

Local Ownership and Liberal Peacebuilding: From Rhetoric to Practice? Sierra Leone as a Case Study

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"Local ownership" has become probably one the most relevant *mantras* in post-conflict peacebuilding interventions in sub-Saharan Africa. Rhetorically, "local ownership" has to do with the degree of control that locals have in the design and implementation of post-conflict peacebuilding reforms. In practice, however, "local ownership" hides several contradictions and tensions that pose important challenges and dilemmas to post-conflict peacebuilding.

By analyzing the case of Sierra Leone, the paper pretends to deal with three different issues: to explain the relevance of the concept, to analyze the contradictions and tensions, and to discuss the real link between "local ownership" and peacebuilding. With regard to the relevance of the concept, two reasons might explain the prominence of "local ownership". The first one has to do with efficiency (worried by the failure of many post-conflict peacebuilding activities, donors are underlining the need to take into account "local dynamics and values") and the second one with ethics (peace should not be imposed from outside, by outsiders). Secondly, many contradictions and tensions are underlying in the concept itself: there exist different interpretations among the different actors about what "local ownership" is supposed to be, lack of local capacities makes very difficult the participation of the locals, donors are in practice the ones that still decide what to do and who the "owners" are, etc. Finally, the paper will discuss if it is possible to go beyond rhetoric and to put in practice "local ownership" in a country as Sierra Leone.

All in all, the paper wants to contribute to a better understanding of how international and domestic political forces interact in post-conflict situations and what relationship between the two is most likely to be conducive to the goal of sustainable peace.