and peace techniques
4. Increased application of non-violent discipline and peace techniques in class
5. Improved classroom dynamics
6. Decreased acceptance of violence use
7. Increase in confidence and motivation to apply techniques
8. Teachers’ use of peace techniques is positively reinforced as a result of personalized feedback sessions (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 6)

In the long term, these intermediate outcomes will develop into the long term goals of the program which include; a reduction in teacher violence against students, reduced peer violence, an improved and safer school environment, a reduction in the school dropout rate, improved educational outcomes, and an influence on the Ministry of Education policy (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 6).

In 2017, five years after the start of the APEV program, Graines de Paix partnered with a London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) research group to run an evaluation of their program. Using the APEV theory of change, LSHTM conducted surveys testing four of the eight intermediate outcomes with a sample size of 160 teachers from the Tonkpi region. The outcomes involved in the surveys were: “awareness of the consequences of violence (ToC 1), motivation to change violent behavior (ToC 2), an increase in confidence to apply peace-culture techniques (ToC 7), and decreased acceptance of violent discipline practices (ToC 6)” (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 8). The surveys were conducted in three rounds, one before the training, one at the end of the first day, and the last was four months after the training. The assessment also included nineteen interviews and three focus group discussions with teachers and counsellors (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 8).

The results of these methods showed some promise in the long-term development of APEV programming. Teacher responses to ToC 1, their awareness of the consequences of violence, showed an increase in understanding from pre-training onward, however it is not statistically significant enough a change. Understanding is graphed at a scale of 0, low understanding, to 16, high understanding. Pre-training levels were at a score of 13.9, while four months later it had increased to 14.2 (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 9). The results for ToC 2 and ToC 7 showed that there was a large increase in teacher motivation and confidence in learning non-violent techniques (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 10). Teachers also took the opportunity to advocate for more attention towards non-violence trainings for parents and community members too, which shows their growing confidence with non-violent interventions (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 10). One teacher quoted in the LSHTM report says that he has “already drawn up a charter with contributions from [his] students” and it is being used as the rules for his classroom (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 11). Overall, teachers discussed that learning the new classroom techniques involved a lot of self-restraint and control, but they believe that these techniques used will create positive outcomes in the future (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 13).

Table 3: Côte d’Ivoire Best Practices Framework

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Participatory Involvement | Conflict Analysis | Capacity Building | Peacebuilding | Specific | “Do No Harm” |
| Learning for Peace | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Graines de Paix | N | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |

Using the results shown in Table 3, the peace education programs in Côte d’Ivoire exhibit many of the best practices in peace education, particularly the Learning for Peace initiatives. The Learning for Peace conflict analysis assessed the primary conflict drivers that affect youth in the country and consulted with many different stakeholder groups. The Peace Messenger Clubs and Peace Guardians both met the standards for the participatory involvement best practice. They ensured that young people, both in schools and out of schools had the resources and training necessary to promote peaceful conflict resolution in their respective communities. Particularly important in the case of Côte d’Ivoire, the program emphasized recruiting students who were involved in perpetuating violence in schools. This helped to stop violence at the source and improved the chances of more violent youth to listen to their peers and use more peaceful methods of conflict resolution.

The program met the expectations of the capacity building best practice on multiple levels. Personally, the Peace Messengers and Peace Guardians grew in their ability to create social change and act for peace, which also led to them improving their educational outcomes and wanting to continue with their education at the next level. The actions of the program also improved schools’ ability to provide education with fewer disruptions due to the violent gangs. The program met the specificity and peacebuilding best practice requirements because its primary goal was to restore order and peace to the education system. The program’s focus on using Peace Messenger Clubs and Peace Guardians allowed for it to remain effective over a larger group of schools. Finally, the program succeeded in doing no harm because its conflict resolution training for violent youth changed their worldview to be more peaceful and decreased the levels of violence seen in schools.

The Graines de Paix program met fewer peace education best practices. To start, the organization did not report having completed a conflict analysis, however, its understanding of violence in the education sector indicates some form of understanding of the local conflict situation. Due to the nature of the APEV program being rooted in using teachers to limit the violence in schools, there is little evidence of the participatory involvement of youth. While there is evidence of students being part of the development of classroom rules, this is not enough to show that students were empowered to act as agents of peace. It is important to note that the program still included local participatory involvement through the “train the trainer” model and the use of local teachers as agents of peaceful change. The trainings provided by the APEV program act as means of building teacher’s abilities to provide a better education to their students, and the abilities of counselors to ensure that teachers are using more peaceful methods of teaching. Therefore, this program met the requirements of the capacity building guideline. From the start of the program, Graines de Paix established that this program was to build peace in schools using more peaceful teaching techniques and pedagogies that should disseminate to the students in the school and out into the communities. This met the best practices of a goal to build peace through a specific area of engagement: teachers. Lastly, the “do no harm” best practice was covered by this program because it focused on, and succeeded in, stopping the use of violence and physical punishment of students by teachers.

# **Discussion**

Table 4: All Program Best Practices Framework

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Participatory Involvement | Conflict Analysis | Capacity Building | Peacebuilding | Specific | “Do no harm” |
| Learning for Peace – *NYSP and JNV* | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Learning for Peace - *CFS* | Y | Y | Y | Y | N | N/A |
| Learning for Peace -*Peace Messenger Clubs/Peace Guardians* | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| CFP – *Active Non-Violence and Peace Education* | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| PSI – *Member schools* | N | N | Y | Y | Y/N | N/A |
| Graines de Paix - *APEV* | N | N | Y | Y | Y | Y |

Table 4 shows how all six programs fit into the best practices framework. The Learning for Peace programs fit the best into the framework with the only missing pieces being the specificity and “do no harm” practices of the CFS program. The other three programs run by NGOs vary in their ability to match the framework, but all of them succeeded in meeting the best practices for capacity building and peacebuilding. A reason for this disparity is that the Learning for Peace programs are a UNICEF-sponsored initiative, which means that these programs were created under the standards set by the UN. Those same standards also formed the basis of the best practices framework used in this research. This is why the Learning for Peace programs conducted conflict analyses, but the NGO programs did not. Local NGOs do not need to conduct in-depth conflict analyses because they already know the important aspects of the conflict from their experiences. In this sense, it may be more inclusive to amend the best practice principle of conducting a conflict analysis to having a good understanding of the conflict and its drivers through whichever means that befit the situation. However, this understanding must still be youth centered. This amendment will require different actions from different groups. International NGOs will probably want to conduct a conflict analysis due to their lack of situational context, but local NGOs do not need to waste time and money on a conflict analysis if they already have the contextual understanding of the conflict.

The most effective best practice from this framework is the participatory involvement of youth and other local actors in building peace. The four programs that ensured their programs involved youth participation reported a greater impact on the participants than the PSI or Graines de Paix programs. The National Youth Service and Junior National Volunteer programs in Liberia, and the Peace Messenger Clubs/Peace Guardians program in Côte d’Ivoire detailed personal accounts from various participants who all reported having made a positive impact on peacebuilding in their communities. In addition, the CFP nonviolence program and the Child Friendly Schools initiative both documented examples of students applying what they have learned from the programs to their communities through creating their own peer mediation groups or advocating for peace in front of their parents and village elders.

The two programs that did not meet the youth involvement best practice reported little to no instances of youth-led community peacebuilding, primarily because these two programs focused on providing peace education training and resources to teachers rather than students. This is an interesting difference to consider because providing trainings and resources to teachers is an important part of most formal peace education programs, but they limit the amount of youth participation. On the one hand, training teachers on peace and conflict resolution can limit the use of violence in schools and teachers can adjust the curriculum to their specific conflict context. This is an important aspect of local ownership in peace processes and helps to tackle structural inequalities in the formal education system by institutionalizing peace education. On the other hand, it may lengthen the development of program outcomes because teachers must integrate peace education curriculum into the rest of the curriculum they must teach. In the long term these programs will create cultures of peace in their schools, but short-term impacts may be lessened. In that regard, it is important for program developers to decide if they want their program to have a greater impact in the short-term or the long-term. Programs that want to immediately address communal violence should prioritize youth involvement through direct action, but those that aim to change the structural elements of education sectors in the long-term may need to use different local actors that are not in the youth population. To accommodate for this, the definition of the participatory involvement best practice should be loosened to strongly encourage active youth participation, but if it is not feasible for the NGO to do so then the program should still empower local actors to promote peacebuilding.

The changes made to the participatory involvement and conflict analysis best practices makes the entire framework more inclusive of smaller NGOs working in peace education. The peace education programs run by Learning for Peace had far more funding and access to resources than those run by the other NGOs. This helped them fit all the best practices in the original framework, while the smaller NGOs did not. When thinking about best practices in peace education, it is essential to make sure they are as universally applicable to both large-scale and small-scale organizations as they can be. The new best practices still require programs to think about safeguarding local involvement and the specific conflict situation, but in a way that allows smaller NGOs with more financial limits to meet them and still provide a successful program. The other four best practices in this framework are more universal and act as strong indicators of success for peace education programs no matter the organization.

These findings present an interesting relationship between the ideals of liberal and emancipatory peacebuilding. Peace education is emancipatory by nature. It targets structural violence and insecurity through a sector of the population that is often ignored by the political and economic peacebuilding policies liberal peacebuilding practitioners prioritize. In this regard, peace education programs challenge the status quo in international peacebuilding circles by providing alternate routes to achieving peace that are often more sustainable than liberal peacebuilding policies. This is because peace education changes the mindsets of individual people away from violence and towards a collectivist and human rights-based ideology. Liberal peacebuilding has failed many times in building peace through solely political and economic reforms because the individual gets forgotten. Any large scale political or economic change will not build peace in a country that has experienced civil war as long as a culture of violence continues to exist. With an entrenched culture of violence, citizens will use violence when they are confronted with the reality that post-conflict peacebuilding is a long and hard process. Implementing more people-centered approaches, such as peace education, into the liberal peacebuilding structure will build the culture of peace necessary for the sustainable political or economic change liberal peacebuilding wants to create.

Relying on peacebuilding through solely grassroots level initiatives is not an effective or sustainable peacebuilding tactic either. As seen in through the analysis of the six peace education programs, local NGOs have fewer funds available to reach large parts of a country’s population. The more successful programs in this study were those that were run by UNICEF, and therefore had greater connections to the liberal peacebuilding system. Most peacebuilding funding goes to the UN and other institutions of liberal peacebuilding because those organizations have the resources available to create large-scale change. Grassroots NGOs do not have such resources, and this limits their ability to provide wide-scale services. In this, I agree with criticism from scholars about the true impact that local NGOs can have on peacebuilding and believe that it is not feasible to expect that only using grassroots peacebuilding will be a better peacebuilding option than liberal peacebuilding activities. Advocating for such a change would go against the best practice recommendation of specificity in this thesis, because it would push local NGOs into providing more services than they can adequately do.

# **Conclusion**

This research project aimed to understand how the application of peace education principles relates to current discourses on peacebuilding theory and best practices in peacebuilding. Through the analysis of secondary source documents and reports published by NGOs and other UN organizations, I established a best practices framework for peace education programs in West Africa that highlights the importance of the participatory involvement of youth and other local populations in peace efforts. The framework also presses the need for a youth-centered understanding of local conflict contexts, either through the completion of an in-depth conflict assessment or the utilization of local NGO knowledge and experiences. Peace education programs in the region should also continue to provide resources and trainings to participants to build on other capabilities and encourage greater participation in civil society. Due to the lack of funding available to NGOs running peace education programs, they must remain focused on a specific area of engagement that must also have the intended outcome of building peace. In peace education, it is not enough to simply provide services and resources to empower youth, those services must build a positive mindset of peace rather than one of violence. Finally, peace education programs must follow the principle of “do no harm” and must remain aware of the psychological effects that experiencing civil war has on young people.

Due to the nature of secondary source research, there are limitations to the amount of information I had access to for this study. Some impacts of these programs may not have been described in the sources and future research in peace education in West Africa should involve interviews or other forms of primary source collection which was not possible in this project. Despite the data limitations, this project has shown that peace education programs in the West African context can improve peacebuilding efforts through empowering the younger populations to become local agents for peacebuilding. However, due to the humanistic nature of peace education and the funding limitations of local NGOs in this region, peace education is only a part of the equation to building sustainable peace. The liberal peacebuilding structure is far too entrenched in the international system to reasonably expect grassroots peacebuilding to be able to provide a more sustainable solution. The more sustainable solution should be to combine the original top-down liberal reforms with bottom-up, people-centered approaches that empower local populations to become more involved in peace processes.

There is still much research to do regarding peace education’s impact on peacebuilding. More programs from different regions and conflict situations should also be assessed for best practices so that the impacts of peace education can be better understood. In the context of West Africa, future research could involve gaining a better understanding of the relationship between using people-centered approaches to peacebuilding within the structure of liberal peacebuilding, and if that can help bring more stability to the region. Additionally, there is also a lack of research into the impacts of peace education in the informal and formal sector of education, which is something this project did not cover. There may be some best practices that are more applicable to informal peace education rather than formal and vice versa which can help lead program developers into more sustainable ways to build peace.

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1. While my decision for cases to study was primarily about my interest in the region of West Africa, it is important to note that the study of peace education programs and best practices in Africa is applicable in many other cases outside of the region such as Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and South Africa. Furthermore, interesting cases outside of Africa could be Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, Nepal, among many others. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)