



Peacebuilding and integral ecology

An exploration of approaches in conflict affected settings



Lessons and outcomes



"We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."

Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #139



*The Serranía
de San Lucas, Colombia*

Photos: AEI, CAFOD, Caritas Malakal, NAFSO, PCA, PDPMM and Shutterstock

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Between March 2023 and March 2025 CAFOD supported five civil society organisations in four countries (Colombia, occupied Palestinian territory, South Sudan and Sri Lanka) to collaboratively implement a pilot initiative exploring integral ecology approaches to peacebuilding – the Peacebuilding and Integral Ecology Project (P&IE Project). Between December 2024 and April 2025, a learning review was carried out to understand and showcase outcomes, and draw out lessons from the project. The purpose of this process was to generate insights for CAFOD and partners, as well as other key stakeholders, to inform future programming. The following is a summary of the outcomes, key lessons and recommendations of the learning review.

Key outcomes

Practical skills and knowledge: Participants developed practical skills and knowledge that enable them to behave in ways which have a positive impact on their environments. The skills include communication, advocacy and awareness raising, while the knowledge is in relation to integral ecology and environmental protection.

Personal transformation and resilience: Most participants built resilience and their capacities to confront adversity, developing awareness, and deepening understanding (of oneself, others and their interactions with their environment).

Behavioural change: People who participated in the project have changed their behaviours, integrating more respectful and caring practices in their daily lives.

Awareness raising and campaigning: The project provided the skills, space, connections and impetus for those involved to influence and transform the behaviours of others, with a ripple effect being seen in communities.

Building community: The project has had a significant impact in terms of the connections and communities it has fomented, improving relationships with and among community members, and creating networks, bonds and solidarity.

Engaging duty bearers: The project provided space for people to engage with duty bearers, with some positive policy changes coming about as a result.

Peaceful Relationships: There have been positive changes in the relationships among disputed groups, contributing to greater cohesion, coexistence and peace.

Key lessons

1. In protracted, complex and extremely volatile contexts, small improvements in everyday lives at the individual and community levels can have immense value for people and can lay the groundwork for broader peacebuilding efforts.
2. Integral ecology enables a comprehensive and holistic approach to building peace, addressing root causes of conflict, working towards systems change, and recognising the importance of local efforts in peacebuilding processes.
3. A relational approach which centres and nurtures genuine partnerships and human relationships has immense value and is key to social change and global solidarity. It also requires time and resources.

Youth creativity during awareness training on Laudato Si' in Kalutara, Sri Lanka, February 2025.



Recommendations for CAFOD

- + Invest in and support monitoring, evaluation and learning processes which are relational, adaptive, participatory and locally led.
- + Continue to invest and nurture partnerships, going further to decolonise organisational practices and embrace more reciprocal and equal ways of working.
- + Support cross-organisational programmes, exchange and learning as a key part of CAFOD's Culture of Encounter.
- + Support partner-led peacebuilding and integral ecology initiatives, embracing the diversity of understanding and range of initiatives that comes from enabling local leadership and adaptation to local context.
- + Invest in trauma-informed approaches.

Recommendations for civil society actors and duty bearers

- + Foster, strengthen and invest in solidarity-based genuine partnerships, moving at the speed of trust.
- + Fund and resource initiatives at the intersection between environment and peace.
- + Support and invest in locally led peacebuilding, even (and in particular) in the most volatile and entrenched conflicts.
- + When working in complex and highly volatile political and conflict situations, adopt adaptive strategies which involve engagement at different levels.
- + Work closely with local institutions which are deeply embedded in communities.
- + Support youth as change agents.

Activity carried out with Colombian students in September 2023 in which students walked around with a sheet of paper on their backs, writing on one another's paper to express gratitude for something the other person had done which had helped them (whether the person knew it or not), or something that they appreciated about the other person.

Conclusion

This learning review has revealed insights into both how to support local civil society actors and the communities they represent to positively transform their environments in contexts of armed conflict (in particular through an integral ecology lens), as well as the outcomes which can emerge from such efforts.

The capacities and skills which have flourished, the sparks of hope ignited, the individual and collective agency which has bloomed and grown, and the connections and communities woven within the framework of the P&IE project should serve as inspiration for those involved and others to continue collective struggles to combat poverty, restore dignity and protect nature.





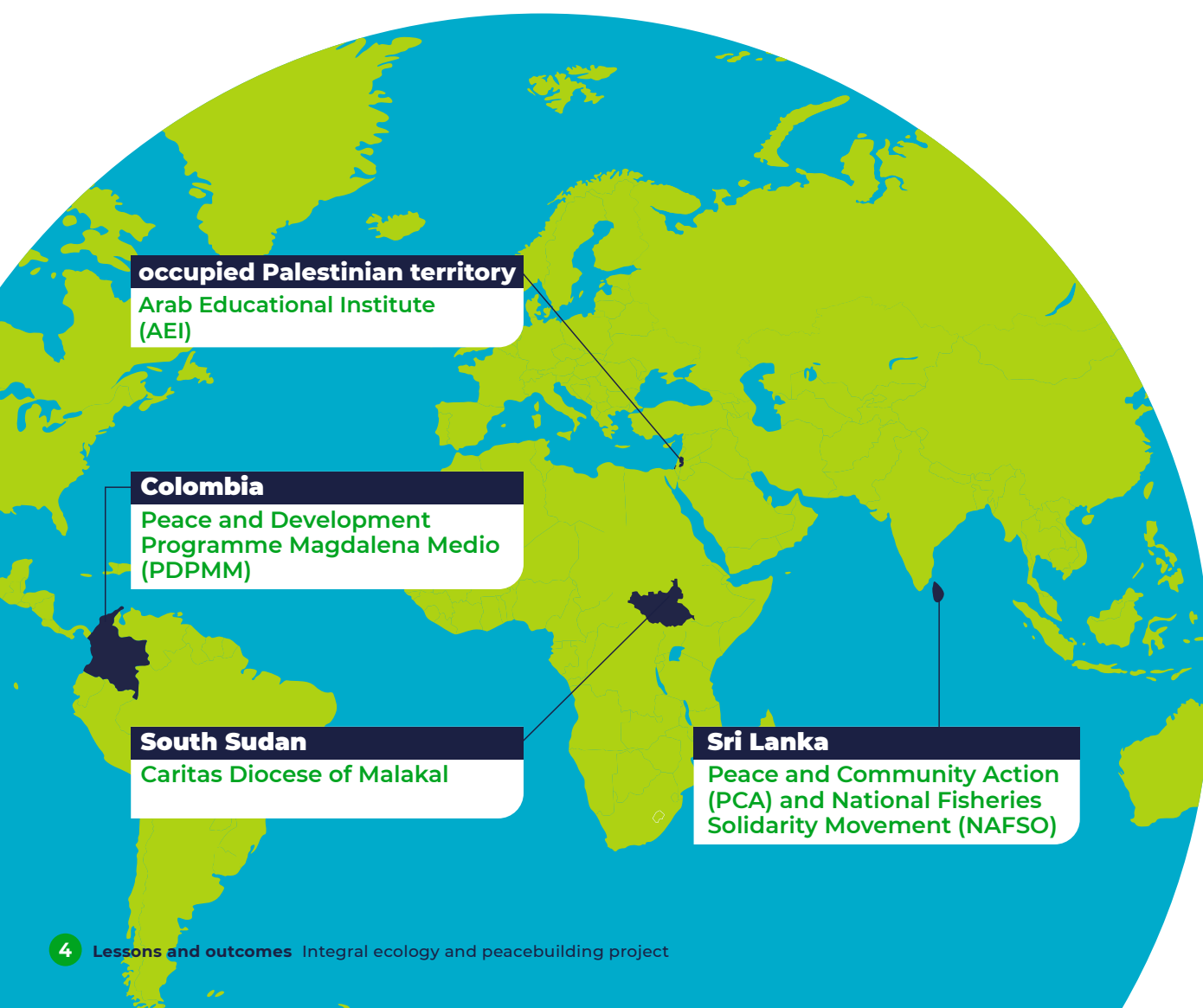
Background

Between March 2023 and March 2025 CAFOD supported five civil society organisations in four countries (Colombia, occupied Palestinian territory, South Sudan and Sri Lanka) to collaboratively implement a pilot initiative exploring integral ecology approaches to peacebuilding.

The Peacebuilding and Integral Ecology Project (P&IE Project) was intended to build on and complement the existing programmes, and through an experimental and collaborative process, to apply an integral ecology lens to peacebuilding and explore the role of the environment¹ in peacebuilding. The P&IE Project sought to influence change through a social-ecological model at the individual level before building to interpersonal change at the community level, and in some cases at a national/international level². All programmes share a commitment to integral ecology as espoused in CAFOD's strategic framework [Our Common Home](#).

Between December 2024 and April 2025, a learning review was carried out to draw out lessons, understand and showcase outcomes of the P&IE Project. Key for CAFOD given the project's pilot nature and the desire to understand what an integral ecology approach to peacebuilding looks like in practice and how it can contribute to more effective peacebuilding, the purpose of this process was to generate insights for CAFOD and partners, as well as other key stakeholders, to inform future programming. This report is the outcome of the learning review.

CAFOD's partners



Context

Understanding the relationship between conflict, climate, environment and peace has become essential in the context of the climate crisis. We are seeing how the mutually compounding nature of conflict and climate change is becoming more acute globally. Resource scarcity contributes to conflicts, the effects of climate change exacerbate social tensions, and, in turn, conflicts prevent effective and cooperative strategies to mitigate against climate change. Holistic efforts which address both environmental and social drivers and impacts of crisis have never been more necessary. Indeed, approaches such as Environmental Peacebuilding provide important frameworks to understand, analyse and design interventions at the intersection of peace, conflict and the natural world, recognising that a healthy environment is an essential part of conflict prevention³ and a key ingredient for positive peace.⁴

Environmental peacebuilding is also an example of how peacebuilding concepts and approaches have evolved and adapted over time.

The effectiveness of traditional conflict resolution – based on a linear understanding of ‘conflict’ and ‘post-conflict’ and with a strong emphasis on top-down processes of (international) mediation, peacekeeping and state building – have been questioned, and peacebuilding approaches today tend to recognise the need for efforts at multiple levels and the profound social, political and economic transformations necessary for positive peace. Local peacebuilding is now broadly understood to be a vital ingredient for sustainable peace.

Despite this, the broader international political environment is currently not conducive to such efforts. We have seen a retreat from collaborative approaches, with right-wing governments taking hold in many countries across the globe and pushing solely nationalist, and often divisive, agendas; and the international rules based order being questioned, undermined and even flagrantly disregarded by a failure to challenge violations of international humanitarian law and to work for just peace. With these trends, the international development/aid sector (of which ‘peacebuilding’ has become a part) is currently undergoing seismic shifts. There have been major reductions in bilateral aid budgets and some profound questioning of the ways of operating and giving – which have become the norm over the past few decades. This makes locally led and locally targeted initiatives more crucial, especially in places where people no longer have faith in international law, human rights legislation or even in national/international ‘peace’ as a concept or a possibility.

The hostile environment for peacebuilding and social and climate justice, and in particular aid cuts, are also spurring a movement towards decolonisation of the international development/aid sector in order to build better systems for international solidarity, mutual self-help, and genuine, equitable partnerships which do not produce or reinforce dependencies on external funding, as well as centring local leadership, local knowledge and affected people in all development and aid response efforts.

These major global changes in the environment and in the international development/aid sector are the backdrop for CAFOD’s P&IE Project. They have both shaped it and necessitated it. They are also the global backdrop for the contexts in which the project is implemented, which have themselves all undergone major changes in recent years, many of which have tragically been for the worse.



AEI staff at the separation wall in Bethlehem observing the exhibition they produced of powerful personal stories to share voices of hope, struggle, and calls for justice.

Integral ecology

Integral ecology is a holistic way of understanding and engaging with one's environment. The concept was adopted by late Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'* and has been integrated by CAFOD as a foundational framework for all the work the organisation does and supports. As a frame for systems thinking and systems change, integral ecology recognises and explores the relationships we have with ourselves, between humans, the more than human, the natural world and the built environment, recognising the interconnectedness among these. It can provide a lens to bring diverse groups and multidisciplinary practices to transform systems, structures and social norms that discriminate against people and planet.

CAFOD's partners describe how integral ecology "looks at the human being as a whole with its surrounding environment" (Caritas Malakal) and focuses on "rootedness and connection to the land" (AEI). For NAFSO, the focus of integral ecology is the critical balance between humans and planet, a balance all actions and activities should be linked to preserving, which is the "most critical challenge we have, it is our main responsibility". A colleague at PDPMM describes how "it is not only about caring for the environment, but also about looking inward, at how I relate to myself and others".



"An integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good... the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment... The notion of the common good also extends to future generations."

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* #156 – 159



Project information

The overall aim of the P&IE Project is to facilitate innovation in peacebuilding programming at CAFOD, applying an integral ecology lens to peacebuilding and exploring the role of the environment in peacebuilding. Four of CAFOD's Country Programmes, each different, but with synergies and similarities, joined hands to implement the two-year pilot project between 2023 and 2025: Colombia, Sri Lanka, the occupied Palestinian territory, and South Sudan. The project has also had a cross-regional component, with regular online partner exchanges, learning facilitated between CAFOD staff (including with CAFOD education staff), and youth video exchanges, whereby youth from one country shared messages with young people from the other countries via video, and vice versa.

COLOMBIA

In Colombia, a historic peace agreement was reached in 2016 with the then largest guerrilla group, the FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia). In spite of this, significant challenges in implementation and persistent, deeply rooted conflict dynamics, fuelled by illegal economies, mean that a multiplicity of guerilla, paramilitary and criminal groups continue to engage in armed violence. Violent conflict has been ongoing for over half a century. State neglect, disputes over control of resources and goods, illicit crops and mining, together with widespread extortion and the forced recruitment of minors, make Magdalena Medio one of the country's most conflict-affected regions. Human rights violations are widespread, and environmental degradation is destroying one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world (the Serranía de San Lucas). With the presence of FARC dissidents, the ELN (National Liberation Army) and the AGC (Colombian Gaitanista Self-Defence Forces), conflict in the region remains acute and some armed groups have taken advantage of peace talk efforts to regroup and become stronger. La Ye de San Luquitas is a town that epitomises the above: a remote mountain village, with little state presence, through which numerous gold mines located in the San Lucas Mountain range can be accessed and which is hotly contested.



The project has been focused on the community of La Ye de San Luquitas in the Magdalena Medio region, in particular in the village school. It has worked with students to develop their socio-emotional and environmental competencies aimed at fomenting care for the environment, increasing peaceful coexistence and giving young people a sense of self and ambition which ultimately reduces the likelihood of them being recruited into the many active armed groups in the area. It has also supported local initiatives with a focus on integral ecology.



*La Ye de San Luquitas
in Colombia*

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Israel has been perpetrating extreme violence against Palestinians in Gaza since Hamas' attack in October 2023, which, according to a United Nations Special Committee, Amnesty International, and other experts and human rights organisations, amounts to genocide against the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation and accelerating annexation through the expansion of settlements and the taking over of Area C in the West Bank has worsened since the start of the war, as have the multiple forms of physical and structural violence faced daily by Palestinians, including in the West Bank.⁵ Israeli settlers' attacks on Palestinians have skyrocketed to record levels since the UN began documenting cases in 2005.⁶ The occupation places extremely tight restrictions on movement and Palestinians' access to natural resources and land. One of the consequences of the occupation is the impact of Israel's discriminatory policies on Palestinians' access to adequate supplies of clean and safe water.⁷ In this context, there is a pervading sense of hopelessness and despair, particularly amongst young Palestinians, and a growing cynicism about the value of international law in the absence of accountability and prospects for just peace.



In the occupied Palestinian territory, the integral ecology project has involved working with students to advocate for the Palestinian natural/cultural environment. Students have developed their skills through training and have led campaigns on key, local environmental issues. Young adult women's groups in the southern West Bank (Bethlehem and Hebron) have also been supported to develop their communications and influencing skills and advocacy actions.

Houses and land in the areas around Bethlehem



SOUTH SUDAN

Although the civil war in South Sudan formally ended with a peace agreement in 2018, violence continues. This is compounded by the effects of climate change, which contributes to record levels of poverty⁸ and hunger and negatively impacts livelihoods. South Sudan shares an approximately 900-kilometre-long border with Sudan and every year during the dry season pastoralists from Sudan enter South Sudan looking for grazing lands, often leading to conflict with the local farmers over water and land. South Sudan ranks the second most vulnerable country globally to the impacts of climate change, and one of the least resourced countries to cope with its shocks.⁹ The country endures severe droughts and floods, resulting in displacement and the loss of lives and livelihoods. Floods in 2024 affected 1.4 million people.¹⁰ The Sudan conflict exacerbates the humanitarian situation, forcing 508,000 people into South Sudan in 2024.¹¹ With few livelihood options, charcoal production has become an important source of income for many.



The project has focused on communities in Fashoda County in Upper Nile State in South Sudan, where Caritas Malakal has trained young people to safeguard the environment and carry out local campaigning and advocacy to reduce harmful environmental practices. The youth have carried out awareness raising in their communities and engaged local duty bearers to dissuade practices which contribute to environmental degradation and climate change.



Young people walking between villages to raise environmental awareness among communities in Fashoda County, South Sudan

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has a complex conflict context, with a history of structural violence, and tensions between multiple ethnic, religious, and socio-political groups which can erupt into violence at times of crisis. The most high profile recent conflict; the war between the state and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), came to an end in 2009 after 25 years of armed conflict with a military victory which involved the killing of tens of thousands of civilians,¹² human rights abuses and widespread international criticism. Since 2021, Sri Lanka has been in an economic and political crisis following the collapse of the economy and ensuing debt crisis. Though a popular uprising in 2022 led eventually to a new government, economic policies continue to prioritise growth and profit at the expense of environmental considerations or rights. Climate change poses significant threats to the country, in particular its coastal areas, and plastic pollution is a major issue.¹³



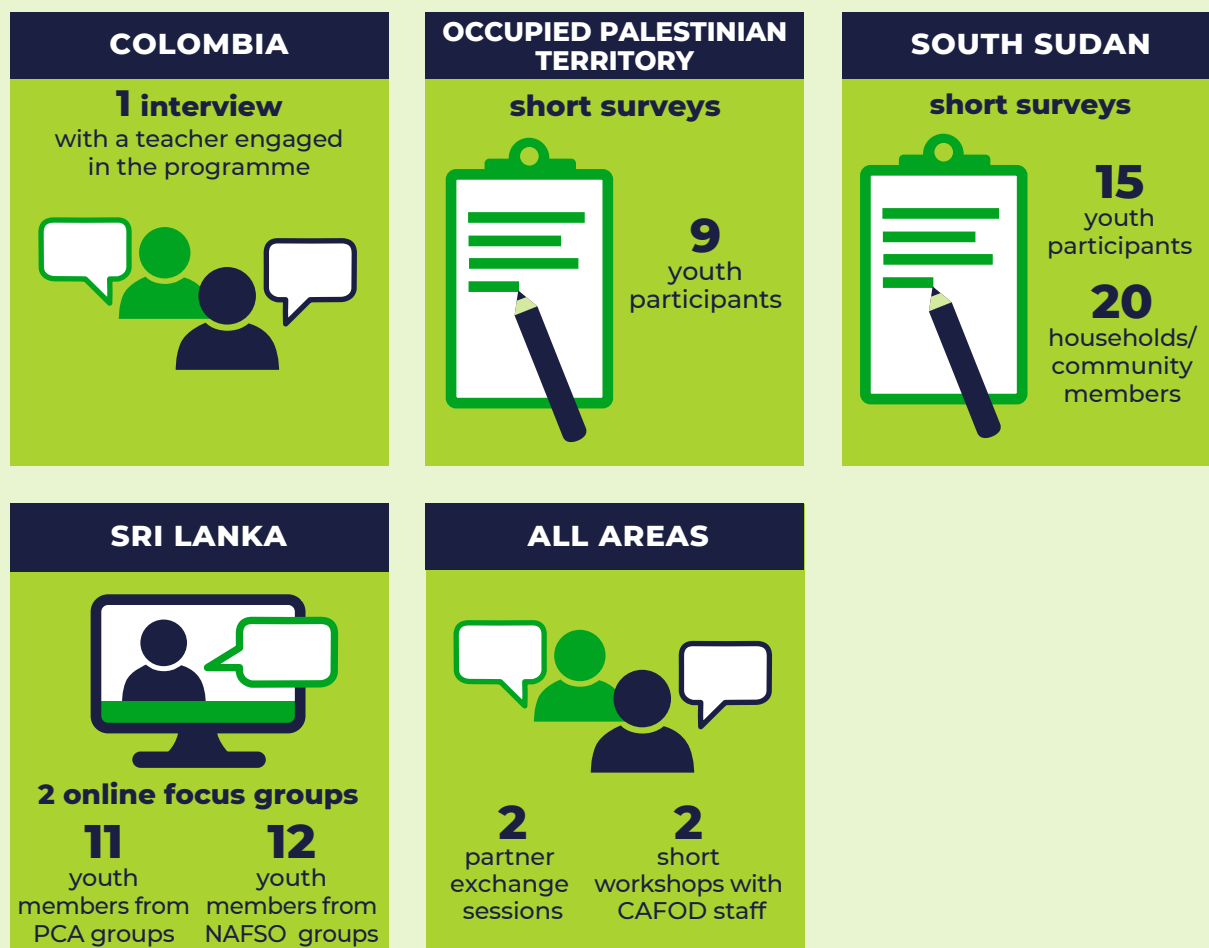
The project has been implemented by two of CAFOD's partners: PCA which works in Ampara district in the east (an area characterised by volatility between diverse ethnic and religious community groups) to build local capacities for peace, and NAFSO, a people's movement which works nationwide to empower poor and marginalised citizens to achieve dignified lives and livelihoods alongside environmental protection. Through the project, PCA brought an environmental lens to their peacebuilding work, working with multi-ethnic youth groups through processes of reflection and personal transformation, supporting them to develop skills and to carry out initiatives to improve their environments whilst engaging with their communities on peacebuilding and environmental care. NAFSO experimented with bringing a more explicit conflict transformation lens to their empowerment and environmental work with youth groups in the Negombo, Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa and Ampara areas. In addition to their separate activities, PCA and NAFSO also brought their youth groups together for encounters and mutual exchange of learning through this project.



Young people participate in a study tour at Knuckles Conservation Forest in the Dumbura Mountain Range in central Sri Lanka in 2024

Methodology

This learning review encompassed a literature review of relevant project documentation, online interviews with CAFOD staff members and online interviews with all of CAFOD's partners implementing the project.



Limitations

The limitations of this review relate predominantly to the constraints in the number of people consulted and communication and access challenges. The sample size of direct participants is small (102 individuals), and it has not been possible to engage with wider communities impacted by the project beyond the short survey in South Sudan (20 individuals). The sensitive and risky nature of the contexts have complicated access. Given the scope of the project and the review, it was not possible to hire local facilitators and/or engage responsibly with community members and appropriately compensate them for their time. With the review taking place online, internet connectivity and shutdowns have also limited the ability to communicate with partners and participants.

KEY CONCEPT

Our Common Home

Linked to Integral Ecology, the concept of ‘our common home’ has had resonance in some contexts. ‘On care for our common home’ is the title of the encyclical [Laudato si’](#) and the concept refers to humans’ shared responsibility towards the one planet – the one home – we have. In Colombia, the idea that we all live under the same sky and share the same home has been key to young people understanding themselves as part of a wider community. The connections generated between young people among the different countries through the creation and sharing of videos with messages for one another has been immensely meaningful, helping young people to relate to others. In Colombia it has also presented an opportunity to generate a culture of peace. It is an “*umbrella, which provides a much more comprehensive understanding*” (PDPMM).



KEY CONCEPT

Shramadana

“Shramadana”, which means “gift of labour” or “shared labour”, is a key concept for Sri Lankans. The country has a long tradition of volunteerism, with citizens regularly and voluntarily contributing to improving and developing their communities. In 2014, 8.6 million Sri Lankans volunteered at least once a year, which is around 40 per cent of the country’s able population, many of whom are in rural areas.¹⁴ This model of self-help and volunteerism enables people-led action and within the context of the P&IE Project, it has been a useful way to gather people around a common purpose. It has provided reasons and spaces for people from different cultures to work together towards a shared aim. It is also a sustainable way to engage people in initiatives and processes which will last beyond the project’s close.



KEY CONCEPT

Sumud

Sumud in Arabic means “steadfastness” or “steadfast perseverance” and is a key Palestinian value with cultural, spiritual, educational, social, emotional and economic significance, as well as an ideological and political strategy of nonviolent resistance. The concept gained traction among Palestinians in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War in response to their oppression and the resistance it inspired against the Israeli occupation, although the collective Palestinian consciousness of struggle for staying on Palestinian land is part of a longer history of resistance to oppression and dispossession.¹⁵

The concept has different meanings and conveys “a continuum of goals and practices of resistance... comprising the many various actions people take against the politics of erasure”.¹⁶ Two forms of sumud have been identified – static sumud and resistance sumud (or passive and active) – the first focused more on a defensive strategy of staying on one’s land and the latter a more offensive strategy of civil disobedience and active resistance.



“The concept of sumud has been very helpful. It connects people deeply to their land and helps them stay strong in the face of political and environmental challenges. Sumud has been practised in daily actions like caring for the environment, helping others, raising awareness, and building sustainable habits. It shows that resilience doesn’t always mean confrontation – it can also come through love for the land, solidarity with the community, and commitment to positive change despite difficulties. The idea of sumud has brought communities together and encouraged youth, women, and especially religious leaders to see it as a shared spiritual value in both Islam and Christianity. It has also helped spread the message of Catholic Social Teaching, especially the values of care and justice found in Pope Francis’ inspiring letter Laudato Si’.

“The awareness, education, and training sessions in the project helped people turn the values of sumud into real actions – not just showing love, sympathy, or solidarity, but also caring for the two main cries: the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and marginalised... This shows how sumud can lead to real, positive change in both the environment and society.”

Arab Educational Institute



“I have become more involved in helping others, taking care of the land and agriculture, and practising my steadfastness (sumud) on the land that expresses my identity as a Palestinian who believes in his right to this land. I look forward to improving and developing the environment for the better.”

Palestinian participant

KEY METHOD

Read, Reflect, Communicate and Act

A method which has been useful in the Palestinian context for encouraging participants to engage with ideas around the environment and integral ecology, and for turning theoretical learning into practical learning, is *Read, Reflect, Communicate and Act*. It involves sharing a text (for instance verses from the Quran or the Bible, writings and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi or other nonviolent and peace activists) ahead of time or during the session and giving people some time to read and reflect on it individually. Participants then take the time to listen to one another's reflections on and interpretations of the ideas shared, communicating their ideas for how to integrate or implement the ideas. This may be through an advocacy action, awareness raising or training. It may also be a change on an individual level in daily life or practices. People go away to 'act', following up on their ideas and putting them into practice. The group then comes back together to check in and follow up on the actions. In the context of the P&IE Project, some of the actions taken forward include taking care of the Sumud house garden and reviving the tradition of olive picking. This approach has also aimed to change participants' ways of thinking and behaviour to achieve inner peace and nonviolence.



KEY METHOD

The Forgiveness Tree

The forgiveness tree is one of many methods used by the PDPMM team with young people in Magdalena Medio in Colombia. The practice is focused on recognising and processing past and present wounds. The exercise consists of participants creating images and collages of trees and placing painful memories or experiences on the tree, releasing the pain. As people draw out and articulate their struggles, they are able to see them differently and work towards understanding, acceptance and healing. If they want, there is space after making the trees to share with and be heard by the wider group.



Colombian students engage in the 'forgiveness tree' exercise, creating flowers from plastic bottles



Practical skills and knowledge

Participants developed practical skills and knowledge that enable them to behave in ways which have a positive impact on their environments. The skills include communication, advocacy and awareness raising, positioning individuals to be able to influence their communities, while the knowledge is predominantly in relation to integral ecology – including how to engage with their surroundings with positive outcomes – and environmental protection.

Almost all participants who benefited from trainings described an increase in their knowledge and understanding (expressed through focus group discussions and surveys). For many this centred on the connection between the environment and peace. In Sri Lanka, participants described this as the most important lesson they have learned from the project, while one participant from the occupied Palestinian territory described how, through the project, they gained *“a deeper understanding of the importance of cooperation between different villages and communities to address common environmental challenges”*.



“We learned about how a good citizen behaves and what he or she should do/not do. There was a very big change in ourselves as well as our environment.”

Participant from Sri Lanka

In South Sudan training was carried out by the College of Environment of the Catholic University and combined theoretical and practical approaches. Youth were trained on how to do advocacy, both with traditional authorities and local government, and how to engage and negotiate with people.

Training participants in South Sudan were asked to what extent they agree with the statements:

I feel more confident to educate people in my community on environmental issues

71%
strongly agreed
29%
agreed

I understand climate change and how our behaviours impact the environment

43%
strongly agreed
57%
agreed

I can better persuade people to change their behaviours

43%
strongly agreed
57%
agreed

I feel more confident to advocate for leaders to enforce tree cutting rules

64%
strongly agreed
29%
agreed
7%
neutral

Training built skills in advocacy, awareness raising and campaigning, and developed leadership and communications skills. One facilitator who participated in a workshop organised by AEI described how *“I have developed my ability to communicate information in an interactive manner, which has helped me find innovative solutions to energise the group”*, while one student articulated *“I became more aware of how to interact with others and communicate with them in a positive way”*. Other Palestinian participants described the skills they gained through the training: photography, editing, planning advocacy and lobbying initiatives, preparing presentations and engaging speeches, public speaking and teamwork. AEI staff also describe how youth are *“applying what they have learnt in their daily life”*, and other changes they have observed, such as confidence and improved communication skills. In Colombia, the same changes have been observed: students have stopped interrupting each other and those who were previously shy are now more expressive and willing to speak up.



“I became able to perceive problems from another perspective and try to find solutions through which I could help others in environmental affairs and societal problems.”

Palestinian participant

Personal transformation and resilience

Most participants built resilience and their capacities to confront adversity, developing awareness, and deepening understanding (of oneself, others and their interactions with their environment).

As a result of the new knowledge and practical skills gained, combined with new ways of understanding and connections forged between people, many participants shared that they underwent a personal transformation and gained resilience through the process. As articulated in their [description of the Sumud Story House in Bethlehem](#), *“AEI’s experience is that when people gain the confidence to tell and share their own stories, it changes their lives.”* Many participants spoke about these profound changes.



“The training has had an inspiring impact on my personal life and relationships, and has positioned me as an agent of positive change in my community.”

Palestinian participant



Agricultural land including olive trees, in the areas around Bethlehem



In Colombia, the experiences have led to students being “*more assertive, more tolerant and open to dialogue*”. Many are able to concentrate better and better manage their emotions. This contrasts to their behaviour previously, when they would arrive at school, “*stressed, disoriented, discouraged, anxious, irritated, and defensive*”, in particular as a result of the difficult socio-economic backgrounds and conflictive conditions in the region. Many are able to perform academically much better than in the past, with 12 students from the previous year now studying at university. Workshops with teachers have also provided an opportunity to “*let off steam*”. Even though the accompaniment of teachers has been secondary, it has still been immensely meaningful, making them feel accompanied and more confident.

Guided meditation exercise with young people in La Ye de San Luquitas in Colombia

Behavioural change

People who participated in the project have changed their behaviours as a result, integrating more respectful and caring practices in their daily lives (in their behaviours and attitudes towards themselves, others and their environments), and taking greater initiative to improve their environments.

In Sri Lanka, Colombia and the occupied Palestinian territory, there was a strong emphasis on changed behaviour in terms of increased care for the environment. Youth described how *"it made me more aware of the impact of human activities on the environment"*, how they have become *"more committed to environmental practices and raising awareness among people"* and *"more cautious in my behaviour and actions towards the environment"* (participants from the occupied Palestinian territory).

Specific practices mentioned include:

- + Recycling/separating plastic items
- + Reducing resource consumption/saving water and electricity
- + Reducing use of plastics
- + Organising neighbourhood clean-ups
- + Raising awareness among family and friends
- + Using environmentally friendly transportation
- + Planting trees

In Sri Lanka almost all focus group discussion participants emphasised the first point around how their use of plastics and recycling habits changed, since *"now in our personal life we got used to separating plastic items"*.

In South Sudan, young women, who face manifold structural and systemic barriers to their participation in political, social and economic life, were initially reluctant to participate actively in the project activities and were not vocal. But after working with Caritas Malakal over time, their behaviours changed because of increased confidence and skills. Partners describe how they are now carrying loudspeakers, talking about their rights and communicating with other community members on pressing environmental issues. What is more, all 15 participants surveyed described changes in their own behaviours since their participation, with 12 saying went on to raise awareness about wood burning and its impact on the environment, and four mentioning they went on to take actions to protect the environment, such as planting trees.



Mural painted by students in the school at La Ye de San Luquitas in Colombia which reads "The planet is our home and to care for it we must not pollute"

"I noticed a significant change in the students' behaviour, as they became more aware of their environmental practices... They passed these habits on to their families and friends."

Palestinian participant

"I became more aware of the environmental challenges facing my community, and I was able to work with students to find practical solutions. We were able to introduce initiatives that contribute to improving the environment, such as neighbourhood clean-up campaigns, waste sorting at school, and raising awareness about the importance of this topic."

Palestinian participant

Awareness raising and campaigning

Beyond participants' individual behavioural change, the project provided the skills, space, connections and impetus for those involved to influence and transform the behaviours of others, with a ripple effect being seen in communities.

Almost all participants started to influence others, such as their friends and families. And in some contexts, the project provided a framework for more structured awareness raising and campaigning efforts.



"My family and friends started using fewer plastic bags after I explained to them their negative impact on the environment."

Participant from Sri Lanka



Ecology Awareness and Tree planting campaign in Sri Lanka organised by Uhana Youth group with the collaboration of the local community in Uhana

In Sri Lanka, several of the young people PCA trained took the initiative to work at a Sunday school, sharing what they learned through the project with children there. They also shared their knowledge with their families, their neighbours and their immediate communities. Several young people described getting the support of elders, their parents and their neighbours, and being *"able to influence the society"*. In the case of the occupied Palestinian territory, AEI's work with teachers supported them to disseminate knowledge among students: *"it helped me transfer this practical experience to the students and to understand how to motivate students to become leaders in their communities. It also helped me connect environmental concepts to their daily lives, which helped the students make more serious and clear decisions about the environment"*.

Some of the strategies which were described as effective to mobilise and motivate the community include using compelling stories from residents to illustrate the need to change malpractices and using real testimonials (such as interviews with doctors and scientists) to convince people to change their habits.



Some participants mentioned that things changed or people did things differently as a result of the awareness raising, such as *"I noticed afterwards that many residents began to commit to keeping the neighbourhoods and parks clean"*.

"With what I learned, I was able to raise awareness among family members and the society where we live."

Participant from Sri Lanka



Charcoal produced from burnt wood cut down from the areas in Fashoda County

In South Sudan, there are accounts that behaviours which impact the environment in Fashoda County have positively changed, with fewer people in communities cutting down trees for firewood or to make charcoal to sell, and less use of firewood for cooking.

A sample of households from the villages in Fashoda County where youth carry out awareness raising were also surveyed. Partners purposefully sought out households where behaviours had changed and those where behaviours had not changed, so as to understand both sets of circumstances and views.

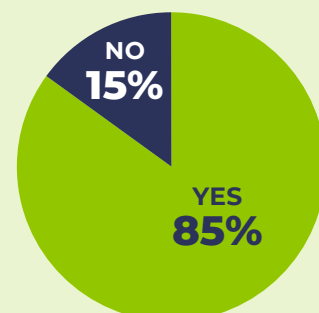
- + Those who had changed their behaviour mentioned having reduced tree cutting, no longer using wood to cook, and having reduced charcoal use. Two people mentioned having changed jobs (from charcoal production to fishing).
- + Of the ten asked who had not changed their behaviours, all but one person said they had heard about the problems associated with woodburning. But this awareness had not led them to change habits (ie. stop cutting down trees to make charcoal to sell) because of their financial situation, with people saying they do not have anything, that they need money for their children, they need to pay school fees or they need to cover their basic needs.
- + 17 out of 20 people (from both those who had changed habits and those that had not) said that they know other people who have changed their habits.

15 participants in Fashoda County were asked about the changes they have observed in people's attitudes to cutting down trees



Fashoda, South Sudan:

Do you know other people who have changed their habits to better protect their environment?



Young people raising environmental awareness among children in Fashoda County

STORY OF CHANGE

Reducing waste burning in Beit Sahour

One of the major environmental issues in Beit Sahour in the West Bank is the burning of waste. Having identified this issue, students supported by AEI mobilised and came up with a campaign focused on raising people's awareness of the dangers of burning waste. They grabbed the public's attention through interviews with experts who spoke of the impact on people's health and the increased prevalence of respiratory diseases among people regularly exposed to smoke, and gave a presentation explaining alternative methods to waste burning (such as recycling). Some clear signs of change began with students taking responsibility for cleaning and caring for their schoolyards. Subsequently, students began to notice small improvements in air quality and a decrease in smoke in their communities, evidence of how residents changed their behaviour and the burning of waste reduced in the neighbourhood.



"The sense of accomplishment was great, especially when some individuals began to change their behaviour."

Palestinian participant

A student from Dar Al Kalima School sharing her perspectives and experience as part of the "Together to Combat Stray Dogs" campaign

STORY OF CHANGE

Stray dogs campaign in Bethlehem

There are areas in the West Bank, including in Bethlehem, where dogs have proliferated and are present in large numbers. They live off rubbish left on the streets and have become a real nuisance for local residents going about their daily business. The issue was identified by youth groups supported by AEI as a key problem negatively impacting the local environment. An advocacy campaign was designed to address the problem. Young people started to engage with the local municipality with the aim of convincing them to sterilise the dogs to stop them reproducing. However, the engagement with the municipality hit a dead-end when their response was to suggest poisoning the dogs instead, arguing they do not have the financial or human resource means to sterilise them. The students were shocked to hear the proposal to poison the animals and strongly opposed the suggestion.

Instead, the youth pivoted and redirected their campaign towards the local community. They focused on raising awareness among their neighbours. As a result, community members started better caring for the stray dogs, feeding the dogs responsibly and taming them. Rather than throwing food in the streets or near bins, people began to recycle and properly dispose of waste. This shift in behaviour shows the community's commitment to addressing the issue humanely and sustainably, moving away from harmful solutions to more compassionate and practical ones.

Engaging duty bearers

The project provided space for people to engage with duty bearers, with some positive policy changes coming about as a result.

In the occupied Palestinian territory, South Sudan and Sri Lanka people involved in the project developed relationships with key duty bearers. They worked to influence them to make changes which are having a positive impact on the social dynamics and local environments where the project is implemented.

In Sri Lanka, there has been very positive engagement with duty bearers, for instance collaborating to take steps to improve the environment, such as raising awareness among the public to stop littering. The campaign to reduce the burning of waste in Beit Sahour Municipality also involved engaging duty bearers, including the Mayor of Beit Sahour and Bishop Yasser Ayash of the Greek Catholic Patriarchate. The students met directly with the Mayor, who was attentive and supportive, promising to work with the health department to raise awareness and introduce new regulations, including fines for harmful practices like rubbish burning. During one advocacy event, the Bishop listened to students' presentations and committed to encouraging priests in his diocese to include these environmental and social values in their Sunday sermons to encourage people to change their behaviours.

Where in South Sudan there is little respect for laws preventing the cutting down of trees, a third (five out of fifteen) participants mentioned that duty bearers have enforced, or tried to enforce, these laws. Partners also described how the local government is becoming more aware and has made promises to act.

STORY OF CHANGE

Cleaning up an area of natural beauty and improving relations between groups



In Uhana Division in Ampara district there was a beautiful lake where people from the cities and towns would go to bathe and swim, taking food for picnics or to cook there and spend the day. Over time, the lake became polluted and dirty because people would leave behind their plastic bottles, beer bottles and cans, Arak bottles, and coconut oil. On social media people would blame those from other ethnic groups for the damage and rubbish. The Ampara youth group supported by PCA came to hear about the situation, arranged a clean-up of the area and liaised with the local government on the issue. Initially the local government built a fence in response, so that people could not access the lake at all. The young people then convinced the local government to take a different approach, putting in a gate so that people are now able to visit, and adding a sign saying that dumping rubbish is illegal and punishable. Now people are able to enjoy the area. What is more, prompted by the conversations they had with the youths as they were carrying out the clean-up, some community members reflected on their own previous assumptions about other groups being responsible for the littering, and came to acknowledge their own responsibility and role. Following this reflection, the tendency to judge and blame others diminished, and tensions between groups have reduced as a result.

Beach clean up and awareness program in Sri Lanka organised by Kalmunai and Navithanvely youth groups with the collaboration of the local community in Kalmunai

STORY OF CHANGE

Rubbish collection easing tensions between groups

In some neighbourhoods of Negombo in Sri Lanka, the build-up of rubbish was contributing to local disputes among Muslim and Hindu communities, who would blame each other. The youth groups supported by NAFSO spoke to different community members about how to best solve the issue, bringing them together to come up with suggestions collaboratively. They then reached out to the local authorities and a representative met with the community members. As a result of the discussions and the commitment of the Public Health Inspector, rubbish collection, which had been taking place weekly, was increased to twice a week. Rubbish collection points were also agreed and clarified to avoid rubbish being dumped in random locations.

Since rubbish collection has increased, the environment is much cleaner and the tensions between the two religious communities have reduced vastly. The relationship between the youth groups and the municipal council has been collaborative. As a result of the confidence built up, the youth group has been consulted on a number of occasions to help deal with issues in relation to rubbish collection and liaise with and raise awareness of local communities.

"We were in a position to actively volunteer (Shramadana) and through this activity we were able to get the support of Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil youths. Not only their support, when we worked together, we were able to understand each other properly."

Participant from Sri Lanka

Peaceful relationships

There have been positive changes in the relationships among disputed groups, contributing to greater cohesion, coexistence and peace.

In several of the project locations there have been changes in the dynamics between conflicting or disputed groups. This is particularly the case in Sri Lanka, but has also been seen in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In Sri Lanka, after nearly three decades of civil war, building trust, fostering reconciliation and achieving social cohesion between communities, especially between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, remains a significant challenge. The trainings, workshops and initiatives supported in Sri Lanka were purposefully designed to bring together Sinhalese, Muslim and Tamil youth. They had a dual purpose of developing solutions to environmental problems and providing opportunities for disconnected ethnic groups to interact and work together toward a common purpose, contributing to dispelling myths, building relationships and developing social cohesion.

Participants describe how "we can bring unity with other communities by minimising the usage of plastics" and, despite differences across religions, languages, cultures "we can get together on one important point".

"Normally when we do Shramadana in our villages, we do it with our neighbours ...but always our own people. But through this project we were able to understand the other communities, the other religions, especially the Sinhala, Tamil."

Participant from Sri Lanka



Beach cleaning and tree planting by youth group members in Kalmunai in Sri Lanka in May 2023

Several participants described how through the project youth from different, divided groups were able to work together, to “develop unity” where normally there are only differences. One participant described how, as a result of these interactions, “the hateful feelings disappeared”. Participants gained understanding of one another’s cultures and customs and increased tolerance and openness to difference, as well as gaining respect for one another and generating solidarity, a process described by one participant as “heartwarming”.

Participants described how the project provided youth “a platform where they can openly share their ideas, visions, dreams”. The platform created, in which differences of opinion were cleared and a common understanding was reached, is described by participants as a lasting result of the project.

Partners from the occupied Palestinian territory also described the connections and bridges built between participants of different religious or ethnic backgrounds. In the occupied Palestinian territory, activities purposefully brought Muslims and Christians together for field trips. For some, for instance Muslims from a marginalised community in Beit Zacharia, it was the first time they had ever met or interacted with Christians and, according to partners, it contributed to dispelling myths and prejudices.



“We see the close connections and interaction continuing to flow among ethnic groups. A beautiful opportunity, it created a very trustworthy atmosphere between these different groups.”

Participant from Sri Lanka

Palestinian students participate in an educational visit to Bethlehem, coming together in a spirit of unity, learning, and shared humanity



STORY OF CHANGE

Helping diverse youth play together in Sri Lanka

In Navainaalvilla, the diverse youth groups worked together to clean up a children's playpark in an area inhabited by Hindus and Christians. The park, located beside a Catholic church, had previously only been used by children from the Catholic community. When the request to clean up the park came from the church, the youth group suggested that it should be done and opened up as a common space for children from different religious backgrounds. Through cleaning the park, both communities were able to start making use of the shared space and increase their interactions with one another. Local community members were inspired by the collaborative efforts, and the groups describe how *"we were able to bring unity between the two cultures"*. One participant articulates how *"this project was strong and meaningful to clear those doubts"* (which existed between the groups).

Building community

The project has had a significant impact in terms of the connections and communities it has fomented, improving relationships with and among community members, and creating networks, bonds and solidarity locally, nationally and internationally.

A strong sense of community created in the occupied Palestinian territory has been felt among participants. One of the facilitators describes how *"I had a deeper connection with students and community members, and I felt like I wasn't just a facilitator. Rather, it has become a source of inspiration and motivation"*.

In Sri Lanka, communities have formed through the youth groups and beyond. Connections were created between youth supported by PCA and those working with NAFSO. The youth connected through this process have gone on to maintain their relationships independently of the official exchanges. What is more, others were drawn into the process: *"we were able to identify a number of civil organisations and join hands with them... and try to absorb [them] into this process of peace and reconciliation."*

All the partners also spoke of the connections and sense of community they have felt through the CAFOD organised online partner exchanges. The youth exchange videos were also meaningful for many young people, who felt a sense of solidarity and possibility through hearing what other young people face and what they are able to do in spite of extremely challenging contexts and circumstances.



"At the end of the programme we could see that the youth were closer to each other, especially the Negombo group were more interactive with the other groups and languages."

NAFSO staff member

*International youth
networking exchange*





The following are some of the key lessons learned by CAFOD and partners through this pilot project. These lessons, while not substantiated by a large evidence base (as mentioned in the [limitations](#) of this review), are based on insights drawn from participants, partners, and CAFOD staff throughout the learning review. These are distinct from the outcomes and instead are a set of reflections on both the *what* and the *how* of the project which have been pulled together and composted, and which we hope can enable future efforts to germinate and bloom.

Seeking change in conflict contexts

LESSON In protracted, complex and extremely volatile contexts, small improvements in everyday lives at the individual and community levels can have immense value for people and can lay the groundwork for broader peacebuilding efforts.

It is difficult to directly engage in explicit peacebuilding work without efforts at an individual level to build resilience, awareness and understanding (of oneself and others). This has been key in all contexts, and especially in the occupied Palestinian territory, where the overall political and conflict dynamics have been traumatic and overwhelming and allowed little space for other types of engagement. Students' lessons were shifted online post-October 2023, which exacerbated an already profound sense of fragmentation and isolation. The workshops facilitated by AEI enabled youth and women to connect with each other, and identify things that were within their sphere of influence and that they could take small steps to change, practising the different meanings and shapes of Sumud despite all the hardships.

LESSON Sparks of hope which emerge through human connections (sometimes, but not always, buoyed by people's faith or religion) are able to create the conditions for individual agency and resilience to take root.

This fostering of hope is the spark which keeps the struggle for peace and social justice alive even in the most challenging of circumstances. In the case of this project, where the broader conflict contexts have worsened, "*in circumstances in which they should be worse, they are not... this shows that something is working*" (CAFOD staff member).

LESSON Local leadership is fundamental to sustainable and transformative change.

An approach which foment local leadership and gives spaces for local people to lead is intrinsic to CAFOD as a partnership-based organisation and has been key in all the countries the project was implemented in. For instance, in South Sudan, Caritas Malakal described how they do not carry out activities, but build the capacities of youth to drive the change themselves, and always support local people (who are experts in their affairs and speak the local language) to lead. Likewise, in the occupied Palestinian territory, AEI's efforts have sought to centre community groups and self-help groups, enhancing and allowing space for youth leadership.

Flexibility and emergence

LESSON In volatile conflict contexts, it is necessary to adapt initiatives and processes continuously, pivoting and redirecting efforts according to the openings and options in the context.

The need to pivot and adapt to changes is necessary in all contexts, but in active and volatile conflict contexts it is even more urgent. For instance, in Colombia, initial planned engagement with the Junta de Acción Comuna (JAC)¹⁷ proved extremely difficult (due to internal fracturing and high turnover of its members) and so PDPMM broadened their engagement to other “Protective and enabling intersectoral spaces” such as the local Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence. What is more, peacebuilding efforts cannot be removed from the basic physical and psychological needs of people. As such, it is important to incorporate flexibility to allow partners and participants to employ funds to flexibly respond to their needs and those of their communities, which may include immediate relief in the form of cash or food.

LESSON Strategies for engagement and influencing should be multi-pronged, working with a range of actors and duty bearers to push through changes wherever spaces open up.

While policy change is possible and, within the project, there have been small but meaningful successes, we have also seen how these changes are difficult to achieve (especially within short project timeframes). Other types of actors such as teachers – people with a certain level of influence and access, but also deeply connected to communities – also play key roles enabling change processes. They have been key in the project, influencing students, changing attitudes and avoiding displacement. For example, in Colombia, when a student from La Ye de San Luquitas was recruited by the ELN guerilla, a teacher went to speak directly with the commander requesting the student be returned, which was respected and resulted in his return home.

View of the San Lucas mountain in the Magdalena Medio region in Colombia





Integral ecology

LESSON Integral ecology enables a comprehensive and holistic approach to building peace, addressing root causes of conflict, working towards systems change, and recognising the importance of local efforts in peacebuilding processes.

The framing of integral ecology has allowed partners to work on issues which would otherwise be difficult to address given their sensitive nature. It has also enabled local development practitioners to make connections between issues which might otherwise be siloed, working across peacebuilding, development, humanitarian and environmental “fields” and needs.

LESSON The framing and concept of integral ecology can be useful and inspiring, providing a new lens for people to understand their relationships with their environments, but it is a concept which must be adapted to local contexts and not forced.

Integral ecology has provided a new and innovative way of viewing one’s environment, opening up new horizons and new possibilities for engagement for partners and participants. For PCA it has provided a “new lens” which they have integrated into all their projects, and similarly for AEI it has become a “cornerstone” to their work. This means that they plan activities with integral ecology in mind, using the framework for training participants, designing initiatives and interventions, engaging on issues and collaborating to resolve problems. Some partners described how the concept is able to “tap into people’s religious beliefs” and how they have addressed integral ecology through religion because “religion reaches people faster than any other approach”. For some it has been useful because it is less sensitive than other language or approaches.

Yet there have been challenges in terms of people not relating to the concept or being open to it initially. For instance, in Sri Lanka, partners initially found it “hard to bring the two concepts together and give meaning to that” (PCA), although with time, understanding was developed and it became a key framework.

Relational approach

LESSON Working first from emotion and human experience as connectors (rather than identity) allows bridges to be built among people with different backgrounds and ethnic and religious identities.

What partners have observed is that, when people are able to engage based on the feelings and experiences they have, they identify more connection points with others. They then see their ethnic or religious identity as a part of their experience, but it does not define their whole identity. This allows meaningful dialogue spaces to be created. In Sri Lanka, the relationship with the environment, and the environment being a common cause that people get behind, care about and work to protect, has enabled meaningful engagement among Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim youth. It leads to a feeling that *“we are one human family, and challenges are faced together”* (NAFSO).

LESSON A relational approach which centres and nurtures genuine partnerships and human relationships has immense value and is key to social change and global solidarity. It also requires time and resources.

In the context of the P&IE Project, CAFOD staff have tried to create and nurture genuine partnerships. Partners express gratitude for the flexibility, understanding and the solidarity which they have felt, both through their partnership with CAFOD and through their interactions with one another (through the partner exchanges facilitated by CAFOD and the video exchanges). Nonetheless, partnerships remain bound by the power dynamics engrained in the aid/development system, and efforts could go further to try to build more horizontal and mutually accountable partnerships. Indeed, partnerships should be understood as a key strategy and approach which merit reflection, energy, time and resources.

LESSON Fostering a “culture of encounter” which includes young people allows them to feel a sense of purpose and value.

Partners and CAFOD staff have observed how youth are especially influenced and uplifted by opportunities to engage and connect with one another and with their communities. In particular when faced with few opportunities, bleak prospects and a sense that they do not have a role, these opportunities give them a sense of purpose and, when they are able to do something meaningful for their communities and environment, they are often *“buoyed by feeling pride”* (CAFOD staff member).



Colombian students engage in a mapping exercise

Operational and organisational processes

LESSON When it comes to engaging in volatile conflict contexts, trauma-formed approaches must be adopted, and physical and psychological safety should be prioritised.

The P&IE Project has shown just how important it is to adopt trauma-informed approaches, given the impact of the conflict on those who must live it. It is important to do this in ways which are contextually appropriate, recognising that western models for understanding trauma are inadequate and that often behaviours are “normal reactions to pathogenic contexts”¹⁸ Examples include the online partner exchanges which fostered a sense of solidarity and enabled a quiet recognition of one another’s traumas and struggles, and approaches adopted (such as in the occupied Palestinian territory and Colombia) which have centred care, fomented trust, given options for participation (as opposed to forcing people to speak or contribute), and used creative methods to enable people to surface and process issues and traumas in thoughtful ways.

LESSON Where possible, compliance and reporting focused MEL processes should be replaced by learning and participation focused MEL.

The project has involved both the facilitation of participatory learning spaces – namely outcome harvesting and partner exchange sessions – and what has come to be more “traditional” MEL – ie. lengthy reports from partners to CAFOD (and not the other way around). The former are more fruitful, interesting and meaningful for partners and CAFOD staff alike, while the latter add little value. More efforts should be put into creating space for emergent learning and creative adaptation based on meaningful collaboration (as opposed to reporting).

LESSON Working across programmes which are often siloed can enable meaningful interactions, solidarity and learning.

There have been many points of comparison and learning which have been useful for CAFOD staff and partners. For instance, programmes face similar challenges relating to safety and security of partners and participants, are likely to have to address mental health problems and support trauma-informed processes, and face intersecting humanitarian, peacebuilding and development needs. Cross-regional programmes can allow for better support to partners and also contribute to weaving webs of global solidarity.



Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed for CAFOD and for external actors (in particular those supporting development, peacebuilding and relief efforts). They are based on the lessons learned through this pilot programme.

Recommendations for CAFOD

Invest in and support monitoring, evaluation and learning processes which are relational, adaptive, participatory and locally led. The capacities of staff and partners should be strengthened to better monitor and evaluate the work. The outcome harvesting trainings supported under this project were a good start, and an area to be further developed in collaboration with partners. Traditional reporting should be removed where it is not externally imposed by donors and replaced by processes which are not projectised, work for partners and focus on identifying impact. Innovative processes for [measuring what matters](#) should be used, which could encompass [everyday peace indicators](#), and innovative story-telling methods. Methods employed under this project, such as outcome harvesting and story-telling through video, should not be separate to MEL but should themselves constitute core MEL processes.

Continue to invest and nurture partnerships, going further to decolonise organisational and cultural practices and embrace more reciprocal and equal ways of working. This means working to decolonise systems and practices and relinquish power in partnerships. It may involve reviewing systems and processes to ensure they are less burdensome, reciprocal and trust-based and supporting partners to become more sustainable in how they operate to avoid dependency on CAFOD. Genuine investments to enable this (such as the purchasing of hard assets, core cost recovery, social enterprise models, community philanthropy approaches etc.), partnership agreements/arrangements which are non-financial and two-way reporting are possible options to advance this.

Support cross-organisational programmes, exchange and learning as a key part of CAFOD's Culture of Encounter. Working across four of CAFOD's programme teams has led to meaningful exchanges and learning (within CAFOD and among partners). These sorts of projects and initiatives should be further developed and supported, and could include more thematic or technical exchanges. The associated organisational roles which are necessary for effective coordination and collaboration should be recognised and factored into plans, workloads and budget.

Support partner-led peacebuilding and integral ecology initiatives, embracing the diversity of understanding and range of initiatives that comes from enabling local leadership and adaptation to local context. The framing of integral ecology has been useful for partners and should continue to guide the work CAFOD supports. The nature of the intersection between conflict and the environment is different from context to context. What is more, partners will be inspired by concepts like integral ecology in their own, different ways. Some will focus more explicitly on their physical environments (such as in the case of Caritas Malakal in South Sudan), and others on psychological elements (such as in Colombia). The diversity and richness of interpretation should be celebrated.

Invest in trauma-informed approaches. Supporting processes to address trauma and create conditions for care, resilience and joy are essential to peacebuilding. While unaddressed trauma can fuel mistrust and undermine peace efforts, supporting people to overcome trauma, confronting painful memories and experiences, can enable healing and reconciliation. Given that partners face the need to integrate psycho-social support into their work, CAFOD should invest in this by offering ongoing training and support to staff and partners, sharing lessons and developing expertise.

Recommendations for civil society actors and duty bearers

Foster, strengthen and invest in solidarity-based genuine partnerships, moving at the speed of trust. Investing in relationships and building trust takes time. To invest in partnerships built on solidarity and mutual self-help may also involve developing (or changing) processes and cultures in institutions and organisations to enable genuine, trust-based and reciprocal partnerships to grow and be nurtured. Spaces should be created to explore similarities in social struggles and between contexts.

Fund and resource initiatives at the intersection between environment and peace. This includes initiatives which integrate peace and conflict issues into environmental, nature conservation, and climate justice and finance action. It may involve sharing learning, carrying out research and developing practical tools to this end. Integral ecology may be able to offer a useful framing for this work. In bringing a different lens through which to see problems, it can unlock solutions.

Give quality funding which is responsible and respectful. This means providing funding which is predictable, flexible, and multi-year, allowing organisations to plan effectively and respond more efficiently. Respecting the time and efforts of organisations, reporting requirements should be streamlined and coordinated so that staff are not faced with multiple templates they must adapt to. Reporting requirements should also be proportionate and funding parameters and processes should be adapted to context.

Support and invest in locally led peacebuilding. While there are challenges to understanding and demonstrating the impact of local peacebuilding, the outcomes highlighted in this report provide some evidence of its impact and value and should serve as inspiration to continue supporting meaningful action even in situations where the broader conflict context feels stuck and impossible to influence. It is in these times that local peacebuilding is crucial and can give meaning, sustenance and fuel to individual and community resilience.

When working in complex and highly volatile political and conflict situations, adopt adaptive strategies which involve engagement at different levels. Often the strategies implemented in highly dynamic or volatile contexts will be a mix of planned and emergent strategies. Working at different levels, from community-led campaigns, to collaborations with locally influential actors like teachers, to engaging duty bearers can all be effective approaches (depending on the contextual possibilities and openings).

Work closely with local institutions which are deeply embedded in communities. These collaborations can be immensely meaningful and useful to working in ways which are adapted and sensitive to context. CAFOD and partners have worked in particular with faith-based and religious institutions, which has enabled deep connection with local communities and sustainability of interventions.

Support youth as change agents. The potential and capacities of youth to make changes in their communities and to break cycles of violence has been key across all four of the countries where the project has been implemented. Youth can benefit greatly from skills training, as well as peer mentoring and exchange. When given the space and resources to develop and roll out their own initiatives, they develop their leadership skills and confidence and become powerful advocates for the pursuit of peace and environmental and social justice.



This learning review has revealed insights into both how to support local civil society actors and the communities they represent to positively transform their environments in a context of armed conflict (in particular through an integral ecology lens), as well as the outcomes which can emerge from such efforts.

The project has had significance and value for the young people it has engaged, many of whom are transformed as a result and have changed their behaviours in order to act more responsibly, in tune and in peace with their environments and with others that also inhabit them. They have also influenced others to improve their environments – their families and communities, as well as duty bearers where there have been openings and opportunities to do so.

The wider political and social contexts around them have got worse. And the partners and participants have not been able to impact many of the wider dynamics in these contexts, such as Israel's extreme violence perpetrated against Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territory, and territorial disputes based on decades of conflict in Colombia.

But in these dire situations, pockets of hope can be found and lives can be improved. People can take back some control of their lives and exercise their right to their land by cultivating it and caring for it. They can improve the environments in which they live. And they can keep momentum alive in contexts and times when achieving bigger change is not possible. The capacities and skills which have flourished, the sparks of hope ignited, the individual and collective agency which has grown, and the connections and communities woven within the framework of the P&IE Project should serve as inspiration for those involved and others to continue collective struggles to combat poverty, restore dignity and protect nature.



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- 6 Ibid
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- 16 Ibid
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