

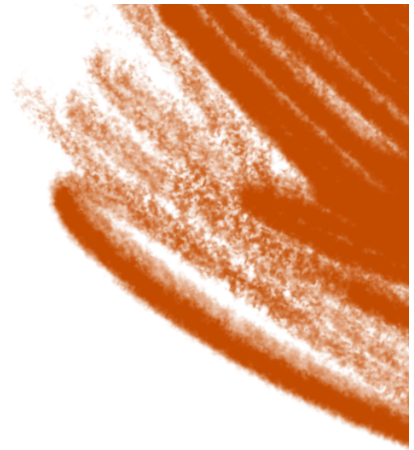
Community-Centred *Peace* Journalism

Advice from Local Peacbuilders to Journalists

by **aidóni**
under the direction
of Méline Laffabry



aidóni



Preface

Journalism shapes how we understand the world. Yet, too often, conflict reporting emphasises violence, division, and sensationalism over depth, context, and the possibilities for peace. As journalists, our responsibility extends beyond simply informing; we must also deepen understanding, provide historical and social context, and amplify voices that are too often overlooked.

This guide is the result of a conversation with peacebuilders and journalists. It is not a rigid handbook but a framework—one that can be adapted, challenged, and improved over time. Every conflict is unique, shaped by complex and shifting factors, and we acknowledge the limits of any single approach. What we offer here is a tool to spark reflection, encourage more nuanced storytelling, and support journalists in covering conflicts and peace efforts in ways that better serve communities.

At **aidóni**, we believe in journalism that goes beyond the frontline—one that captures diverse voices, explains complexities, and explores solutions. This guide is part of our ongoing commitment to doing better and helping others do the same. It was shaped by insights from those on the ground, incorporating the experiences of people navigating conflict and working towards peace.

The name **aidóni** (eye-DOH-nee) comes from the Greek word for ‘nightingale,’ a bird often associated with resilience, hope, and storytelling. In many cultures, nightingales are symbols of voices that persist even in the darkest times. We chose this name because we believe journalism should do the same—persist in telling stories that matter, even when they are difficult, and strive to illuminate pathways to peace.

This guide reflects the insights gained from our participation in **PeaceCon 2024: Status Quo No More: Building Peace in the Time of Rising Violent Conflict**, an annual conference organised by the Alliance for Peacebuilding¹ and the United States Institute of Peace², which brings together peacebuilders, researchers, policymakers, and journalists from around the world. At PeaceCon 2024, **aidóni** led the workshop “**(Story) Telling Your Peace: Crafting a Collaborative Guide on Reframing Peacebuilding Journalism**”, where we engaged in discussions with peace practitioners and academics on how to improve reporting on conflict and peacebuilding initiatives. The workshop reinforced the urgency of shifting how conflict and peace are covered, and provided valuable perspectives that helped shape this guide. The 12 recommendations presented in this document are born out of the conversations and reflections shared during that session³.

However, what is missing from this document are the voices of the people most affected by conflict, as well as those directly benefiting from peace initiatives. As a young organisation working with volunteers and limited resources, our capacity to collect and incorporate these voices is constrained, but this is something we are committed to improving. In the future, we will conduct interviews with those directly affected by conflict and with other professionals. These interviews will be published on our website, ensuring that this guide remains an evolving resource that stays connected to the lived realities of those on the ground.

Despite the absence of these voices for now, we believe that the results of our workshop at PeaceCon 2024 provide good starting points for this conversation. We hope that these initial insights spark a broader dialogue, and help to lay the foundation for more inclusive and comprehensive conflict and peace reporting.

Let’s keep pushing journalism forward—together.

In solidarity and hope,

Méline Laffabry

Founder & CEO, **aidóni**

¹ For more details about the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) see: <https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/>.

² For more details about the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) see: <https://www.usip.org/>.

³ For more information about our workshop, you can refer to the sub-section **More information about our workshop** in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 35 of this guide.

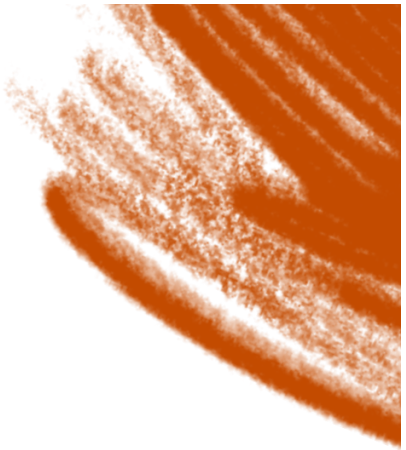
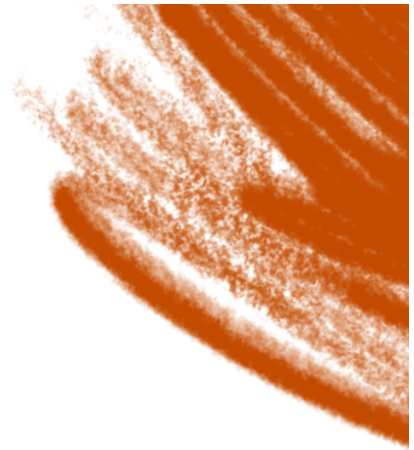


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Introduction

Journalism holds immense power in shaping the narratives that define our understanding of conflict, peace, and the people caught in between.

Stories of war, displacement, and social unrest often dominate headlines, yet they often lack the depth and nuance needed to inform the public. Coverage tends to focus on violence and divisions, overshadowing the quieter, steadfast efforts that contribute to reconciliation and peacebuilding. This imbalance distorts public perception and neglects the human stories and grassroots initiatives driving change on the ground.

With this guide, **aidóni** aims to challenge that narrow focus. It is a resource designed to help journalists rethink how we cover conflict and peace — not by ignoring its realities, but by expanding the narratives we tell. Journalism can do more than document violence; it can illuminate possibilities, provide historical and social context, and amplify the voices of those striving for solutions.

This guide moves beyond conventional reporting by adopting a decolonial, livelihood and people-first perspective; prioritising the voices of those most affected by conflict and centring on human stories. It equips journalists at all levels with practical tools and adaptable frameworks to tell nuanced, inclusive, and solution-oriented stories. By fostering empathy and highlighting local peacebuilding efforts, journalism can transcend biases, amplify marginalised perspectives, and create narratives that unite rather than divide.

Crucially, this guide was shaped in collaboration with peacebuilders — those working every day to mediate tensions, rebuild trust, and create sustainable solutions. Their expertise and lived experiences offer invaluable insights into what communities need from journalism.

If we, as journalists, want to better serve people, we must first listen to them.

This document is not a rigid set of rules but a flexible framework meant to be adapted to different contexts. It provides key concepts, practical tools, and

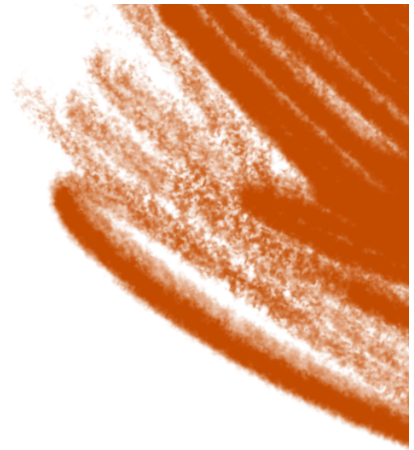
concrete recommendations to help journalists approach conflict and peace reporting with greater depth and responsibility. Whether you are a reporter in the field, an editor shaping newsroom priorities, or an educator training future journalists, you can use this guide as:

- A reference for incorporating more context and diversity into conflict stories.
- A tool for self-reflection and professional development.
- A resource for facilitating discussions, workshops, and training sessions.

In the following sections, we define key concepts, explore the intersection of journalism and peacebuilding, and present recommendations developed during our collaborative workshop at PeaceCon 2024.

Alongside practical tools, examples, and resources, this guide serves as both a challenge and a support system for journalists, editors, and educators committed to improving conflict reporting.

In the appendices, you will find additional resources, exercises, and a practical workshop to help implement these ideas. This is an ongoing conversation, and we welcome new perspectives, critiques, and contributions.



Mission Statement & Objectives

Mission

aidóni's guide ***Community-Centred Peace Journalism: Advice from Local Peacebuilders to Journalists*** seeks to address the critical need for more comprehensive and constructive coverage of peace efforts globally. Journalism plays a key role in informing societies about ongoing conflicts and shaping public opinion, yet it often lacks depth and sustained attention when discussing the initiatives focused on peacebuilding and reconciliation. This guide, grounded in the recommendations and insights of peacebuilders who work in the field, aims to change that by equipping journalists with the tools and frameworks to report on peace with the same dedication and rigour applied to conflict.

Our guide recognises that traditional journalism tends to mainly see and report on violence and escalation, overlooking the slow, steady work of peace. This imbalance can obscure the full picture of conflicts, leaving audiences with incomplete narratives that miss opportunities for empathy, understanding, and resolution. At **aidóni**, our mission is to connect journalists and agents of change through stories that place people's voices at the heart of reporting, empowering citizens to support and create democratic, feminist, decolonial and anti-racist societies. In line with this mission, this guide advocates for a shift towards peace-focused and constructive journalism that highlights resilience, grassroots efforts, and local solutions.

Developed with a decolonial perspective, this guide includes frameworks adaptable to various contexts, with an emphasis on diverse voices and inclusive narratives. By focusing on conflict resolution, community healing, and human stories, we seek to counter biases, reduce stereotyping, and foster empathy across audiences. This approach encourages journalists to move beyond the elite perspectives that can dominate media and instead centre the experiences of those most affected by conflicts and those working towards peace.

This guide will serve as a practical tool for journalists at all levels, from those new to reporting on peace initiatives to seasoned correspondents looking to deepen

their understanding. It is compact, to be read in a short time-frame, but is also valuable as a reference tool to be accessed when needed. This guide includes practical resources, case studies, and recommendations that challenge journalists to consider the human impact of crises and the challenging work of peacebuilding. By questioning biases, embracing complexity, and committing to long-term coverage, journalists can better serve communities worldwide, illuminating paths to peace and empowering societies to envision a more just and inclusive future.



Objectives

1. Empowering Journalists and Storytellers with Decolonial and Livelihoods-First Perspectives

This guide is designed for journalists at every stage of their career, from experienced reporters to budding journalists and citizen storytellers in conflict zones. By promoting a decolonial approach, we encourage journalists to challenge dominant narratives, break away from one-size-fits-all perspectives, and honour local voices and perspectives.

2. Centring Community Voices and Lived Experiences

Rooted in the experience of peacebuilders and community practitioners, the guide prioritises the experiences of people directly affected by conflict and peace processes. It provides tools and approaches to ensure that their voices and stories remain central, creating journalism that genuinely represents those it seeks to serve.

3. Challenging Biases and Cultivating Empathy

Following the feedback from peacebuilding experts, this guide includes exercises and examples to help journalists recognise and address their own biases. By approaching conflict narratives with empathy, it supports reporters in moving beyond one-sided stories and instead producing balanced, people-first accounts.

4. A Flexible Framework for Diverse Contexts and Adaptable Approaches

aidóni's guide provides a versatile framework, inspired by the diversity of experiences shared during the collaborative workshop we hosted at PeaceCon 2024. Adaptable to various regions and contexts, it enables journalists to tell peacebuilding stories that signify the local context, while resonating globally and upholding universal standards of inclusivity and accuracy.

5. Encouraging Civic Engagement and Inspiring Change

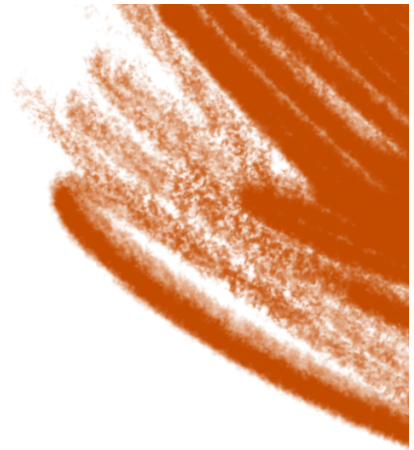
By highlighting stories of resilience and collaboration, **aidóni**'s guide promotes constructive journalism that fosters civic engagement and gives communities agency to take inspiration from peace initiatives around the world. This guide aims to motivate communities facing similar challenges to adopt positive and grassroots-led actions.

6. Fostering Community Unity and Inclusivity

Informed by the insights of peacebuilders, this resource promotes journalism that unites rather than divides. **aidóni** believes in the power of storytelling to build common ground, create solidarity, and support collective action for peace across diverse communities.

With its foundations in practitioners' insights, **aidóni's** guide ***Community-Centred Peace Journalism: Advice from Local Peacebuilders to Journalists*** is a resource that not only informs, but transforms journalism, by prioritising empathy, inclusivity, and decolonial perspectives, building a foundation for shared understanding and lasting peace.





Definitions

Before we dive into the recommendations and tools, it is crucial to establish a shared understanding of the key terms and concepts that will guide this conversation. Definitions set the foundation for the discussions ahead, ensuring clarity and consistency as we navigate complex ideas.

Journalism

Journalism is the practice of collecting, analysing, and disseminating news and information to the public through various mediums, such as print, broadcast, and digital platforms. It serves as a cornerstone of democracy by informing citizens, holding power to account, and fostering public discourse. Ethical journalism emphasises accuracy, impartiality, and fairness, while ensuring that the information presented is reliable and thoroughly fact-checked. It aims to empower individuals to make informed decisions and understand the complexities of their world. Not all news sources practice ethical journalism and all sources must be evaluated by an informed public for true impartiality and fairness.

Solutions Journalism

Solutions journalism is a rigorous and evidence-based approach to reporting on responses to social problems. It seeks to complement traditional problem-focused journalism by investigating how solutions work, examining their effectiveness, limitations, and broader implications. This approach includes detailed analysis of what can be learned from specific interventions, inspiring audiences and fostering constructive engagement. Solutions journalism avoids overly optimistic narratives, instead, it focuses on the critical evaluation of efforts to address societal challenges, offering a nuanced and practical perspective on progress.

Peace Journalism

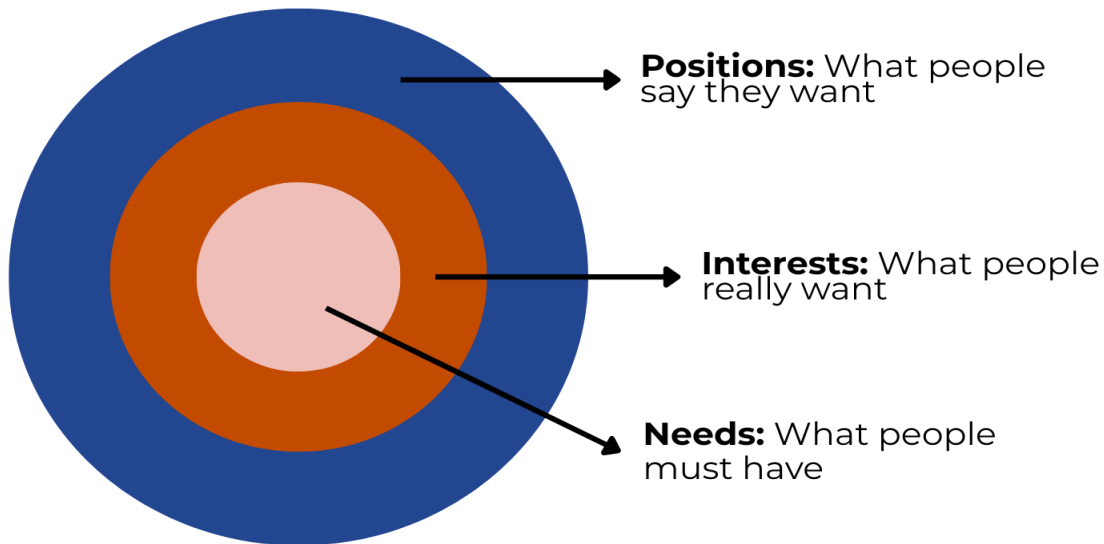
Peace journalism is a reporting approach that prioritises non-violent solutions and constructive dialogue in conflict situations. It challenges traditional conflict reporting, which often sensationalises violence or perpetuates stereotypes, and begins with the end result in mind: sustainable peace between all players in a conflict. Peace journalism focuses on understanding the causes and dynamics of the conflict, amplifying underrepresented voices, and exploring opportunities for resolution. It aims to equip audiences with insights into pathways for reconciliation and sustainable post-conflict peace, while minimising harm to those involved in the conflict.

Conflict-Sensitive Reporting

Conflict-Sensitive Reporting (CSR) is an approach to journalism that prioritises ethical responsibility in how conflicts are covered. It acknowledges the role media plays in shaping public perceptions and influencing conflict dynamics. Journalists practising this approach carefully write their stories carefully to avoid exacerbating tensions, misrepresenting groups or perpetuating biases. CSR ensures stories are fair, accurate, and sensitive to all stakeholders, emphasising the need to examine the root causes of conflicts and highlighting the experiences of those directly affected. While not actively promoting peace, CSR aims to inform without escalating hostilities, helping audiences grasp the complexity of conflicts responsibly.



The Conflict Onion



To improve CSR, it is important to acknowledge the experiences and actions of those directly affected by conflict. Generally they reflect the positions, interests and needs (PIN) of those directly involved and affected by the conflict. A PIN approach also enables a better people-centred approach to stories and CSR.⁴

Trauma-Informed Reporting

Trauma-Informed Reporting (TIR) recognises the profound emotional and psychological impacts that traumatic events can have on interviewees, audiences, and journalists themselves. This approach prioritises empathy, ethical considerations, and sensitivity when engaging with survivors, witnesses, or individuals affected by trauma. It seeks to acknowledge the trauma of all players and stakeholders as valid in a spirit of respect, apart from any preconceived narrative of winners versus losers. Key principles of TIR include obtaining informed consent, avoiding triggering past trauma through careful questioning, and respecting the autonomy and dignity of sources. Trauma-informed journalists also consider the potential emotional impact of their stories on audiences and practice self-care to address the personal toll of covering traumatic events.

⁴ Visual Source: *The peacebuilding practitioner* (2021), in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 36.

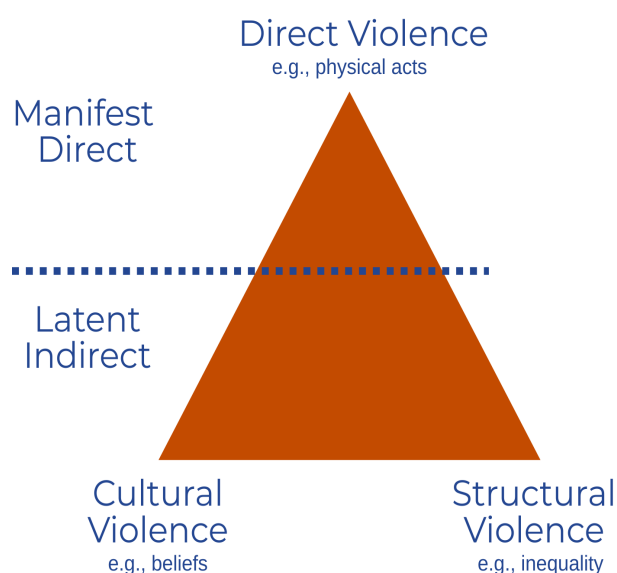
Negative Peace⁵

Negative Peace refers to the absence of direct violence, wherein active conflict has stopped but the deeper causes of tension remain unresolved. While it prevents immediate harm, this state often fails to address issues like inequality, mistrust, or systemic problems that can reignite conflict in the future. Because it does not tackle the root causes of violence, Negative Peace is fragile and temporary, offering a pause rather than a lasting solution to conflict. Negative peace was coined by Johan Galtung, founder of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, and considered the founder of the discipline of peace studies.

Positive Peace⁶

Positive Peace goes beyond simply ending violence; it focuses on addressing the systemic issues and inequalities that threaten human dignity. By tackling the root causes of conflict — such as injustice, discrimination, and unequal access to resources — it works to build fair and sustainable systems that foster lasting harmony. Unlike Negative Peace, which halts immediate violence, Positive Peace creates the conditions for a just, inclusive, and enduring peace that prevents future conflict from arising. It was also theorised by Johan Galtung.

Understanding violence is essential to understanding and ultimately building peace. According to Johan Galtung, the causes of violence can be direct, structural, or cultural, and they often influence one another⁷. While addressing direct and visible violence (e.g., physical or verbal) can lead to a form of peace, known as negative peace, it does not address the root causes of conflict which are often invisible. Cultural violence arises when aspects of culture or belief systems are used to justify violence (e.g., ideologies, religious wars). Structural violence results from systemic or institutional oppression (e.g. discriminatory laws). Therefore, achieving positive peace requires addressing the root causes of violence in all its forms while also improving social, economic and political conditions.⁸



⁵ For more details see: Galtung, J. (1996), in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 33.

⁶ For more details see: Galtung, J. (1996), in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 33.

⁷ For more details see: Galtung, J. (2004), in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 33.

⁸ Visual Source: Dos Santos Luciano, J. (2023) in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 36.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a long-term process aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and creating lasting peace. It focuses on building systems, tools, and relationships that enable conflicts to be resolved through dialogue and non-violent strategies, rather than escalating into violence. Recognising that conflict is a natural part of human interaction, peacebuilding seeks to prevent harm by fostering mutual respect, trust, and collaboration amongst all parties involved.

Unlike Peacekeeping, which involves short-term actions to halt violence, Peacebuilding works to establish the foundations for a fair and sustainable peace. It emphasises proactive efforts to create systems that promote understanding and ensure conflicts can be resolved peacefully, both in the present and the future.

Conflict

Conflict is defined as a disagreement or clash between individuals, groups, or nations, often caused by differing needs, values, goals, or perspectives. While conflict can take many forms — such as personal, social, or economic — political conflict specifically revolves around competing political interests, ideologies, or power dynamics. These disputes may centre on governance, resource allocation, policy priorities, or issues of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, or culture. Political conflict can manifest in peaceful forms, like debates and protests, or escalate into violent confrontations, including riots, uprisings, civil wars, or international disputes. The outcomes of conflict often depend on how it is managed, potentially leading to policy shifts, regime changes, or prolonged instability.

Post-Conflict Society

A post-conflict society is a society that has experienced armed conflict and which is facing challenges and difficulties that can vary over time on a case-by-case basis. These challenges are generally economical, political, geopolitical, social and cultural. In this context, the transition towards a positive peace is not completely achieved. This is a fragile and dynamic phase, which can take decades wherein change creates resurging violence or a sustainable transformation process throughout society. This does not only involve the very area where the conflict and violence took place but can affect neighbouring countries, the region and the world, and all categories of society.

Victim or Survivor?

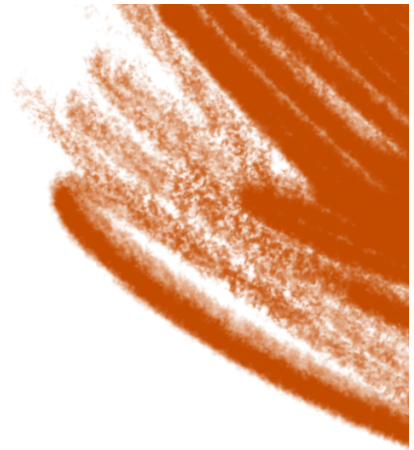
Both the terms “victim” and “survivor” describe individuals or groups who have experienced harm often in the context of conflict, violence, or systemic injustice. The term “victim” highlights the immediate suffering and powerlessness of those affected, emphasising the impact of harm inflicted upon them. Conversely, the term “survivor” reflects resilience and the ability to endure or recover, focusing on personal agency and processing trauma. The choice of which term to use often depends on the perspective being emphasised, the way the individual and/or the community identify, and the writer’s point of view or aim.

Agent of Change

At **aidóni**, we define an Agent of Change as anyone who actively participates in society, who fights for and believes in a more egalitarian world. Sometimes mentioned as change maker or activist, we prefer the use of a more inclusive term. Rather than defining them by a status, we prefer to define them by their engagement. This includes anyone trying their best to fully understand a situation before coming-up with creative solutions, such as activists, social workers, NGO workers, educators, artists, or any person taking an active stance to implement and inspire change in society.

FACING the
TRUTH of
PAST + Present
VIOLENCE





The Role of Journalism in Peacebuilding: Beyond Reporting to Reconciliation

The Power of Storytelling in Conflict and Peace

The intersection between peacebuilding and journalism lies in the power of storytelling to shape perceptions, bridge divides, and foster dialogue in societies that experience conflict. Rather than defining peace, we focus on refining the tools of storytelling to centre people at the heart of their stories. Academics themselves as well as peacebuilders, or mediators have different definitions of peace.

Generally, journalists do more than simply report events — they frame narratives, amplify marginalised voices, and challenge entrenched stereotypes, all of which can either fuel or help heal conflicts. What we believe is at stake amidst rising competing agendas behind media agencies is the sensitivities towards the people themselves; beyond the “cause of the collective” or the nations involved. We aspire to build media coverage that is conflict-sensitive and inclusive — one that fosters understanding, creates space for reconciliation, and transforms journalism into a tool for peacebuilding. Our tools are ever-evolving; they require constant refinement and adaptation. As journalists committed to centring people in their stories, we recognise that as stories evolve, we must evolve with them.

Peacebuilding goes beyond merely ending violence — it requires transforming the social, political, and economic structures that give rise to conflict. Sustainable peace demands structural change to address inequalities and power imbalances. The absence of violence does not equate to the presence of justice and equality. Peacebuilding also involves challenging dominant narratives, fostering inclusive community engagement to enhance contextual understanding, and ensuring that local communities have agency in their own reconstruction efforts. Above all, it is crucial to first understand what peace means to the communities involved and how they understand their situation, the conflict, and the solutions.

Journalism as a Tool for Peace

Journalism contributes to peacebuilding processes in different ways, some of which are:

- **Narrative Framing:** By choosing which voices to amplify and which contexts to highlight, journalists can either deepen divisions or build bridges. Narrative Framing encourages conflict reporting that prioritises human stories—focusing on needs, struggles, and aspirations—rather than merely reiterating problems or political narratives.
- **Countering Misinformation:** In conflict situations, inaccurate or sensationalised reporting can exacerbate tensions. Misinformation can be a tool for political control. Emphasising fact-checking and context-sensitive storytelling helps to dispel myths, reduce fear, and foster informed public debate.
- **Empowering Local Communities:** By engaging directly with local sources and ensuring that those most affected by conflict have a voice, journalism can promote grassroots solutions and support local peace initiatives. This approach not only enhances the credibility of the news but also fosters a shared understanding of the root causes of the conflict, placing people at the heart of the narrative.
- **Facilitating Dialogue:** Quality journalism creates opportunities for dialogue between conflicting parties. When reporters present balanced and nuanced perspectives, they invite audiences to consider multiple sides of an issue, which is essential for developing sustainable peace.
- **Introducing Solutions:** Although most journalists are neither humanitarian nor development practitioners, their investigation of sources and actors can highlight solutions, bringing more people or resources to the table to support negotiation or justice mechanisms. Additionally, their work informs the public about these solutions, equipping citizens with greater understanding of potential pathways to resolving the conflict.

Misinformation plays a critical role in escalating tensions during conflict coverage, as it can deepen divisions, spread propaganda, or merely discredit peace efforts. The biases or passive language in narratives about ethnic or political violence can dehumanise parties, and lead to aggression. Reports including such narratives are used to manipulate public opinion or obstruct peace negotiations. This is actually how misinformation forms. Misinformation hinders peacebuilding by reinforcing stereotypes, eroding trust in institutions, and fuelling radicalisation and resentment — often through propaganda. This can legitimise further targeted violence. In humanitarian crises, falsehoods and fallacious claims can delay aid efforts, endanger public health, and cause fraud—or merely hold aid from people who need it the most.

To see how these dynamics play out in real conflicts, we turn to two case studies: *Sudan* and *Iraq*. The choice of these two cases aims to illustrate how the framing of narratives can either undermine social cohesion or create new divisions within the same nation—potentially sowing the seeds of conflict or exacerbating existing tensions. These examples demonstrate how the media is employed to legitimise a politicised or securitised image of "The Other," fostering prejudice or normalising political actions that, as history later reveals, have led to the killing of innocents.

Sudan: Social Media as a Double-Edged Sword in Conflict

The Darfur conflict, which began in 2003, was rooted in the resistance of ethnic minority rebels (SLM and JEM) against the state's repression and discrimination. Government-backed Janjaweed militias, later rebranded as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2013, committed atrocities, later declared genocide⁹ by US officials. In April 2019, nationwide protests against dictator Omar al-Bashir erupted, triggered by the country's economic collapse and authoritarianism. The military (Sudanese Armed Forces, SAF) and RSF jointly ousted al-Bashir but soon clashed over power-sharing, leading to the April 2023 SAF-RSF war, which still continues today. The RSF, though nominally part of Sudan's transitional government post-2019, retained autonomy and ties to foreign actors (e.g., Russia's Wagner Group), and took part in proxy violence. They have also been funded by other regional governments. And albeit rebranded, its tactics mirror earlier Janjaweed campaigns, including ethnically targeted violence in Darfur and Khartoum.

Social media played a pivotal role in Sudan's revolution echoing other recent revolutions and social movements during which citizen journalism had critical agency.. During the 2019 protests, citizens used hashtags like #BlueForSudan to organise and bypass state censorship, sharing live streams of demonstrations and attracting global attention. However, post-2019, both the SAF and RSF weaponised social media to spread disinformation, inciting hatred and resentment. Pro-military accounts spread anti-protest propaganda demonising protestors, while



⁹ Source: Al Jazeera and News Agencies (2025) "US says Sudan's RSF Committed Genocide, Announces Sanctions on Leaders". Al Jazeera, 7th January 2025. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/7/us-says-sudans-rsf-committed-genocide-announces-sanctions-on-leaders>.

RSF-linked networks promoted conspiracy theories to legitimise their rule. Under al-Bashir, state media denied Darfur atrocities (e.g. dismissing genocide claims as “Western lies”). After 2019, independent outlets like *Radio Dabanga* documented abuses, which brought to light the criminal record of RSF in the country.

Social media played a crucial role in empowering citizen journalism, allowing people to share their stories amid the turmoil. While it was also exploited by state-backed media, it provided a platform for individuals to voice their experiences of killings, rape, looting, displacement, and the genocide they endured.

Iraq: Media Narratives and the Legitimisation of War

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was heavily legitimised by Western media, through amplification of government claims about Iraq possessing weapons of mass destruction and ties to Al-Qaeda—both of which were later debunked. Some media outlets and TV networks amplified George W. Bush’s administration rhetoric, with phrases like “mushroom cloud” and “axis of evil”, which stoked public fear and entrenched a dehumanised depiction of Arab and Muslim identities. In a Joint Session of Congress and the American People speech following 9/11, President George W. Bush said:

*“Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”*¹⁰

In such a speech, George W. Bush depicted “The Other”, who is also part of the American social fabric, as uncivilised, anti-democratic, or anything but “like Americans.” Iraqis were often depicted as either passive victims or potential terrorists, stripping them of agency and reinforcing negative stereotypes.¹¹

Post-9/11 islamophobic tropes conflated Arab identity with extremism, sidelining Iraqi voices and obscuring the war’s humanitarian toll as this narrative legitimised the “war on terror.” This justified a war that killed hundreds of thousands, destabilised the region and entrenched anti-Arab racism globally. Rather than fostering peace, the media’s portrayal of Iraq and Iraqis in this conflict normalised militarism and intervention; eroded trust in institutions, and deepened cultural divides. It also had an effect on the social fabric of American society, leading to

¹⁰ Quotation Source: George W. Bush 20th September 2001 speech. Available at: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

¹¹ For more details see: Sahlane, A. (2022), in our section **Resources to go further**, p. 35. Especially “interpretive dominance” that was inextricably structured in hegemony and social control.

racism and Islamophobia, along with increased scrutiny and surveillance toward Muslim Americans.

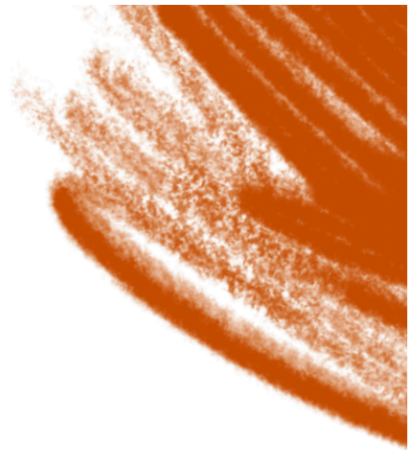
Every story can be told in a different way, but in this section we ask: “where were the people in the coverage?”. This narrative not only served to legitimise military intervention, but also reinforced negative stereotypes about Arabs, portraying them as inherently violent, backward, and in need of Western governance. Such biased reporting helped create a climate of fear and xenophobia that amplified support for the war. Ultimately, this fuelled animosity and deep-seated prejudice, translated into racism and xenophobia, rather than fostering dialogue or peace.

What These Case Studies Teach Us - Key Takeaways

Both *Sudan* and *Iraq* show how the media, particularly journalism's framing of narratives, can either amplify conflict or contribute to peacebuilding. In Sudan, social media was a tool for both mobilisation and disinformation, illustrating the power of citizen journalism in conflict zones. Meanwhile, the media's role in Iraq demonstrates how unchecked narratives can normalise violence, deepen divisions, and entrench stereotypes.

In both cases, we see that journalistic practices must be sensitive, context-aware, and committed to fostering dialogue.

Whether through challenging misinformation, amplifying local voices, or providing a nuanced view of the conflict, journalism has the potential to either escalate or ease tensions—making it an invaluable tool for peacebuilding when used responsibly.



Recommendations

These insights, developed during our collaborative workshop at PeaceCon 2024, offer practical strategies to improve conflict reporting. They are designed to inspire reflection, spark new approaches, and guide journalists in telling more inclusive, solution-oriented stories. It is important to remember that this is a framework, and each situation is unique—therefore these recommendations should be adapted to fit the specific context you are reporting on. When in doubt, you can always turn to the communities you serve or report on for insight and advice.



Capture Diverse Perspectives

1 - Talk to everyone

Include individuals directly or indirectly affected by the conflict, not just political and military leaders.

2 - Amplify marginalised voices

Ensure representation of marginalised communities.

3 - Balance perspectives

Avoid oversimplification and encourage critical thinking.

4 - Present community interests

Highlight the broader perspectives and priorities of the communities involved.

Build Context and Clarity

5 - Explain the “why”

Provide historical context to help audiences understand the conflict's roots.

6 - Fact-check rigorously

Use reliable data to support your reporting.

7 - Demystify the process

Explain who is involved, how they are chosen, and key timelines or milestones in the peacebuilding process.

8 - Clarify complexities

Break down technical terms or processes into simple language, making the story accessible to a broader audience.

Enable Dialogue and Solutions

9 - Highlight collaboration

Report on negotiation techniques like interest-based bargaining and bartering to showcase how common ground is found.

10 - Act as a bridge

Use your platform to connect stakeholders and reveal shared interests or potential solutions.

11 - Report grassroots efforts

Spotlight local initiatives addressing tensions outside of government frameworks.

12 - Facilitate conversations

Provide opportunities for groups to engage, whether directly or indirectly, and share successes from these interactions.

Capture Diverse Perspectives

1 - Talk to everyone

Include individuals directly or indirectly affected by the conflict, not just political and military leaders.

Conflicts affect entire societies, not just those in power. Speaking to a broad range of individuals—including civilians, activists, and those displaced—ensures that journalism reflects the full reality. Leaders and military officials provide important insights, but they often shape narratives for political gain. Hearing from everyday-people adds depth and humanises the story. A well-rounded and inclusive approach challenges stereotypes and avoids a one-sided portrayal of events.

2 - Amplify marginalised voices

Ensure representation of marginalised communities.

Marginalised communities often experience conflict differently and are underrepresented in media coverage. Their perspectives can reveal overlooked dimensions of violence, survival, and peacebuilding. Without their voices, reporting risks reinforcing dominant power structures and missing key drivers of conflict resolution. Representation fosters more inclusive policy making and advocacy efforts. By actively seeking out marginalised voices, journalists contribute to a fuller understanding of the situation.

3 - Balance perspectives

Avoid oversimplification and encourage critical thinking.

Reporting on conflict requires avoiding oversimplified narratives that paint one side as entirely right or wrong. By including a range of perspectives—from grassroots activists to high-level negotiators—journalists ensure a nuanced and accurate depiction of events. This approach also reduces the risk of reinforcing propaganda or misinformation. Balanced reporting encourages critical thinking among audiences. It also helps build a foundation for future dialogue and reconciliation.

4 - Present community interests

Highlight the broader perspectives and priorities of the communities involved.

Conflicts are often portrayed as battles between leaders, but they have far-reaching consequences for entire communities. Highlighting the priorities of those directly affected by conflict—such as security, education, healthcare, or justice—helps shift the focus from power struggles to human needs. This approach can also counter sensationalist reporting that prioritises violence over solutions. By amplifying community interests, journalists contribute to a more constructive public conversation.

Build Context and Clarity

5 - Explain the “why”

Provide historical context to help audiences understand the conflict’s roots.



Conflicts do not emerge in a vacuum—they have deep historical, political, and social roots, going back decades or even centuries in some cases. Without this context, audiences may struggle to understand the motivations behind actions or decisions. Oversimplified narratives can fuel misunderstandings or perpetuate harmful stereotypes. A well-researched and documented historical background helps people grasp the complexity of the situation and see patterns across different conflicts. Contextual reporting empowers audiences to engage with the issue beyond surface-level headlines.

6 - Fact-check rigorously

Use reliable data to support your reporting.

Misinformation spreads rapidly during conflicts, sometimes even influencing political decisions or public opinion. Journalists have a responsibility to verify claims, cross-check sources, and rely on credible data. Unverified information can escalate tensions and endanger lives. Rigorous fact-checking ensures accountability and maintains the credibility of journalism. It also protects vulnerable communities from harmful misrepresentation

7 - Demystify the process

Explain who is involved, how they are chosen, and key timelines or milestones in the peacebuilding process.

Peacebuilding involves multiple actors, frameworks and stages that can be difficult to navigate. Without clear explanations, audiences may see diplomacy as abstract or ineffective. Breaking down key milestones, agreements, and negotiation strategies helps people engage with the process more critically. Understanding how peace processes work can also increase public support for constructive solutions. Furthermore, a well-informed audience is better equipped to hold leaders accountable for their commitments.

8 - Clarify complexities

Break down technical terms or processes into simple language, making the story accessible to a broader audience.

Technical jargon, legal frameworks, and geopolitical strategies often dominate conflict reporting, making it inaccessible to the general public. Journalists should translate these complexities into clear, relatable language. Simplifying does not mean dumbing down; rather, it allows more people to engage with and act on the information. Using storytelling techniques, comparisons, and expert insights make intricate topics understandable. This approach fosters informed discussion rather than passive consumption of news.

Enable Dialogue and Solutions

9 - Highlight collaboration

Report on negotiation techniques like interest-based bargaining and bartering to showcase how common ground is found.

Collaboration is key to resolving conflicts, yet it often goes unnoticed in media coverage. Reporting on negotiation techniques—such as interest-based bargaining, bartering, and consensus-building—can illustrate how conflicting parties find common ground. These methods help shift the focus from rigid demands to shared interests, fostering cooperation even in tense situations. By showcasing examples of groups working together—whether through peace talks, resource-sharing, or joint reconstruction efforts—journalists can highlight the practical ways collaboration emerges. Understanding these dynamics helps audiences see that conflict is not just about division but also about the potential for solutions.

10 - Act as a bridge

Use your platform to connect stakeholders and reveal shared interests or potential solutions.

Journalists can produce constructive journalism by actively fostering dialogue between conflicting groups. By amplifying voices that seek common ground and reporting on initiatives that build trust, they can help dispel misconceptions and humanise all sides. This can mean covering joint community projects, cross-border collaborations, or personal stories that reveal shared struggles. Reporting that highlights interdependencies—such as economic ties, cultural exchanges, or environmental concerns—can help reduce polarisation. By showcasing examples of cooperation, journalism can inspire constructive engagement and shift narratives from division to possibility.

11 - Report grassroots efforts

Spotlight local initiatives addressing tensions outside of government frameworks.

Peacebuilding is not just the work of diplomats—it also happens at the community level through local initiatives. Reporting on grassroots efforts showcases alternative paths to conflict resolution beyond governmental negotiations. These initiatives often provide practical, sustainable solutions tailored to local contexts. Highlighting such efforts can inspire similar actions elsewhere and attract support for these underreported projects. Local peacebuilding efforts can sometimes lead to broader systemic change.

12 - Facilitate conversations

Provide opportunities for groups to engage, whether directly or indirectly, and share successes from these interactions.

Journalism should not only report on divisions but create spaces for constructive dialogue. This can involve hosting forums, featuring solutions-oriented discussions, or publishing responses from different sides of a conflict. When people see examples of successful communication between groups, they can be encouraged to engage in their own exchanges. Showcasing dialogue in action is the key here since it helps counter narratives suggesting peace is unattainable. To sum up, journalism that fosters engagement rather than passivity strengthens democratic participation.

In the appendix, you will find the material we used during the workshop, including a fictional scenario and examples that illustrate the recommendations formulated by the attendees. Additionally, we have included a lesson plan to help you organise similar workshops, allowing you to engage with these ideas in a practical and interactive way.

Conclusion

As we conclude this guide, we recognise that the journey of *transforming* conflict reporting is ever evolving. Journalism holds the power to shape perceptions, inspire change and build bridges—but it also carries the responsibility to do so with empathy, depth, and integrity. This guide is just one step in the ongoing process of rethinking how we cover conflict and peace, moving beyond the dominant narratives of violence and division, and opening space for stories of hope, resilience, and the tireless efforts of those working for peace.

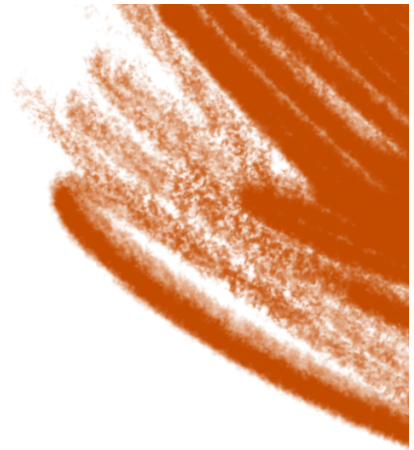
By centering the voices of those most affected by conflict, acknowledging the complexity of each situation, and focusing on solutions rather than just problems, journalists can play a pivotal role in fostering understanding and encouraging positive change. As we have outlined here, it is not about avoiding difficult truths but providing a broader context that gives those truths meaning and perspective.

We know that this guide, as it stands, is only a starting point. There is much more to be done, and we are committed to keeping the conversation going. As a young organisation, our resources are limited, but our dedication to improving the quality of conflict reporting is boundless. We will continue to gather insights, particularly from those who are directly impacted by conflict, and update this guide to reflect their voices and experiences. We hope that by engaging with this framework, journalists, editors, and educators will be inspired to reconsider how they approach conflict stories, and find ways to amplify voices that often go unheard.

We will be expanding this resource, incorporating interviews, case studies, and further reflections to make this guide more inclusive and responsive to the realities on the ground. We invite you to be part of this process—whether through your own contributions, critiques, or shared experiences. Together, we can help reframe the narrative around conflict and peace, and in doing so, make journalism a force for positive change.

Thank you for joining us in this endeavour. Let's continue pushing boundaries, challenging assumptions, and transforming the way we tell stories.





Resources to Go Further

The following is a list of resources to continue the conversation initiated by this guide and equip journalists with tools and knowledge on peace journalism. You will find references of practical tools, handbooks, academic articles, books, and videos to help implement the ideas and recommendations from this guide. Additionally, this section includes references to content exploring the PeaceCon 2024 workshop “(Story) Telling Your Peace: Crafting a Collaborative Guide on Reframing Peacebuilding Journalism”, which informed our recommendations. This section also references articles or theories used throughout this guide.

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Co-Authors

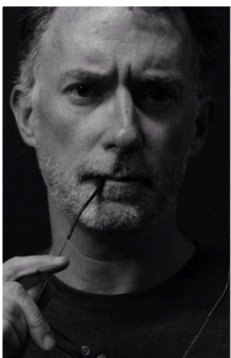


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Chip recently retired after twenty-five years as a Drama, Film, and Broadcast Journalism teacher in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA. Chip holds a Ph.D. and Master's Degree in Diplomacy and International Affairs, as well as a Bachelor of Fine Arts in the Theatre Arts. His Ph.D. dissertation was entitled *The Case for Privacy in Diplomatic Negotiations: Lessons from the 1787 Constitutional Convention, the 1993 Oslo Accords, and the 1998 Good Friday Accords*. Chip is a writer, novelist, and playwright. His hobbies include travel, visiting museums, and touring battlefields & historical sites. For more info on his work visit: www.linkedin.com/in/macenulty. Author: [Author Website](#)



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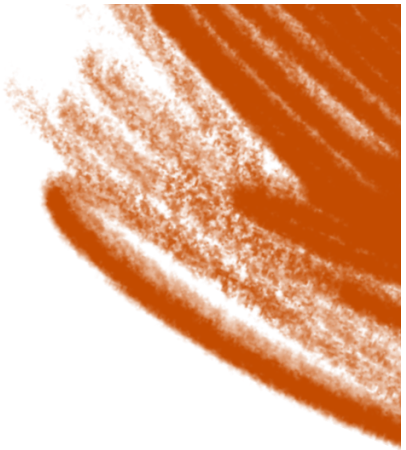


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Appendices

- **Appendix I: Fictional scenario summary**

A summary of the fictional scenario used during the PeaceCon 2024 collaborative workshop.

- **Appendix II: PeaceCon 2024 Workshop materials - Articles**

2 articles employed as the main tool to foster reflection and collaboration.

- **Appendix III: PeaceCon 2024 Workshop materials - Fact sheet**

A 2 pages list of facts to make the fictional scenario more comprehensible.

- **Appendix IV: Map of the fictional scenario representing the ethnic diversity of the Republic of Alphaland**

A fictional map illustrating and summarising the fictional scenario used during the workshop.

- **Appendix V: Recommendations with examples based on the fictional scenario**

12 Recommendations developed during the collaborative workshop with examples based on the fictional scenario used during the workshop.

- **Appendix VI: Workshop: Structure & Outline**

A short lesson plan and exercises to introduce journalism on peacebuilding in a 3 hour workshop.

- **Appendix VII: Workshop: Schedule**

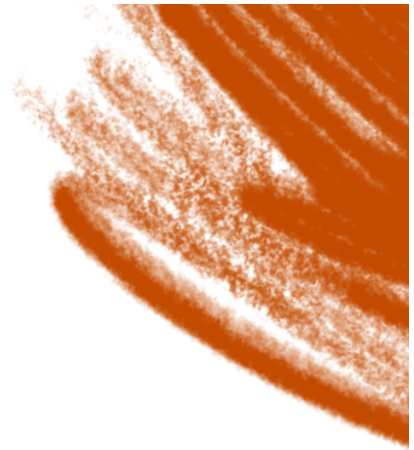
A detailed schedule including details on tasks, outcomes and objectives of the workshop.

- **Appendix VIII: Workshop/Activity: Introduction to PINs Activity**

A 2-page activity with solutions to apply the Position, Interest, Needs (PINs) model.

- **Appendix IX: Workshop/Activity: Analysing the Conflict over the Dam Construction**

An activity to apply the Position, Interest, Needs (PINs) model to the fictional scenario developed during the PeaceCon 2024 workshop.



Appendix I: Fictional scenario summary

The Republic of Alphaland is home to three main ethnic groups: Alphans (the ruling majority, in the North), Betans (majority in the Southwest), and Gamans (majority in the Southeast). During colonial rule, Atozelian colonisers exploited resources from the Hakuna River, fuelling tensions between Betans and Gamans. The Alphans led a successful independence movement in 1952, uniting all ethnic groups, but have remained in power ever since.

In 2024, Alphaland welcomes a UN-backed dam project on the Hakuna River, aimed at generating electricity and managing water resources. However, tensions rise as Betans fear losing control over their ancestral lands, while Gamans support the dam, believing it will benefit their growing community; increasing with refugees fleeing civil war in neighbouring Gamaland.

To prevent violence, the Alphan government calls for a roundtable discussion in Kozran, the historic site of Alphaland's independence, bringing together government and community leaders to ease tensions and find a peaceful resolution.

The Alphaland Sun

Atozelian and Alphan Governments Hand to Hand for the First Step towards the Modernisation of our Great Nation

The Republic of Alphaland is set to launch an ambitious dam project on the Hakuna River, aiming to boost energy production and water management, while addressing historical tensions in the region.

In a significant stride towards modernisation and sustainable development, Alphaland is launching an ambitious dam project on the Hakuna River, supported by generous monetary contribution from Atozelia. This project aligns with the nation's commitment to global Sustainable Development Goals and promises substantial advancements in electricity generation and water management.

The Republic of Alphaland, a nation marked by its rich and celebrated ethnic diversity, is home Alphans, Betans, and Gamans. The Alphans, take pride in the unification of the Betans and Gamans, in the southern region of the country during the honourable 1952 revolution, where indigenous Betans opened their homes and shared their Hakuna river with their displaced neighbours from Gamaland.

The new dam project, funded as part of Alphaland's development agreement with Atozelia, aims to address key infrastructure needs. It is expected to bring about significant improvements in energy production and water management, essential for the nation's progress.



However, the project has reignited historical tensions, particularly between the Betans and Gamans, as the Gaman population has increased due to recent displacement from Gamaland, exacerbated by ongoing civil unrest.

The government of Atozelia is working with Alphaland and Gamaland to maintain healthy and peaceful communal relations for the security of both countries. The dam project will not only enhance the country's infrastructure and accessibility to water and electricity in the Southeast of the country, but it shall also attract new foreign investments for the benefit of the economy, and it shall open new job opportunities for the country's labour.

There are protests in the Southern region that the government deems as an obstacle to development, and doubts foreign radical groups flaming the tension between Betans and Gamans, who have already been living in peace, inter-married, and populate the entire South of the country under the glorious Alphan flag.

To address these concerns and prevent potential conflicts, the government of Alphaland has called for a roundtable discussion. This crucial dialogue will be held in Kozran, the northern city symbolic of Alphaland's anticolonial struggle and our nation's unity. The meeting will include representatives from the national government, regional leaders from the South, and community representatives, with the goal of deescalating tensions and fostering a peaceful resolution to the historical disputes.

The Republic of Alphaland remains dedicated to advancing its modernization efforts while ensuring regional harmony and sustainable development. The dam project represents a key milestone in the nation's ongoing journey towards prosperity and unity.

Peaceful Betan Protests against the Toxic Dam Project Led to a Bloodbath by Alphan Police Government

The Betan community is reeling from the death of a family poisoned by contaminated water. As tensions rise over a government dam project that threatens their survival, Betans are demanding justice amid broken promises and escalating violence.

In the face of growing injustice, the Betan community of Alphaland is once again forced to defend its rights, its heritage, and its very survival. The recent death of an innocent Betan family, poisoned by contaminated water from the Hakuna River, has laid bare the ongoing neglect and discrimination that Betans have been enduring for decades. This tragedy is not an isolated incident but the result of years of systemic marginalization that has left the Betan community impoverished, vulnerable, and voiceless. Some people believe that the government dam project could be the origins of the contamination of water.

The roots of the current tensions between Betans and Gamans begin shortly after Alphaland's independence in 1952. Though initially apprehensive about the influx of Gamans in their Southern homeland, Betans accepted their presence in a spirit of coexistence. However, inequalities began to surface with Gamans gaining increasing influence in the South. The Alphan government's favoritism and the Atozelian government's support of Gamans exacerbated tensions between the two Southern communities.

Betan peaceful protests demanding fair treatment and social inclusion were violently suppressed by the police. This led Betans to no other choice but to arm themselves, which ignited a conflict marked by attacks on local administrations, killings and rapes.

The bloodshed officially came to an end after intervention by Alphan security forces and the Revolutionary Council who promised Betans equal access to the Hakuna River. Until this day, this promise has not been met.

Despite being indigenous to this region of Alphaland, Betans are among the poorest in the country, struggling for access to basic necessities. Meanwhile, the Gamans, displaced from Gamaland during the colonial era, and now fleeing a civil war in Gamaland, are increasingly migrating to Southern Alphaland, outnumbering the indigenous Betans and claiming a growing share in the country's economy, industry and resources.

Now, the situation has further been exacerbated by the government's decision to construct a dam on the Hakuna River. This project is co-funded by Atozelia, whose colonial rule and influence the people of Alphaland fought long and hard to abolish. While the dam is presented as a development project aimed at improving water management and electricity supply, it is clear that the real beneficiaries will not be the Betan people. Instead, it is the Gamans and Alphan government who stand to gain the most.

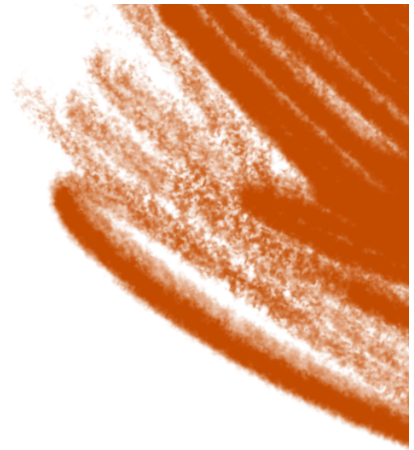
For centuries, and long before the establishment of current-day Alphaland, the indigenous Betans managed the resources of the South with care and respect,



understanding the delicate balance between accessing natural resources for human needs while simultaneously protecting the environment. Yet, Betan voices have been ignored, and their rights encroached. The government's decision to involve the Gamans in the management and administration of the dam, while systematically excluding the Betans, is a blatant provocation to the Betan community which has been present on these lands since countless centuries.

On August 1, 2024, in response to the poisoning, around 5,000 Betans gathered around the future dam's location to peacefully protest and demand their voices to be heard. Protesters were met with the police violently disrupting the demonstration, leaving over 150 protesters injured.

Following this, the government has announced a roundtable discussion in order to mitigate tensions, which will include national government officials, regional leaders, and community representatives in the city of Kozran. The choice of Kozran as the venue is symbolic, as it is emblematic of Alphaland's anticolonial struggle, but for the Betans, it is also a reminder of the long history of broken promises. The government speaks of deescalating tensions and fostering peace, yet it was the same government which violently suppressed the recent peaceful protest, injured its innocent Betan citizens and has historically suppressed any demands for Betan voices to be heard.



Appendix III: PeaceCon 2024 Workshop materials - Fact sheet

• Country Overview:

- Name: Republic of Alphaland
- Independence: Gained in 1952
- Current Government: Alphan-led since independence

• Ethnic Groups:

- Alphans: Majority, indigenous to the North
- Betans: Indigenous to the South, reside in the southwest
- Gamans: Displaced from Gamaland during Atozelian colonization, now reside in the southeast

• Historical Background:

- 1940s: Gamans displaced to Alphaland by Atozelian colonisation
- 1952:
 - Revolution led by Alphans against Atozelian colonisers; support from all ethnic groups;
 - Alphans united various ethnic groups leading to independence
- 1960: Protests by Betans; repressed by Alphan government; Recruited Police were Gamans; It turned into a violent conflict when Betans armed themselves
 - The conflict ended with the persecution and incarceration of protestors and armed Betans.
 - Later in the year, the Alphan government introduced an initiative of population-represented administration of the Southern region, whilst supporting initiatives of inter-cultural dialogue; sponsoring inter-racial marriages; and inter-cultural youth projects.
- 1970s: Gamaland gained independence; many Gamans remained in Alphaland

- **Geographical and Social Dynamics:**
 - Hakuna River: Divides Betans (southwest) and Gamans (southeast); yet since 1970s, the entire south became a melting pot of Betans and Gamans
 - Conflicts: Historical disputes between Betans and Gamans over Hakuna River resources, exacerbated by Atozelian resource extraction and Gaman population influx

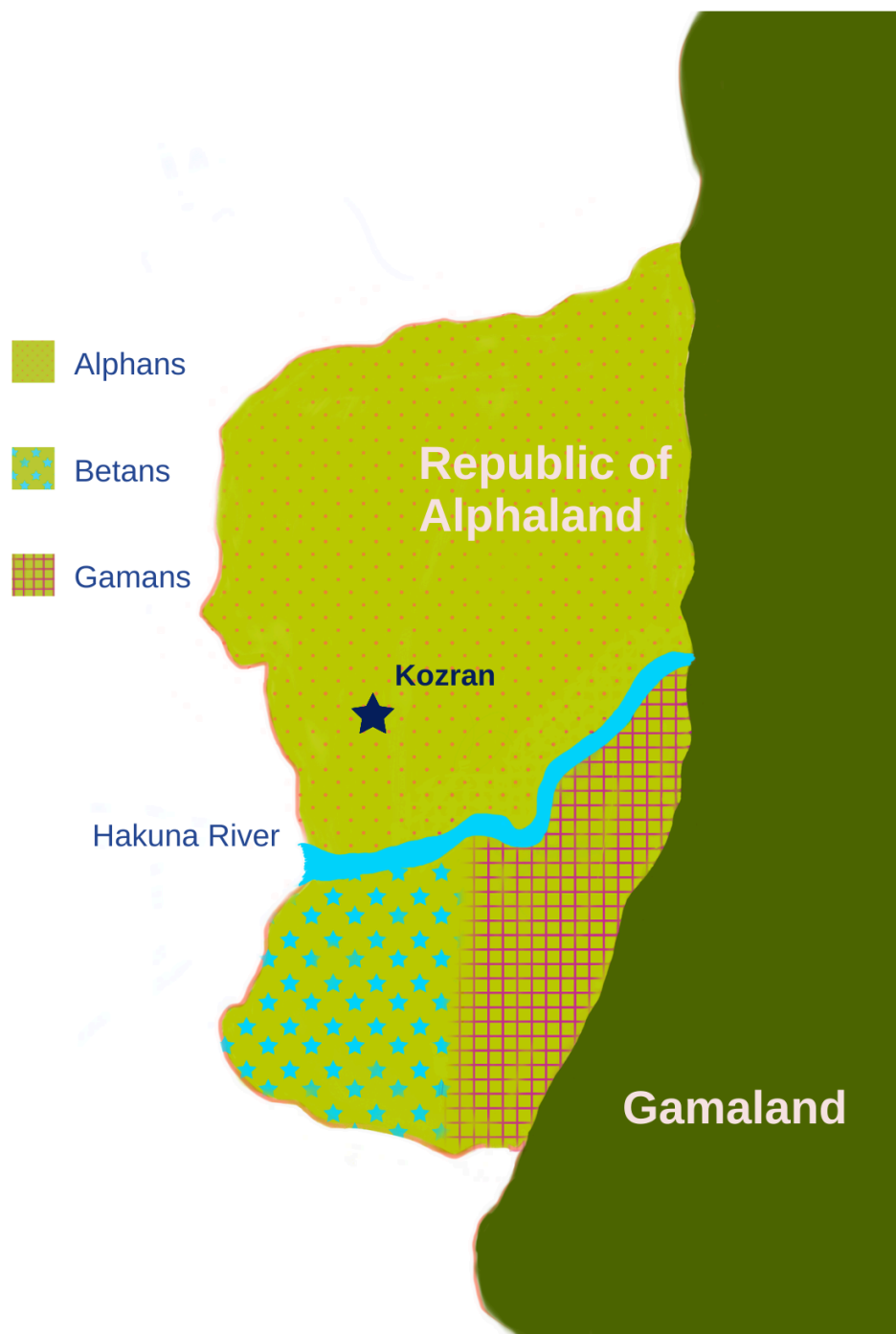
- **Government Efforts:**
 - Peace Initiatives: Diversification of southern regions, promotion of national identity, intercultural dialogue, and inter-racial marriages to reduce ethnic divisions

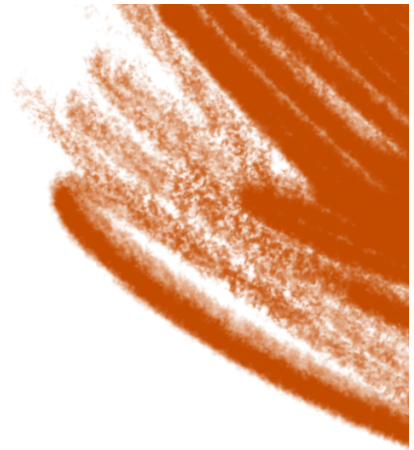
- **Current Developments (2024):**
 - UN Development Programme: Building a dam on the Hakuna River for electricity generation and water management
 - Impact of Civil War: Increased Gaman population in southern Alphaland due to displacement from Gamaland
 - Tensions: Resurfacing conflicts between Betans and Gamans over resource

- **Management**
 - Betans' Concerns: Threatened by growing Gaman population and resource management issues
 - Gamans' Support: Favor construction of the dam, with preference for management by southern population; benefits also for neighboring Gamaland

- **Peace Process:**
 - Government Actions: Call for a roundtable discussion to de-escalate tensions
 - Meeting Location: Northern city of Kozran, site of the last anticolonial battle

Appendix IV: Map of the fictional scenario representing the ethnic diversity of the Republic of Alphaland





Appendix V: Recommendations with examples based on the fictional scenario

These recommendations, developed during our collaborative workshop at PeaceCon 2024 offer practical strategies to improve conflict reporting. These are the same recommendations that the ones presented earlier in the guide. However, here they are illustrated with examples based on the fictional scenario used during our PeaceCon 2024 workshop “(Story) Telling Your Peace: Crafting a Collaborative Guide on Reframing Peacebuilding Journalism”.

Capture Diverse Perspectives

1 - Talk to everyone

Include individuals directly or indirectly affected by the conflict, not just political or military leaders.

A state-owned news channel covered the story about the dam project by quoting only senior Alphan officials, presenting it as a “major step towards national unity”. The voices of Betans and Gamans, the ones most affected by this project, were excluded and any form of opposition to the dam project was portrayed as being unpatriotic. Betans and Gamans were described as “backward” and “resistant to progress”, and their anxieties surrounding the possibility of displacement were portrayed as “village rumors”. This non-inclusive approach fuelled resentment amongst Betans and Gamans and led to a rise in community tensions.

On the other hand, an independent news channel aired a report including interviews with Betan farmers, Gaman workers, and Alphan officials to discuss the dam project. This inclusive approach showcased the involvement of all stakeholders, wherein all discussed their fears and hopes surrounding the project: (a) the Alphan officials believe this project could bear potential to foster unity; (b) Betans’ fear the loss of their land; and (c) Gamans wished for labour opportunities. The interviewer asked critical questions about resource sharing, to which local

experts responded by exploring different ways the rights to resources and soil could be distributed equally. This report made parties feel heard and represented; it also provided room for community tensions to ease.

2 - Amplify Marginalised Voices

Ensure representation of women, youth, and minority communities.

In Alphaland, most media content showcased only Alphan politicians and officials. This reinforced the belief that only their voice was legitimate despite the country's rich ethnic diversity. Most of these communities felt under-represented and isolated, especially Gamans often viewed as “poor peasants” or “violent foreigners,” leading to structural inequalities, stereotypes, racism or fewer economic opportunities.

By way of contrast, in Gamaland the government showed interest in improving social cohesion and inclusion processes. It provided financial support to all media dedicating 80% of their content to better represent all communities present in the country and their diversity. This is why the media showcased local initiatives, especially those in favour of community building, diversity or gender inclusion. This resulted in the government recording a 57% decline of violent racist protests across the country between 2018 and 2023. Likewise, the Ministry of Labor recorded a rise of 13% in women's salary in 20,000 large businesses, narrowing the gender pay gap in most Gamaland companies.

3 - Balance Perspectives

Include the views of all stakeholders, from grassroots to leadership.

A prime time news report mentioned the dam project as the “product of genius engineering”, including only Alphan government officials praising the project. Local Betan and Gaman communities were not included in the report and portrayed as passive beneficiaries of the project. Betan and Gaman concerns were dismissed, stating that they will acknowledge the benefits of the dam once it is constructed. This framing insinuated that opposition to the dam project was irrational and consequently increased mistrust towards Betans and Gamans.

A documentary aired on live national television, exploring the details surrounding the Hakuna river conflict. It included the leader of a Gaman grassroots organisation, the Betan farmers' organisation and Alphan agricultural experts. The Gaman leader promoted shared resource management under the auspices of an expert committee, made up of all ethnic groups from Atozelia, while the Alphan experts emphasised the mutual benefits of cooperating on the dam project. The

Betan farmers organisation discussed their concern surrounding irrigation. The interviews were conducted in multiple languages and subtitles were provided to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. The balanced reporting included all affected groups, and provided the audience with a nuanced understanding of the conflict at stake with potential solutions.

4 - Present Community Interests

Highlight the broader perspectives and priorities of the communities involved.

The Aphaland government held a roundtable discussion between representatives from the national government, regional leaders from the South, and community representatives, with the goal of de-escalating tensions and fostering a peaceful resolution of the tensions around the dam project. Southern communities were favourable until government media outlets did not report health and irrigation concerns of the farmers and rural communities opposed to the project. They only emphasised development and modernisation plans, leading to the revival of tensions. A month later, an independent media outlet from the South initiated a series of interviews with Gaman community leaders, civil society members and farmer unions representatives to highlight their interests. The aim was to “focus attention on the priorities of those citizens who had been mis-reported during the rising tensions”. After the publication of these interviews by journalists, and their dissemination on social media by Alphan officials, tensions drastically reduced and negotiations resumed.

Build Context and Clarity

5 - Explain the “Why”

Provide historical context to help audiences understand the conflict's roots.

A primetime television programme referred to the Hakuna River conflict as an “age-old tribal rivalry”. The programme gave no historical background, nor shed light on the conflict's colonial history. Betans were framed as overly traditional and opposed to modernisation, while the Gaman growing population was portrayed as a threat. This binary framing made conflict resolution seem almost impossible since it portrayed the conflict as a product of “irrational” tribal disputes.

A special independent report explained the historical origins of the Hakuna River conflict. It detailed how colonial-era Atozelian policies displaced Gamans into Alphaland, creating resource tensions with Betans. Historical footage and the use of historical maps displayed the changes in land and resource ownership since the establishment of the state of Atozelia. The journalist explained how Betans' fears over losing territories and displacement were directly linked to previous land loss, while Gamans' drive for cooperation and inclusion was a result of past marginalisation and displacement. The report also included local and international historians, who stressed the importance of understanding the historical context in order to understand the present-day conflict. By doing so, the report was balanced and included multiple perspectives, thus abstaining from oversimplifying the ethnic divisions of the conflict. By tracing the history, the report explained why the current dispute over the Hakuna River evoked such deep divisions.

6 - Fact-Check Rigorously

Use reliable data to support your reporting.

Following protests over the dam project, a Gaman local media organisation, based in Southern Alphaland, found that the data used during protests coverage was different between government-supported Alpha-owned media and marginalised Gaman-owned media. A source working for an Alphan newspaper disclosed to a Gaman journalist that Alphan-owned media lacked fact-checking processes. They “often rely on rumours or fake news to sensationalise every event, to appear interesting and present the government as the saviour of one ethnicity at the expense of another”, the source said.

However, Gaman media placed a strong emphasis on thorough fact-checking processes, often dedicating hours to separating truth from falsehood. Local Gaman media outlets were particularly concerned that a lack of rigorous fact-checking could exacerbate the country's ongoing crisis and further weaken social cohesion. Internal discussions suggested this could lead to heightened violence and growing distrust in official institutions, especially among rural Gaman communities. Recognising this risk, they saw it as their responsibility to provide the most accurate fact-checking possible to prevent, or at least mitigate, such outcomes.

7 - Demystify The Process

Explain who is involved, how they're chosen, and key timelines or milestones in the peacebuilding process.

A television news programme announced that the peace talks regarding the dam conflict had begun, but did not give any background information as to who was going to be part of the negotiations: what the timeline and the deadlines would be, or how the decision-making process would work. The audience was given no information on how any agreement could be reached and what that would mean for resource allocation. The presenter used complicated legal terms without explaining them and no local communities were included. This led to an increase in mistrust towards government officials, but also towards the peace talks as a whole, with rumors circulating that the ultimate decision would be made behind closed doors.

An independent local journalist produced a video series on the peace process of the Hakuna River conflict. The first episode explained who the parties attending were, their roles and why they were selected to attend. The second episode took on a historical perspective, looking at past peace talks and how their outcomes are still influencing present-day peace talks. The third episode explained key deadlines, the applicable legal and institutional frameworks and the details of the decision-making process. The series included interviews with representatives from all parties and independent political experts: statistics, graphs, and images explaining the details surrounding the peace talks. The use of statistics and graphs made the information more accessible to the audience and provided transparency on the decision-making process. This series increased public awareness around the peace talks and led to more citizen engagement at the local level.

8 - Clarify Complexities

Break down technical terms or processes into simple language, making the story accessible to a broader audience.

In 2021, a national study on the Alphaland-Gamaland conflict was conducted by an Atozelian research institute. Most interviewees expressed difficulties understanding the war, its processes and origins because of the media's use of technical terms and the content's complexity. Notably, 83% of people stated that this "was not a real war", and that this was not their problem "because it's too complex and very far from us".

In 2023, a national study on the Alphaland-Betaland conflict was conducted by the same Atozelian research institute. The same sample was used. Most interviewees expressed their concern in this war affecting their life, their economic opportunities and their future. It happens that 77% of respondents asked for ways to contribute to peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts, and how to support the local population.

In 2024, the same institute compared the vocabulary used for the media coverage of both wars and found that the use of technical terms used by the media during the 2021 war coverage was 43% higher than during the 2023 war coverage. In addition, news consumers had a higher educational background, with 65% of people holding a Masters degree in 2021 and 38% of people holding a Masters degree in 2023. The use of short and simple media content explaining the origins of the conflict and breaking down actions and processes was also much more present in the analysis of the 2023 conflict - helping people to understand the root causes of the conflict; current events and future mediation, negotiation and peace opportunities.

Enable Dialogue and Solutions

9 - Highlight Collaboration

Report on negotiation techniques like interest-based bargaining and bartering to showcase how common ground is found.

An article in one of the main Atozelian newspapers described the Hakuna River conflict as “a zero-sum conflict”, in which Betans were portrayed as resisting any change and modernisation, and Gamans as wanting special treatment. The article focused on the protests across the country and interviewed members of radical opposition movements from both Betan and Gaman communities, creating divisive narratives. The article framed the conflict as a timebomb waiting to explode, fuelling levels of violence that had existed in the past and making a peace process seem impossible.

By way of contrast, a television programme showcased Betan and Gaman youth organisations collaborating on a joint irrigation system, which improved water access to both communities. It showed how both communities’ livelihoods are directly tied to the river. Interviews with these communities revealed how the collaboration reduced community tensions, and showed how they used different non-violent techniques to communicate peacefully. Betan and Gaman engineers explained how such small-scale local initiatives could aid the dam project. By showing that peaceful cooperation was already taking place at a local level, the report highlighted the possibility of moving away from conflict and focusing on practical solutions. It highlighted the shared interest and concerns of the communities instead of emphasising their division. Upon the release of the programme, Alphan officials showed their support by providing funding to the initiative and also created a fund for future local projects, to drive further inter-community collaboration.

10 - Act As a bridge

Use your platform to connect stakeholders and reveal shared interests or potential solutions.

A local Betan media organisation, with a strong grassroots presence and trusting relations with diverse local communities across the country, was used to cover the 2021 Alphaland-Betaland conflict. Over the course of discussions on the conflict coverage two journalists, working in communities with very different economic and political backgrounds, noticed that the Alphan army was succeeding in recruiting Betan youth into their militia.

The journalists decided to bring together researchers, civil society and peacebuilding NGO representatives from both communities. This allowed stakeholders with very different backgrounds to connect through the same platform and share knowledge about the impact the conflict was having on their economy and their lives. The local media acted as a bridge to connect different communities and stakeholders facing the same issue: they initiated discussions about the origins of the problem, and tried to find solutions to prevent Betan youth recruitment into the Alphan's militia. The media documented the whole process and fact-checked every element of information. They are now in the process of writing an article they hope will be influential in informing people in Betaland, including the government and local NGOs regarding youth protection and conflict resolution.

11 - Report grassroots efforts

Spotlight local initiatives addressing tensions outside of government frameworks.

A major newspaper published an article on Alphan government efforts to initiate peace initiatives in regards to the Hakuna River conflict, portraying the government as the sole actor who could resolve the conflict. Local peacebuilding and grassroots initiatives were excluded, and Betans and Gamans were framed as being entangled in an age-old tribal conflict that could only be resolved by a modern top-down approach. This led readers to believe that community reconciliation was out of reach.

Meanwhile, a local journalist covered a women-led project working on planting trees along the Hakuna River to prevent soil erosion. It showcased how Betan and Gaman women worked together, despite historical tensions, with the support of an Alphan agricultural expert. The expert was interviewed and explained how soil erosion and deforestation bore the potential of exacerbating conflict, thereby emphasising the value of this women-led local initiative. Interviews with Betan and Gaman women showcased how collaboration was met with apprehension from within their respective communities at first, but how, over time, the feeling of shared responsibility increased and more women joined the project. This special report emphasised the importance of local leadership in relation to such initiatives, and how such leadership can drive environmental peacebuilding. The project also inspired communities and villages across the river to collaborate on such initiatives, as members of all communities saw how small-scale unified activity could create a positive and lasting change.

12 - Facilitate conversations

Provide opportunities for groups to engage, whether directly or indirectly, and share successes from these interactions.

A few months after the creation of the first discussion platform to prevent Betan youth and children from being engaged in the Alphan militia, a local Betan media outlet created social media group chats, along with in-person discussions circles, in communities where the militia problem arose. In-person discussions were held in places where journalists working for this media outlet were living and provided opportunities for groups to engage directly. These journalists were facilitating: sharing successes, results and solutions emerging from these interactions, based on the discussions they had attended. This allowed for the building of trust and social cohesion in the community, as well as informal fact-checking processes. By creating intra- and inter-community dialogue spaces, communities were able to understand the reasons for youth engagement in Alphan's militia; the discussions helped locals to find solutions and prevention mechanisms for the recruitment, improving the living situation in conflict affected areas.

APPENDIX VI

WORKSHOP PLAN

For interested educators, this workshop is included to introduce journalism on peacebuilding to the larger aims included in this guide.

*This workshop plan is a guide itself. It provides a general outline for a roughly **three-hour** workshop. Please feel free to adapt the suggested exercise here as needed to suit specific schedules.*

This entire workshop is based on an active, vocal group dynamic. More discussion better serves the overall aims.

OBJECTIVES

- ☐ Participants will complete a capstone project based on **aidóni** Peace Journalism principles.
- ☐ Participants will be introduced to Position | Interest | Needs (PIN) analysis of conflicts.
- ☐ Participants will appreciate and understand Peace Journalism as opposed to mainstream journalism.

GRADED ASSIGNMENTS (if applicable)

Benchmarks and/or grading assignments are included here for retention and accountability purposes.

- ☐ Journal
 - ☐ Plenary Participation
 - ☐ Highlighted/Annotated Article
 - ☐ PINs Handout
 - ☐ Final Capstone Project
-

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

For purposes here, participants will need to be broken up into the following structure based on an average class size of 24 - 28.

STEP 1: Divide participants into **3 Groups**: Group 1 will be Gamans; Group 2 will be Betans; and Group 3 will be Alphans

STEP 2: Divide Groups into working Sub-Groups of 4-6

STEP 3: Divide Sub-Groups into Partners (one group of three may be used if necessary)

MATERIALS NEEDED

The materials needed are for in-person workshops or classes. Adjust as needed for online sessions.

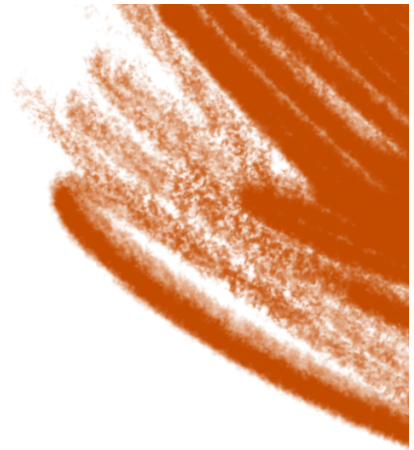
- ☐ Whiteboard or large sheets of paper
- ☐ Different coloured highlighters
- ☐ Handouts (Articles, Fact Sheet, PIN Handout, **aidóni**'s guide *Community-Centred Peace Journalism: Advice from Local Peacebuilders to Journalists*)

APPENDIX VII - Workshop Schedule (adapt as necessary)

Time	Task	Outcome/Objective
15	Icebreaker Activity (Optional. Suggested for participants meeting for the first time.)	<i>Group comfort and getting-to-know each other; choose an activity that is mobile and active, getting participants moving around the room.</i>
10	Overall Objectives of the Course	<i>General Outline Structure</i>
10	Group Assignments	• Arrange the room in their respective groups • Handout Articles (1) based on group assignment
5	Journal Reflection	<i>"What is conflict? In your own life, do you view conflict as good or bad?"</i>
5	Partner Share	<i>Share thoughts/insights</i>
10	Group Share (optional)	<i>Share thoughts/insights</i>
15	Plenary Share (optional)	<i>Share thoughts/insights</i>
BREAK		
10	PINs Handout	<i>Discuss identifying Positions, Interests, and Needs.</i> <i>Complete the activities on the handout as a group.</i>
10	Read/Highlight/Annotate Article	<i>Display/Project the Fact Sheet and Map with potential dam project.</i> <i>Read YOUR Group's assigned article:</i> 1. Identify the major conflict(s) 2. Identify your group's Positions, Interests, and Needs (PINs) 3. Highlight Key Words and Adjectives describing the tone of the piece Note: The Gamans do <u>not</u> have an article. What does this signify? Have this Group address this, i.e. come up with a plan. They still need to come up with their own PINs to share.

		• <i>Create a common consensus to share in plenary</i> ◦ <i>Write these on the Whiteboard/Paper for display</i> • <i>Choose/Elect one person to share in plenary</i>
20	Plenary Discussion	• <i>Each side presents their PINs to the Others</i> • <i>Discuss in plenary:</i> ◦ <i>Where are the places they disagree?</i> ◦ <i>Where do they agree?</i> ◦ <i>What surprised you hearing from the "Other" side? Be specific</i> • <u>Keep notes for next session</u>
BREAK		
5	Recap/Show notes from last session	
20	Plenary Discussion	1. <i>Fill in PINs handouts with the other groups you're missing.</i> 2. <i>How did the article YOU READ differ from what YOU HEARD from the "Other" Groups?</i> 3. <i>What are the big topics/issues your GROUP missed?</i> 4. <i>Why are these significant?</i> 5. <i>Based on what you heard, describe your assigned article's balance? (poor, fair, good, or excellent)</i>
20	Partner Outline	• <i>Read aidóni's principles</i> • <i>With your partner, outline a new, updated article that will introduce the importance of the upcoming dam negotiations.</i> • <i>In your outline, be sure to include all PINs</i>
BREAK		
45	CAPSTONE PROJECT (suggestions) For this capstone project, remember that you are now working as an aidóni journalist. • WRITE a new article (1000-1500 words) • CREATE social media posts or start a BLOG • PERFORM a skit in plenary showcasing the principles of peace journalism • PERFORM a poetry slam advocating a solution to the dam controversy • DRAW a poster showing all voices representation • CASE STUDY: Research other cases where peace journalism was successful <u>or</u> missing. • CREATE A CAMPAIGN: Organise an awareness/advocacy campaign in your community	

BREAK		
5	Revisit first Journal entry about conflict	<i>Reflect: True or False: Conflict is bad How can conflict be a positive agent for change?</i>
10	Plenary Discussion (optional)	<i>Reflect: True or False: Conflict is bad How can conflict be a positive agent for change?</i>
60	Video (Optional): "Turning Conflict into Progress," Shamil Idriss	<i>Reflection or Class Discussion</i>
EXIT TICKET: <i>What are 2 takeaways you will take from this workshop?</i>		
Helpful Resources: - Fisher, R. and Ury, W. (1991). <i>Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In</i>. Second Edition. New York, New York: Penguin Books. - SXSW EDU (2025). "Keynote Address: Turning Conflict into Progress in Our Divided Times by Search for Common Ground CEO Shamil Idriss". Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3-1NCIyy5o.		



APPENDIX VIII - Introductory PINs Activity

In preparation for analysing the conflict over the dam project, participants will be introduced to Positions, Interests, and Needs (PINs) Theory. To introduce this theory, we begin with the “Scenario of the Orange.” It is suggested that the scenario be read aloud, followed by a discussion in plenary about possible solutions. Then read the solution on the back.

THE SCENARIO OF THE ORANGE

I'm late, I'm late, I'm late. The store is about to close and I'm way behind. I check my watch. Goodness! Guests coming in an hour. I rush through the doors and head to the aisle with the fresh produce. There. I see it. The oranges. There is only one left, the last one! I reach for it and just as I am about to grab it, my hand is blocked by two other hands. There are three of us reaching for the last orange. We all take a moment to realise we all want this last orange. I smile, say, “I am so sorry but I really have to have this orange.” The next one also smiles and says, “You know what? I do too. And this is the last open store.” The third says, “Listen. On any other day, I'd let it go, but today I really need this orange.” Just then, we hear over the speaker: “We will be closing in five minutes. Please make your final selections and head to the checkout. You have five minutes. Thank you.”

What to do? **Discuss** how this should be solved.

Key Terms		
Positions	The What	The “ what ” of a negotiation, the specific proposals or offers (demand) put forward on the table.
Interests	The Why	These are the “ why ” behind a position, the deeper reasons or goals a person wants to achieve.
Needs	The Core Value	These are the fundamental necessities that drive interests, often related to security, respect, or personal well-being.

The solution to the Orange Scenario

By asking probing questions, essentially asking “*Why* do you need the orange?” the following was discovered:

One person needs only the rind for a cocktail garnish. The second person needs the pulp and juice for a recipe to make coffee cake. The third person only needs only the rind for a zest for an icing recipe.

By taking the time to find out *why* the parties want a certain item, one quickly realises the elegant solution.

CONNECTION: If you were a journalist reporting on this issue, how could you detail this elegant solution as a win-win-win for all three players?

Practice: <i>using the same scenario, brainstorm different interests and needs</i>				
Positions	A worker asks for a specific day off.	An employee wants a 10% raise.	An employer needs to change workers' schedules.	A boss needs to cut everybody's pay or fire someone.
Interests	She wants time off to attend a family reunion.			
Needs	She needs to feel connected to her family and maintain positive relationships.			

APPENDIX IX

<i>Analysing the Conflict over the Dam Construction</i>				
<i>After understanding PINs theory, identify the PINs for each group in relation to the dam project. As you read, HIGHLIGHT key words and adjectives that describe the underlying tone of the arguments for or against the dam project.</i>				
	Betan	Gaman	Alphan	Atozelian
Key words				
Positions				
Interests				
Needs				

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