



AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING



THE “AMANI KWANZA (PEACE FIRST)” PROJECT

Lessons Learned Report

December 2024

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



ABOUT THE AGENCY FOR PEACEBUILDING

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) is a think-and-do organisation committed to bridging the gap between research and practice in peacebuilding. AP aims to contribute to more peaceful and just societies by preventing and transforming violent conflict and creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation across sectors and divides. AP is the first Italian organisation specialising in peacebuilding. This allows us to occupy a unique role in the European landscape: on the one hand, we interpret and synthesise relevant topics for the benefit of Italian agencies and institutions working on peace and security; on the other, we highlight experiences, capacities, and resources specific to the Italian system, which can contribute to the resolution of violent conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The report was written by Bernardo Monzani, Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) at the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP), with contributions from Hashim Pondeza, Executive Director of the Center for Youth Dialogue (CYD). Bernardo was responsible for reviewing documents and facilitating the reflection meeting, and for coming up with the external findings of the evaluation. Bernardo led the internal reflection process and contributed to the report's section on relevance and the partnership assessment. The authors extend their gratitude to George and all those individuals who were kind enough to take part in evaluation activities.

The views expressed in this report are those of its authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AP's partners and donors.

Cover Photo: Participants in the Peace Dialogue (Source: Center for Youth Dialogue).

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SUMMARY

The “Amani Kwanza (Peace First)” project has been designed to address challenges to social cohesion in Zanzibar, whose peace needs constant special care from governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including religious authorities, who must be able to engage each other and respond to the needs of communities, in particular the archipelago’s youth. For this reason, the project was designed with the overall objective of strengthening Zanzibar’s community resilience to reduce youth radicalization, by strengthening collaboration between state and non-state actors involved in peacebuilding, and by unpacking existing peace challenges and suggesting ways forward. The project was funded by the Otto per Mille fund of the Chiesa Valdese and implemented by the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) and the Center for Youth Dialogue (CYD) in 2024.

AP and CYD successfully implemented all planned activities. These included two training workshops on peace and coexistence, one in Unguja and the other in Pemba. In total, the events engaged 60 beneficiaries including religious leaders, politicians, *madrassa* teachers, government representatives, *sheikhs*, padres, and representatives from women-led civil society organizations (CSOs), whom facilitators from CYD and AP trained on conflict analysis and peacebuilding. Then, CYD held a dialogue event with religious and community leaders, in Pemba, which brought together 35 participants, including religious leaders, school teachers and members of the Pemba local community. The dialogue was strategically organized to foster messages of peace, harmony and unity in Zanzibar, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming general elections, planned in 2025.

The main positive outcome of the project is given by the strong relationships that CYD built with religious leaders and authorities, and that these stakeholders build among themselves. There are not many occasions where these individuals can come together. In fact, opportunities are very rare, in spite of the special role that authorities can play in moments of crisis. Critical to this success was the way in which stakeholders were engaged. The work done by CYD was crucial to ensure that they would commit to sending their representatives to the training workshop first and then to the dialogue event. Stakeholders were engaged through a participatory process, whereby they were given the chance to shape the events and also to decide who to send to them. This helped to gain their goodwill.

Aligning the project with existing governmental peace initiatives, such as the call by the President of Zanzibar for civil society to support peace, was also important, as it increased the project’s sustainability. Positive relationships were also built with CSOs, particularly those led by women, youth and people with

disabilities. These organizations played a very important role in the inception phase of the project, and also during the peace training workshops. Their involvement not only broadened the project's reach but also facilitated a more inclusive understanding of community dynamics and the importance of addressing diverse needs in peacebuilding efforts.

The project also allowed AP and CYD to test and consolidate their partnership. Overall, the assessment has been positive under this aspect, as AP and CYD worked well together, especially in the implementation of activities, which was generally smooth. There were challenges, related to the selection of participants and to the limited financial resources. These required some adjustments and a lot of communication between the two partners, which was done effectively. The implementation of activities was not affected by those limitations, and the project, even in its limited scope, achieved its intended impact.

There were also lessons learned, which will be helpful to guide similar efforts in the future. These are presented below.

Inclusivity is a key feature for success. The interfaith peace training workshops showcased the importance of including a diverse range of participants, including religious leaders, government, educators, and community representatives, and in both Unguja and Pemba islands.

Historical examples from Zanzibar's past are important to promote buy-in from stakeholders. This historical perspective helped participants appreciate the deep-rooted traditions of peace and collaboration within their communities, and reinforced the idea that maintaining harmony is both achievable and essential.

Good timing makes a difference. The project made a significant contribution to the debate on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This was due to the fact that the training workshops and the dialogue event were organized on the eve of the 2025 general elections.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential for impact. The dialogue emphasized the role of both the government and society in maintaining peace and security. Participants stressed that the government must ensure tolerance and take proactive measures to eliminate any factors that might cause fear or tension within the community, particularly before, during, and after elections. This will create an environment where citizens feel secure and actively contribute to promoting peace and development in the country.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings and lessons learned of the final evaluation of the "Amani Kwanza (Peace First)" project, which was launched to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to foster mutual understanding and coexistence in Zanzibar. The project aimed in particular to contribute to the way religious leaders and authorities can work together to shape and disseminate peace messages among young people, who can be traditionally marginalized in Zanzibar politics.

The project included several activities, starting with preparatory meetings with different stakeholders, including government and non-governmental actors, and with an emphasis on the engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs). The second activity included training workshops with all these stakeholders, in both Unguja and Pemba islands. The third activity was a peace dialogue specifically for religious leaders and authorities.

The goal of the evaluation—the project's fourth and final activity—was to identify lessons learned to inform future efforts by AP and CYD to support social cohesion, dialogue and peacebuilding in Zanzibar. Designed as an internal evaluation, the assignment looked at the experience of the coordinators who led the implementation of activities. The evaluation focused in particular on answering questions related to the project's effectiveness (Were expected results achieved? What were the challenges encountered?), sustainability (Will stakeholders continue to work with each other?) and contribution to partnerships (How effective was the collaboration between AP and CYD? How could it be improved?).

The report provides an overview of the context in which the project took place, and a background on the project itself. Findings are then presented and discussed, following the three criteria (effectiveness, sustainability and partnership). Finally, conclusions and lessons learned to guide future efforts are presented.

CONTEXT BACKGROUND

The Amani Kwanza project has been designed to address challenges to social cohesion in Zanzibar. Despite Tanzania being a multiparty democracy, its political system has historically been biased, leading to dissatisfaction among many individuals and groups, particularly youth who have, over the years, been turning to more radical positions and taking negative actions—against authorities, and also each other. The risk of violence has also grown, in particular in places, like Zanzibar, with a history of conflict and social tensions. Recent incidents suggest that young people are turning away from peaceful dialogue and towards more radical positions.

The 2020 general election was specifically challenging as for the first time it was held on two consecutive days. Many people in Zanzibar and other political actors outside the islands were reluctant about this decision, but the Zanzibar Elections Commission (ZEC) insisted that it followed the law as stated in the 2018 Zanzibar Election Act. That decision led to clashes between the supporters of the main opposition party and Zanzibar and Tanzanian security forces. This said, after the general elections and the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU), in December 2020, with the swearing in of the late Maalim Seif Shariff Hamad as First Vice President of Zanzibar, the security and political environment in the archipelago continued to stabilise. Besides that, on January 12, 2022, during the 58th anniversary of the Zanzibar Revolution event at the Amaan Stadium in Unguja, supporters of both CCM, the ruling party, and ACT Wazalendo, the main opposition party on the island, marched together to show solidarity under the GNU spirit.

Despite ongoing peaceful conditions, Zanzibar's peace is in fact a situation that needs constant special care from peace and security stakeholders, due to its volatile condition. For instance, on July 18, 2021, Zanzibar witnessed a very contested by-election in the Konde constituency in Pemba Island. The election campaign was peacefully held by all participating political parties, although the more active campaigns were between CCM and ACT Wazalendo. The National Elections Commission (NEC) then announced Mr. Sheha Mpemba Faki, the CCM's party candidate, the winner in the by-election. However, ACT Wazalendo rejected the official results claiming there was vote-rigging. Later, they made a threat to remove themselves from the GNU. There were different high-level political analyses and suggestions on urgent actions to save the GNU. When it was publicly announced that family reasons led to the resignation of CCM party's newly elected MP, political analysts viewed that decision as the result of concrete actions to save the GNU from collapsing and to prevent an escalation to political violence. Since the resignation announcement was publicly made and a fresh election was called, which witnessed ACT Wazalendo

strongly winning the by-election, the social and political relations among citizens and other political actors in Zanzibar have again improved.

In this context, previous research efforts by AP have shown that there is a perceived huge capacity of different stakeholders in Zanzibar, and also community members, to act as informal mediators and champions for peace in their communities. Information collected through qualitative and quantitative means also shows that approximately two-thirds of the Zanzibarian population, both male and female, use conflict transformation or similar non-violent strategies. Furthermore, the majority of the population in Zanzibar says that there are different collaborative forums already in place, and that these can be useful to de-escalate tensions. These platforms, and other joint initiatives, therefore represent an opportunity to strengthen social cohesion and conflict transformation mechanisms in the archipelago. In addition, religious leaders are regularly mentioned as relevant stakeholders by communities, indicating that religious differences are not considered a limitation to address tensions.

Against this backdrop, it is pivotal to identify the needs of youth and to address them in permanent dialogue with local institutions, and in particular with religious leaders and *Shehia* authorities, which are local administrative authorities close to citizens and able to address social and economic issues before they become a cause for conflict. This is what the project has sought to do.



Photo description: Participants in the Peace Dialogue (Source: Center for Youth Dialogue).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The “Amani Kwanza (Peace First)” project has been implemented by the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) in partnership with the Center for Youth Dialogue (CYD). AP is a peacebuilding organization based in Italy. CYD is a youth-focused organization working on human rights, empowerment and peace in Zanzibar. The project represented the first time in which the two organizations worked together formally. The project, which was funded by the Otto Per Mille fund of Chiesa Valdese, started on June 1st, 2024, and ended on December 20, 2024.

The overall objective of the project was to strengthen Zanzibar's community resilience to reduce youth radicalization. The specific objectives were:

1. To strengthen collaboration between state and non-state actors involved in peacebuilding; and
2. To unpack existing peace challenges in Zanzibar and suggest ways forward in collaboration with security experts and institutions.

The direct beneficiaries of the project were intended to include community members in both Pemba and Unguja islands, with particular focus on religious leaders and authorities, local government representatives and security agencies, and civil society representatives. In particular, the project had aimed to:

- Train at least 30 young people;
- Engage at least 30 peace stakeholders (at national, regional, district and municipal level) in dialogue; and
- Disseminate lessons learned on co-existence and peacebuilding.

Overall, the project was designed on the basis of a preventive and participatory approach, and with a vision to engage with relevant stakeholders, including youth, at different levels. AP and CYD wanted to give particular attention to promoting dialogue between civil societies and institutions and to use sustainable approaches.

FINDINGS

EFFECTIVENESS

Under the project AP and CYD successfully completed the following activities:

Inception meetings In Unguja and Pemba. These were held from July 9 to 11, 2024, and involved three key offices: the Office of the Registrar for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the Grand Mufti's Office of Zanzibar, and the Association of People with Disabilities in Zanzibar (UWZ). The meetings helped to advance the project's familiarity, promote its acceptance, and enhance the significance and popularity of the project among government institutions, communities, religious sectors, and other relevant sectors, particularly especially women-led CSOs, youth-led CSOs, and CSOs for people living with disabilities. In Pemba meetings were held on July 16 and 17, 2024. CYD representatives met with the Chake Chake District Commissioner from the Pemba South Region, and the Coordinator of the Mufti's Office in Pemba and the Secretary of the Madrassa Teachers' Development Association Pemba.

Interfaith peace training workshops. Two workshops were implemented, in Unguja (at Tumekuja Secondary School) on August 14, 2024, and in Pemba (at the Main Library Conference Hall in Chachani) on August 17, 2024. In total, the events engaged 60 beneficiaries including religious leaders, politicians, madrasa teachers, women's associations, government representatives, sheikhs, padres, and women led CSOs representatives. The key objectives of the workshops included providing an overview of the "Amani Kwanza" project, training participants on tolerance, collaboration, and community responsibilities, and developing actionable plans for peace promotion. Facilitators included Hashim Pondeza, CYD's Executive Director, Ali Shaaban, CYD's Project Coordinator, and Bernardo Venturi, AP's Head of Research and Advocacy. Overall, the interfaith peace workshops served to build bridges between various community groups by emphasizing shared values and the importance of mutual respect in achieving lasting peace. The leaders and representatives from different faiths and backgrounds created a joint platform for open training and collective efforts towards conflict resolution.

Dialogue event among religious and community leaders. On November 9, 2024, CYD, with support from AP, convened a Peace Dialogue at Makonyo Hall, on Pemba Island. The dialogue brought together 35 participants (30 males and 5 females), including religious leaders, school teachers and members of the Pemba local community, and was strategically organized to foster messages of peace, harmony, and unity in Zanzibar, particularly in anticipation of the upcoming general elections, planned in 2025, which

are often associated with social and political violence. The dialogue underscored the importance of collective responsibility in creating positive change, with a particular focus on reducing election-related tensions and violence often experienced in Pemba Island during election periods. As Mr. Hashim Pondeza, CYD's Director and the Coordinator for the project, said, "We are here in this dialogue to discuss peace matters as human beings rather than our faiths, traditions, ethnicities, or political affiliations." An important achievement for the event was the participation of Sheikh Abdul Karim Said Abdallah, an officer from the Mufti's Office Zanzibar, who led the event as the facilitator (together with Mr. Pondeza). He divided the 35 participants into four smaller groups to brainstorm critical issues concerning peace in different contexts. The topics for group discussions were strategically outlined to address peace in four fundamental areas: peace in faiths, peace in the economy, peace in the community, and peace in politics. The discussions encouraged participants to analyze the challenges, identify opportunities, and propose actionable solutions that would ensure a peaceful and harmonious Zanzibar. The dialogue served as a moment to discuss the lessons learned from previous efforts to facilitate co-existence in the archipelago, placing a strong emphasis on reconnecting with Zanzibar's rich history of peaceful coexistence.

Final internal evaluation and lessons learned report. Following the completion of the dialogue activity, AP launched the evaluation, with the overall aim of identifying lessons learned to inform future efforts by AP and CYD to support social cohesion, dialogue and peacebuilding in Zanzibar. The evaluation's specific objectives were: (i) To assess whether the project was relevant, effective and sustainable; (ii) To understand how the partnership between AP and CYD worked, and how it can be strengthened; and (iii) To identify lessons learned, related to the project, which can support future peacebuilding efforts in Zanzibar. The evaluation was framed through an inception report, which identified key questions, and it was conducted by Bernardo Monzani, AP's Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.

Overall, the activities were implemented according to the modified project implementation plan, which was approved following the funding decision by the donor and subsequent re-modulation of project activities. Training and dialogue activities were conducted in line with the amended plan, and involved a total of 95 participants (60 for the trainings, and 35 for the dialogue event). Only minor adjustments were made to allow the participation of AP's Head of Research and Advocacy, Bernardo Venturi, to the training events.

The main positive outcome of the project is given by the strong relationships that CYD built with religious leaders and authorities, and that these stakeholders build among themselves. There are not many occasions where these people can come together. In fact, opportunities are very rare, in spite of the special role that authorities can play in moments of crisis. Whenever political divisions threaten to

destabilize communities and lead to violence, people still turn to religious leaders and listen to them. Religious authorities are the only ones who can reach to perceived enemies without compromising their moral authority. The project brought them together, assembling a very diverse group for the dialogue event, and an even more diverse group for the trainings. These groups came together and bonded, meeting the project's goal.

Critical to this success was the engagement of stakeholders. The work done by CYD, and Hashim Pondeza in particular, was crucial to ensure that they would commit to sending their representatives to the training workshop first and then to the dialogue event. Stakeholders were engaged through a participatory process, whereby they were given the chance to shape the events and also to decide who to send to them. This helped to gain their goodwill.

Stakeholders and participants were particularly appreciative of the engagement of Bernardo Venturi, who joined the training workshops. During the events, Bernardo had the opportunity to talk about peacebuilding in Italy and other European countries. He talked, for instance, about the Jewish community in Bologna, where AP is based, and how they organized interfaith events. And this happened in both Pemba and Unguja, with different stakeholders. Bernardo also explained what Chiesa Valdese did and the support it provided to the project. That was very positively received by the representative from the Office of the Mufti, who also shared many examples where his Office had received support from other faith-based organizations.

Within this approach lies also a first challenge. Because of it, in fact, CYD did not have full control in terms of who the participants selected would be. The goal had been to engage young people, but in the end the partners selected people who were a bit older than the project's original target group. This said, the emphasis on young people remained. For instance, when the Office of the Mufti had to nominate a representative to join the project, the choice fell on the youngest person in its staff. That served to maintain attention on the need to engage young people, and give them a voice in decision-making processes.

The second challenge was with the resources. The project had to be reduced following the funding decision by the donor, which granted fewer funds than originally requested. Based on this, AP and CYD re-modulated the project, with a smaller scope. The new activities were successfully implemented, but the reduction in scope meant that fewer people could be engaged. And that those engaged had fewer opportunities to come together. This meant that the project's contribution to impact was likely smaller than what could have been achieved with the original resources.

SUSTAINABILITY

The engagement with government officials and religious authorities has been instrumental in establishing the credibility and legitimacy of the Amani Kwanza project. In Unguja, the meeting with the Office of the Registrar for Civil Society Organizations ensured that the project aligned with the President of Zanzibar's call for CSOs to support peace efforts in the lead-up to the 2025 elections. The support from Hon. Abdalla Rashid Ali, the Chake Chake District Commissioner, was equally crucial in Pemba. His endorsement not only facilitated effective local participation, but also signalled a commitment to the project's objectives. This alignment with governmental peace initiatives underlines the project's importance and integrates it within broader national efforts to foster stability and peace.

Overall, the inception activities highlighted the importance of engaging key governmental and religious offices early in the project. This approach enhanced the acceptance and credibility of the project, and also ensured the active participation and commitment of these stakeholders, as seen with the Registrar of CSOs, the Grand Mufti's Office, and the Chake Chake District Commissioner.

Aligning the project with existing governmental peace initiatives, such as the call by the President of Zanzibar for CSOs to support peace, was also important, as it increased the likelihood of project success. The assurance of support and the issuance of necessary permits, as seen in the engagement with the Registrar of CSOs, were critical for the smooth implementation and sustainability of the project's interventions.

The engagement with stakeholders was also important for the quality of implemented activities. For instance, at the interfaith peace training in Unguja, on August 14, 2024, the Grand Mufti's Office, which is also a coordination centre for the Zanzibar interfaith committee, partnered with CYD to deliver insightful discussions on interfaith relations, focusing on the imperative for both Muslims and Christians to actively participate in promoting peace from religious perspectives. The training workshop also featured contributions from other notable figures: Sheikh Talib Said and Inspector Hashim Ali Hashim from the Zanzibar Police Headquarters facilitated participants' discussions, which yielded valuable insights.

Positive relationships were also built with CSOs, particularly those led by women, youth and people with disabilities. These organizations played a very important role in the inception phase of the project, and also during the interfaith peace training workshops. The engagement with the Association of People with Disabilities in Unguja demonstrated the project's commitment to inclusivity and advocacy. These organizations provided valuable insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by marginalized

groups, ensuring that the peacebuilding efforts were comprehensive and equitable. Their involvement not only broadened the project's reach but also facilitated a more inclusive understanding of community dynamics and the importance of addressing diverse needs in peacebuilding efforts.

Overall, stakeholder engagement has been one of the most positive aspects of the project. CYD has been able to reach out to some of the most important stakeholders in Zanzibar, in an inclusive and participatory manner. This engagement certainly benefited from the coordination between CYD and AP, which has allowed Bernardo Venturi, AP's Head of Research and Advocacy, to be present at the project's initial activities.

These relations are sustainable. CYD is presently building on them, while also looking for more resources to continue engaging religious authorities. In this context, the timing of the project was critical and very positive. Project activities have, in fact, taken place on the eve of national elections, which are historically moments of social decisions, tensions and violence. Yet, within the Zanzibar community, religion cuts across political and ethnic divisions. There are differences in politics that make people not talk to each other. but religion does, and always has allowed dialogue. The interfaith committee has been bringing people together in all previous times when conflict rose and threatened violence. Getting religious stakeholders together at such a critical time must be considered a very positive achievement and a factor contributing to the sustainability of the relationships created by the project.

PARTNERSHIP

The evaluation also wanted to assess the partnership between AP and CYD. The Amani Kwanza project represented, in fact, the first formal collaboration between the two organizations, which have aspirations to continue working together.

Overall, the assessment has been positive. AP and CYD worked well together and this showed most clearly in the implementation of activities, which was generally smooth. In this regard, AP gave a considerable amount of autonomy to CYD (within the parameters of the original proposal, which had been co-designed by the two organizations). This was appreciated and contributed to the achievement of the positive results mentioned in the section on effectiveness.

Communication worked really well. The expectations were clear from the beginning, and a system of regular check-ins was agreed. Updates and information were shared via email, calls and WhatsApp messages. This helped to make communication instant when it needed to be.

Positively, there was also mutual learning. Time was invested early on in the project implementation period to allow CYD to learn about AP's systems and templates. That was a good learning opportunity for the organization. For AP, the partnership represented an opportunity to test its systems, fine-tuning them to the necessities of the partner organization, and of the donor.

Where the partnership encountered some challenges was on reporting. Aligning the two organization's systems and practices proved more complicated than expected, especially in light of donor regulations and requests. Addressing specific requests highlighted, in fact, gaps in each other's understanding, in some cases of the tools being used, and in some others of the procedures for recording expenses. Communication helped to clear the misunderstandings, but certainly these are challenges that, in the future, can be anticipated and tackled earlier on.

A last challenge was in relation to the donor. This was the first time that either AP or CYD worked with Chiesa Valdese. Learning the donor's platform and systems required time and effort, which had not been initially foreseen. Being able to communicate directly with the donor representatives made a huge difference, but the challenges led to some delays in reporting.



Photo description: Participants in the peace training workshop organized in Unguja (Source: Center for Youth Dialogue)

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The project was successful. Albeit limited in scope, it made important contributions to the debate on peacebuilding in Zanzibar, a debate that has become more important with the approaching of general elections. CYD applied an inclusive and participatory approach to engaging government stakeholders and religious authorities, which helped consolidate relationships that are going to be fundamental in the pre-electoral period. AP provided added value, supporting key events and providing interesting new perspectives. There were challenges, but these were managed without consequences for the implementation of activities.

There were also lessons learned, which will be helpful to guide similar efforts in the future. These are presented below.

Inclusivity is a key feature for success. The interfaith peace training workshops showcased the importance of including a diverse range of participants, including religious leaders, government, educators, and community representatives. In both Unguja and Pemba, the involvement of these varied stakeholders enriched the discussions, bringing multiple perspectives and expertise to the table. This inclusivity enhanced the training's depth and fostered a sense of collective ownership and commitment to peace among participants and cross-sectorial.

Historical examples from Zanzibar's past are important to promote buy-in from stakeholders. The historical context provided during the training workshops, particularly by Hashim Pondeza, highlighted the significance of understanding past coexistence between Muslims and Christians. This historical perspective helped participants appreciate the deep-rooted traditions of peace and collaboration within their communities, hence emphasizing historical examples of peaceful coexistence reinforced the idea that maintaining harmony is both achievable and essential.

Good timing makes a difference. The project, even when reduced in scope, made a significant contribution to the debate on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This was due to the fact that the training workshops and the dialogue event were organized on the eve of the 2025 general elections. This timing was crucial to the project's contribution. The events reminded participants of the crucial role of local leaders, including religious figures, educators, and community organizers, in promoting and sustaining peace.

Contributions from figures like Sheikh Abdallah Hadhar Abdalla and Donald Naveta highlighted how local leaders can influence and guide their communities toward peaceful coexistence even in times, like general elections, where divisions and intolerance are on the rise. Their insights and commitments emphasized the need for these leaders to be actively involved in peacebuilding efforts.

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential for impact. The dialogue emphasized the role of both the government and society in maintaining peace and security. Participants stressed that the government must ensure tolerance and take proactive measures to eliminate any factors that might cause fear or tension within the community, particularly before, during, and after elections. This will create an environment where citizens feel secure and actively contribute to promoting peace and development in the country.



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