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LEARNING BRIEF

Owning the Process: Localising Peacebuilding Through Community Structures and Sub-national Institutions

...Insights from the PARTNER Project in Plateau State

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This learning review analyses how community structures, civil society organisations, and the Plateau State Peace Building Agency sustained peacebuilding processes during and after the closure of the USAID-funded PARTNER project. It highlights lessons on ownership, institutionalisation, and the practical realities of localisation in Plateau State.

Key findings

- ▶ **Sub-national peace institutions, when mandated and resourced, offer Nigeria the most sustainable foundation for long-term peacebuilding.** The Plateau model shows that state-led structures can anchor and sustain community mechanisms beyond project cycles.
- ▶ **Community-led peace structures are Nigeria's most consistent early responders in fragile settings.** Structures established (EWMRGs and CBRCs) maintained mediation, vigilance, and incident reporting even without external funding.
- ▶ **CSO–government mentorship accelerates institutional capacity more effectively than traditional training.** WANEP's embedded accompaniment strengthened PSPBA's conflict analysis, programme design, M&E, and internal systems.
- ▶ **Volunteer-based community peace systems are resilient but vulnerable without predictable support.** High motivation exists, but continuity is threatened by limited logistics, transport gaps, and unstable funding.

Recommendations for National Peacebuilding Programming

- ▶ **Establish or formalise peacebuilding agencies or coordination units in all states.** States without such structures should create peace agencies, peace desks, or equivalent platforms that institutionalise community peace mechanisms.
- ▶ **Integrate community peace structures into state and national peace frameworks.** EWMRGs and CBRCs should be formally recognised, linked to state agencies, and connected to national EWER systems through harmonised SOPs.
- ▶ **Adopt structured CSO–government mentorship as a national capacity-building standard.** The WANEP–PSPBA model should inform national guidelines on strengthening state peace institutions.
- ▶ **Create dedicated state budget lines for community peace structures.** States should progressively incorporate community peace architecture into annual workplans, using cost-sharing and incremental financing

1.0 Introduction

Localisation in peacebuilding goes beyond shifting resources closer to communities. It is about ensuring that people closest to conflict, and the institutions that govern them, are the primary architects of solutions. For Nigeria, where conflicts vary widely across states and are often hyper-local in nature, localisation is not simply desirable, it is essential for building peace that lasts. Evidence from across the country continues to show that peace efforts are more sustainable when they are rooted in trusted community structures and supported by sub-national institutions with legitimacy, continuity, and proximity to everyday realities.

The experience from Plateau State is therefore instructive for national peacebuilding programming.

The USAID-funded PARTNER project¹ was abruptly closed following donor funding cuts, creating a real-world test of whether community structures and state institutions could sustain peacebuilding functions without external support. The transition revealed how community platforms, civil society organisations, and a committed state peace agency can reinforce one another to continue peace actions beyond donor timelines. These lessons have relevance far beyond Plateau: they speak directly to the need for every state in Nigeria to strengthen, or establish, mechanisms that anchor

community-led peacebuilding within formal state systems.

This learning review set out to understand three core questions: how community peace structures sustained their work after the abrupt project closure; how the Plateau State Peace Building Agency (PSPBA) absorbed, coordinated, and institutionalised these structures; and what the embedded CSO–government mentorship model, exemplified by WANEP’s accompaniment, reveals about building durable, locally led peace systems.

The review draws on interviews and reflective sessions with PSPBA staff, community representatives from PARTNER intervention sites, and WANEP-Nigeria technical staff, complemented by a desk review of programme documents. Together, these insights illustrate why localisation, when driven by communities and enabled by strong sub-national institutions, offers one of the most viable pathways for strengthening Nigeria’s peace architecture.

2.0 The Case: Plateau State as a Localisation Example

Plateau State offers a practical context for examining localisation in Nigeria’s peacebuilding landscape. Under the USAID-funded PARTNER Project, community-led mechanisms were supported to strengthen early warning, mediation, and collective action in selected communities. The Project worked through existing social structures, youth groups, women’s platforms, traditional leaders, and community volunteers, ensuring

¹ The Peace Action for Rapid and Transformative Nigerian Early Response (PARTNER) project, funded by USAID, was implemented in selected states across Northwest and North Central Nigeria. It aimed to strengthen Early Warning and Early Response

(EWER) by closing gaps between reporting and action and by unifying disparate systems into a coordinated framework. Its vision was to foster collaboration among local, government, civil society, and security stakeholders, with a particular focus on addressing sectarian conflict

that interventions were grounded in local realities.

Two community structures were central to the model: the **Early Warning Monitoring and Reporting Groups (EWMRGs)**, responsible for detecting and reporting emerging tensions, and the **Community-Based Reconciliation Committees (CBRCs)**, which facilitated mediation, dialogue, and community mobilisation. These volunteer-led platforms formed the backbone of local peace efforts during and after the Project.

Plateau State also benefits from having a dedicated sub-national institution, the **Plateau State Peace Building Agency (PSPBA)**, which provides a coordinating framework for community peace structures across the state. PSPBA's presence offers an important example of how localisation can be anchored within state systems, creating an enabling environment for community-driven peacebuilding to take root.

3.0 How Localisation Played Out in Practice

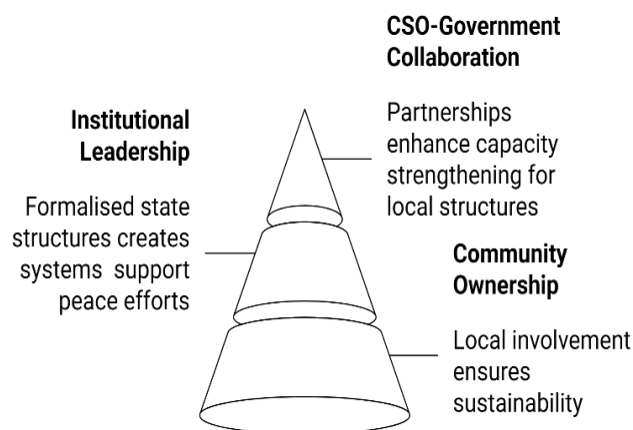


Figure 1 Localisation Ecosystem in Plateau State

3.1 Community-Level Dynamics

Communities across Jos North, Mangu, and Jos South LGAs demonstrated a deep sense of ownership over the PARTNER Project. From the outset, they positioned themselves not as beneficiaries but as **active drivers of peace efforts**, organising rallies, leading sensitisation campaigns, and mediating disputes in ways that reflected their priorities and realities. This level of participation emerged from a process that genuinely valued local voices and placed community-led organisation at the centre rather than external direction.

“Most of the activities were organised by us. PARTNER only came in to support the work we were already doing; mediating disputes, reconciling people, and keeping our communities peaceful.”

~ Key Informant, Community Member

When the project ended abruptly due to funding cuts, communities faced the challenge of sustaining peace initiatives without external support. Many continued by relying on established structures such as the **EWMRGs** and the **CBRCs**. Through these platforms, they maintained mediation, engaged with security actors, and organised awareness activities on issues like substance abuse, early child marriage, and harmful labour practices. Youth groups remained particularly active, using sports for peace (football tournaments) to engage young people at risk of drug use or political manipulation. These efforts continued through religious festivals and periods of heightened tension,

reflecting **strong social cohesion and community resilience**.

“Even after the project ended, we continued our peacebuilding work, organising football matches during the Sallah celebrations, holding monthly meetings, and working closely with neighbouring communities to prevent tensions from escalating.”

~Key Informant, Community Leader

However, the experience was not uniform. Some groups struggled to maintain activities because of **limited financial and logistical support**, revealing the inherent vulnerability of volunteer-driven systems. Activities requiring transport, materials, or coordination across wider areas proved difficult to sustain. This uneven continuity underscores a deeper lesson: **motivation and ownership are powerful, but they cannot fully replace the enabling role of institutional support**.

The patterns observed across communities offer important insights for Nigeria’s localisation agenda. Peace efforts continued most effectively where community structures enjoyed legitimacy, internal cohesion, and clear roles. Yet resilience was strongest when these community mechanisms were connected to broader systems of support. The Plateau experience illustrates that localisation thrives when **community ownership is paired with light, predictable institutional reinforcement**, rather than leaving volunteers to shoulder the burden alone. Community-led peacebuilding is capable and impactful, but its long-term

sustainability depends on the presence of **sub-national structures that recognise, coordinate, and backstop local efforts**.

3.2 Sub-national Institutional Leadership

For PSPBA, the transition from the PARTNER Project to full state responsibility represented a critical test of localisation. When donor funding ended, the Agency stepped in to provide continuity, demonstrating the importance of sub-national leadership in sustaining community peace structures. This moment revealed both PSPBA’s readiness to assume ownership and the pressures placed on state institutions when external support recedes.

A major milestone came in August 2025, when PSPBA formally adopted all community structures established under the PARTNER Project². This decision transformed EWMRGs and CBRCs from temporary project mechanisms into official components of the state’s peace architecture, with plans to integrate them into existing Community Peace Architecture Forums (CPAFs). This formalisation created a single, coherent platform for regular engagements, early warning escalation, and community-level dialogue, an important step toward

“From the design phase to the implementation phase of the PARTNER project, the Plateau State Peace Building Agency has been present. Hence, management and programme staff were aware of the sustainability component from the onset, and this made it easier for the Agency to take ownership when the project closed.”

~Key Informant, PPBA Staff

2: PSPBA (2025) PSPBA Officially Takes Over ‘PARTNER’ Structures in 3 LGAs from WANEP, Plateaupeacebuilding.org. Available at: https://plateaupeacebuilding.org/pspba_partner_structure.php (Accessed: 15 September 2025).

institutionalising peacebuilding across the state.

Institutional strengthening followed naturally. PSPBA staff drew on learning from the PARTNER Project, including the Organisational Performance Index, to update documentation practices, improve verification tools, and develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for programme design and reporting. The embedded partnership with WANEP played a pivotal role in building technical capacity, particularly in conflict analysis, programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, and community engagement. Working side by side with WANEP helped the Agency build confidence and internal systems that will outlast individual projects.

Challenges remained. Communication gaps during the closure phase created uncertainty for some community members, and resource constraints continue to limit the Agency's ability to reach all intervention sites consistently. These issues highlight a recurring lesson: **sub-national institutions can sustain peace structures, but predictable support with clearer transition processes are essential.**

PSPBA remains committed to consolidating gains by strengthening early warning, expanding CPAFs, and deepening community capacity, demonstrating that durable peace emerges when state leadership supports, institutionalises, and reinforces locally led structures.

3.3 CSO–Government Collaboration

A key driver of localisation under the PARTNER Project was the collaboration

between WANEP-Nigeria and PSPBA. WANEP's identity as a national civil society network, rooted in over 270 member organisations across Nigeria, positions it uniquely to bridge grassroots realities and formal state structures. Its governance model is deliberately inclusive and community-grounded, ensuring that civil society leadership and local ownership remain central to its work.

The PARTNER Project offered an opportunity to deepen this approach by embedding a WANEP technical staff member directly within PSPBA. This was a significant shift from traditional CSO–government partnerships. Instead of external supervision or short-term training, WANEP adopted an **accompaniment and mentoring model**: working side-by-side with state staff, strengthening systems from within, and ensuring that PSPBA, not the project, remained the primary driver of community engagement. This daily collaboration improved programme design, conflict analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and community mobilisation, while also enhancing internal processes such as documentation, reporting, and verification standards.

“Working hand in hand with WANEP, from programme design to implementation and evaluation, greatly improved organisational capacity and strengthened PSPBA's ability to operate better”

~Key Informant, PSPBA Staff

The mentorship worked because it combined WANEP's civil society reach with structured, practical institutional support. While the embedded officer strengthened PSPBA from within. This created a **single**

localisation ecosystem in which communities, civil society, and the state reinforced one another, rather than operating in parallel.

Staff consistently described the experience as transformative. The partnership raised PSPBA's confidence, exposed staff to best practices in peacebuilding design and evaluation and reinforced the principle that **community stakeholders are active contributors, not passive beneficiaries**. At the same time, challenges such as documentation gaps at community level and disparities in staff welfare were acknowledged, underscoring that even strong models require refinement.

The implications for national programming are clear. **The Plateau experience shows that embedding CSO expertise within state peace institutions can accelerate capacity building, strengthen coordination with community structures, and reduce the fragility that**

emerges when donor projects end abruptly.

This model is particularly relevant for states that lack formal peace agencies or whose institutions are still developing; a structured mentorship approach can help them move toward sustainability more quickly and with greater legitimacy.

Ultimately, the WANEP–PSPBA collaboration demonstrates that localisation is most effective when **CSO mentorship complements state authority** and when government structures are supported, not substituted by civil society networks. This creates durable peace systems in which community actors, CSOs, and sub-national institutions each play their role within a connected, locally led architecture. The model offers a practical template for scaling localisation across Nigeria's peacebuilding programs.



Pictured: Cross-section of participants at the formal adoption of PARTNER structures by PSPBA | **Photo Credit:** PSPBA.

4.0 Cross-Cutting Insights: Enablers and Barriers to Localisation

Insights from PPBA staff and community representatives highlight what supported localisation in practice and what undermined it. The enablers show how WANEP's CSO network, PPBA's adoption of structures, and community motivation combined to advance ownership. The barriers point to structural and resource challenges that threaten continuity and reveal where peacebuilding systems remain fragile.

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Enablers</i>	<i>Barriers</i>
1	WANEP's network model: A broad CSO membership base and embedded mentoring provided structured support to state and community actors, making localisation tangible.	Volunteer fatigue and dependency: Reliance on unpaid actors reduced sustainability, with several groups citing limited financial and moral support as a barrier to continuity.
2	Community ownership and motivation: EWMRGs and CBRCs organised peace rallies, mediations, and awareness campaigns, and many continued activities after the project pause.	Political and financial instability: PPBA acknowledged resource constraints and the difficulty of covering a wide geographic area without stable funding.
3	Sub-national leadership through PPBA: Formal adoption of EWMRGs and CBRCs into Community Peace Architecture Forums (CPAFs) demonstrated government commitment to institutionalisation.	Coordination challenges: Ambiguity between PPBA and national EWER systems created confusion around reporting responsibilities and duplication of efforts.
4	Linking reporting and response: Communities reported incidents to security actors and coordinated vigilance during high-risk periods, which helped prevent escalation.	Inclusion gaps: While women, youth, and traditional leaders were engaged, strategies for persons with disabilities and deeper empowerment for women and youth were limited.
5	Institutional strengthening: PPBA improved internal systems, reporting templates, and SOPs, drawing on lessons from the PARTNER Organisational Performance Index.	Weak closure communication: Staff noted limited formal documentation and uneven communication during project close-out, which created uncertainty at the transition stage.
6	Capacity building across levels: Training and mentoring enhanced conflict analysis, mediation, and negotiation skills. Involving permanent PPBA staff as well as volunteers helped safeguard institutional memory and enabled smoother integration.	Risk of momentum loss post-donor support: The end of external funding posed risks to sustaining peace structures without clear bridging mechanisms or state budget allocations.

Overall, localisation advanced when CSOs, sub-national government, and community structures reinforced one another. The greatest enablers were community motivation, WANEP's mentoring model, and PPBA's formal adoption of structures. The barriers centred on resource limitations, coordination gaps, and the vulnerability of volunteer-driven systems. Sustaining localisation will depend on stable institutional support, consistent inclusion, and ensuring that capacity building extends beyond volunteers to permanent state staff

5.0 Findings

- The Plateau Peacebuilding Agency (PSPBA) has demonstrated that state-level peace infrastructure can drive sustained conflict prevention and early response when adequately supported.
- The embedded accompaniment model with WANEP strengthened PSPBA's technical capacity in conflict analysis, programme design, monitoring and evaluation, and community engagement.
- Local peace structures, including Community Peace Observers and Ward-Level Committees, improved early warning accuracy, local legitimacy, and community ownership.
- The formal adoption of PARTNER structures by PSPBA illustrates how locally driven systems can be institutionalised when political will, technical support, and community participation converge.
- States with peace structures show higher levels of coordination among government, security actors, and civil society, leading to quicker responses to emerging risks.

6.0 Recommendations

- **Communities:** should strengthen early warning groups, participate actively in local dialogue platforms, and maintain continuous links with ward and LGA structures to ensure timely reporting, coordinated responses, and stronger grassroots ownership of peace efforts.
- **Sub-National Actors:** State governments must establish and

formalise peace structures, integrate localisation into planning and budgeting, and progressively align their institutions with a unified national peace architecture supported by predictable annual funding.

- **Civil Society Organisations:** should deepen mentoring support to state institutions, strengthen joint learning platforms, and build long-term partnerships that improve analysis, coordination, and technical capacity across Nigeria's evolving peace and localisation systems.
- **International Partners:** should invest in establishing state peace structures, support harmonised state–national coordination frameworks, and prioritise long-term institutional funding that strengthens Nigeria's peace architecture in line with regional and ECOWAS standards.

7.0 Implications for National Peacebuilding Programming

The Plateau experience provides critical lessons for strengthening peacebuilding across Nigeria. **First, it demonstrates that states without dedicated peace institutions face significant coordination gaps, weak information flows, and fragmented responses to local conflicts.** Establishing state peace agencies or equivalent platforms is therefore essential for ensuring early warning translation into early action and for embedding conflict prevention within state governance systems.

Second, the Plateau model shows that mentoring and accompaniment arrangements are powerful tools for institutional growth. A technically competent CSO working side by side with a

state institution accelerates skills transfer, builds confidence, and improves programme quality. This has strong implications for national programming, suggesting that replication of this model could support states with weaker technical foundations.

Third, the experience highlights the value of localisation as a policy principle. When peacebuilding processes are owned and driven by communities, they enjoy greater legitimacy and sustainability. Institutionalising localisation within federal and state policy frameworks, including peace policies, early warning architectures, and community development plans, will strengthen Nigeria's overall peace ecosystem.

Finally, national stakeholders have clear takeaways. Agencies can leverage Plateau's learning to harmonise state-level approaches, link local structures to national systems, and ensure that early warning from communities leads to coordinated early response at all tiers. The Plateau model offers a practical blueprint for designing integrated national peace architecture.

8.0 Conclusion

The Plateau case shows that localisation is not only viable but also highly effective when supported by strong institutions and committed partners. Subnational peace structures have proven to be essential for sustainability, providing proximity, legitimacy, and contextual understanding needed for meaningful conflict prevention and response. The experience further illustrates that CSO accompaniment can accelerate institutional capacity and help state agencies build robust systems for data gathering, dialogue facilitation, and coordination.

To ensure these gains are replicated nationally, Nigeria requires a unified and coherent peace architecture where state-level structures are fully integrated into national systems. When states adopt locally grounded approaches and receive the right technical support, the country is better positioned to prevent violence, manage tensions, and promote long-term stability.

Acknowledgement

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This report forms part of WANEP-Nigeria's **Research and Knowledge Management commitment**, aimed at strengthening evidence-based peacebuilding practice, deepening learning across , and supporting the development of resilient, community-driven peace architectures in Nigeria.

About WANEP-Nigeria

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP–Nigeria) is a leading peacebuilding organisation that coordinates a network of over 270 civil society organisations across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Through its programmes on Early Warning and Response, Women, Peace and Security, Peace Education, Democracy and Good Governance, WANEP–Nigeria promotes collaborative, evidence-based approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Working closely with government institutions, development partners, and local communities, it strengthens national capacity for dialogue, social cohesion, and sustainable peace across the country.

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