



Policy Driver for Data Accessibility and User-Friendliness in Peacebuilding: A Collaborative Framework

Developed by Open PeaceTech Hub and Open Knowledge Foundation in July 2024

Abstract

This paper presents a policy framework designed to improve data accessibility and user-friendliness within peacebuilding. Developed collaboratively at the Austrian Forum for Peace on July 4, 2024, by representatives from the United Nations, OSCE, peacebuilding organisations, the third sector, and activists, the framework addresses key challenges in data dissemination. It emphasises transparency, ethical considerations, methodological precision, and sustainability, aiming to empower peacebuilders with reliable and user-centric data to support effective interventions.

Executive Summary

Access to reliable, ethical, and user-friendly data is essential for effective interventions and informed decision-making in peacebuilding. This paper outlines a policy framework collaboratively developed at the Austrian Forum for Peace on July 4, 2024, incorporating insights from international organisations, peacebuilding entities, the third sector, and grassroots activists. The framework tackles significant challenges in data dissemination, focusing on transparency, methodological accuracy, ethical considerations, and sustainability.

The framework aims to enhance dataset utility by ensuring data is accessible, actionable, and contextually relevant. Key recommendations include establishing protocols for transparency and source disclosure, providing comprehensive documentation of data methodologies and limitations, and fostering user engagement through interactive tools and educational resources. Additionally, it advocates for strong ethical standards and sustainable practices, aligning data management with global development goals and ethical norms.

A critical element of implementing these policies effectively is incorporating feedback from peacebuilders actively engaged in the field. Amplifying their voices allows data providers to base their policies and strategies on the practical realities of those working in conflict resolution. To support this, the Open PeaceTech Hub of the Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT) and The Open Knowledge Foundation are utilising their networks and events to present policy-driving evidence transparently and in an open-source manner. By integrating human-centric design principles, these initiatives ensure that policies are both theoretically sound and practically relevant.

This framework provides a blueprint for enhancing data accessibility and usability in peacebuilding, emphasising the need to ground policies in the experiences of those on the ground. Through transparent and open dissemination, the framework aims to support more sustainable and impactful peacebuilding efforts globally.

Introduction

In the dynamic field of peacebuilding, access to actionable and reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and strategic interventions. However, merely having data available does not ensure its effectiveness. This policy document offers guidelines to encourage data providers to make their data not only accessible but also user-friendly, ethical, and impactful. The guidelines reflect a collective effort to meet the needs of various stakeholders in peacebuilding, ensuring that data serves as a catalyst for positive change.

Methodology

The policy framework was developed through a participatory approach, bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders at the Austrian Forum for Peace in 2024. Workshops and collaborative discussions allowed representatives from international organisations, NGOs, and grassroots activists to co-design the guidelines. The process focused on identifying common challenges in data usage within peacebuilding and developing practical, universally applicable solutions.

Key Policy Guidelines

1. Transparency: Know the Source

Clearly identify the publisher and primary beneficiaries of the data to ensure credibility. Transparency regarding data sources helps users assess potential biases and reliability, which is crucial for informed decision-making in peacebuilding.

2. Disclosure: Limits of the Data

Data providers must disclose the limitations of their data, including scope,

accuracy, and constraints. This enables users to understand the context and implications for its application in peacebuilding efforts.

3. Documentation: Methodology

Comprehensive documentation of data collection methods is essential. Providers should explain the reasons for data collection, tools used, and any data invisibles that might impact data interpretation.

4. Interactive Tools: Gamification

Develop interactive platforms that allow users to explore and visualise data. Gamification and innovative presentations make complex datasets more accessible and usable for peacebuilders.

5. Data Contestation: Contingency Plans

Establish procedures for contesting data to maintain trust and accountability. Data providers should outline steps for addressing misuse and mitigating negative impacts.

6. Ethics Framework: Ethical Guidelines

Ensure data collection, processing, and dissemination adhere to privacy, consent, and ethical considerations. This framework should be integral to the data lifecycle.

7. Validity Period: Exploration Date

Assign an exploration date to datasets to indicate their period of reliability. This practice helps ensure that users work with up-to-date and relevant data.

8. User Guides: Education Toolkits

Provide education toolkits, including tutorials, case studies, and best practices, to empower users in effectively utilising the data. These resources are essential for informed decision-making.

9. Contextual Links: Related Datasets

Offer links to related datasets to provide additional context or complementary information, promoting a holistic understanding of the data.

10. Bias Questionnaire: Bias Assessment

Include a bias questionnaire to help users identify and understand potential biases in the data. This transparency is crucial for fair and accurate data-driven decisions in peacebuilding.

11. Open Source Tools: Software Recommendations

Recommend free and open-source software for data analysis and visualisation to ensure equitable access. This promotes inclusivity and democratises data use.

12. SDG Alignment: Sustainable Development Goals

Indicate which Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the data supports. A green label can highlight contributions to sustainability and global development goals.

13. Purpose-Driven Data: Needs-Based Approach

Ensure data collection addresses relevant questions and challenges in

peacebuilding. This approach makes the data purpose-driven and impact-oriented.

14. Safety Benchmark: Do No Harm

Adhere to the "do no harm" principle in data publishing. Providers must ensure data dissemination does not inadvertently cause harm or exacerbate conflicts.

15. Standards Compliance: Code of Conduct

Implement a code of conduct to enforce compliance with ethical standards and best practices. This code should be widely recognized and adhered to in the peacebuilding sector.

16. Sustainability: Carbon Footprint

Evaluate and minimise the carbon footprint of data collection and dissemination processes. This aligns with broader efforts to address climate change in peacebuilding initiatives.

17. Narrative Building: Positive Reinforcement

Use data to create positive narratives and highlight successful peacebuilding efforts. Share stories and case studies that demonstrate the impact of data-driven interventions to inspire further action.

18. Quality Assurance: Peer Review

Implement a peer review system for datasets before release to ensure quality and reliability. This process can be linked to new licensing mechanisms to enhance trust.

Findings and Recommendations

The collaborative development of this framework highlights the need for user-friendly, ethical, and accessible data in peacebuilding. Key findings include the importance of transparency, methodological accuracy, and ethical considerations. The recommendations provided serve as a foundation for data providers to enhance the utility and impact of their datasets, supporting more effective peacebuilding interventions.

Implementation Strategies for Data Providers

Transparency and Source Disclosure:

- **Action Steps:** Ensure transparency by documenting and publishing dataset origins, including publishers, data collectors, and beneficiaries. Implement standardised metadata to facilitate user assessment of data credibility and potential biases. Contextualize data sources through summary reports highlighting relevant affiliations or funding sources.

Limitation and Methodology Documentation:

- **Action Steps:** Attach comprehensive disclosure statements to datasets, outlining scope, accuracy, and limitations. Provide detailed methodology documents explaining data collection purposes, tools, and techniques. Regularly update documentation to reflect new insights or limitations.

User Engagement through Interactive Tools:

- **Action Steps:** Develop interactive platforms with gamification and dynamic visualisations to enhance data exploration. Collaborate with tech developers or use existing open-source platforms to create accessible tools for diverse users.

Ethical Guidelines and Safety Measures:

- **Action Steps:** Establish a robust ethics framework covering all stages of data management. Include privacy and consent protocols, a "do no harm" checklist, and impact assessments. Provide regular training and oversight to ensure compliance.

Validity Period and Data Updates:

- **Action Steps:** Assign validity periods to datasets and implement systems for regular reviews and updates. Communicate updates to users to ensure they work with current and reliable information.

Education Toolkits and Contextual Linkages:

- **Action Steps:** Develop multilingual education toolkits with tutorials, case studies, and best practices. Establish systems linking related datasets to enhance understanding and utility.

Bias Assessment and User Support:

- **Action Steps:** Include bias assessment questionnaires with datasets and provide resources for accurate interpretation. Encourage user feedback to continuously improve dataset utility and fairness.

Sustainability and Open Access:

- **Action Steps:** Promote free and open-source software for data analysis. Evaluate and reduce the carbon footprint of data management processes. Indicate SDG alignment using labels or icons.

Quality Assurance through Peer Review:

- **Action Steps:** Implement a peer review process for datasets before release, involving experts to verify data accuracy and reliability. Consider linking peer review to certification or licensing systems to enhance trust.

Narrative Building, Language Relevance, and Positive Reinforcement:

- **Action Steps:** Use data to create positive narratives and share successful peacebuilding examples. Ensure communications are clear and accessible, avoiding technical jargon. Document and share data-driven successes to inspire and engage users.

Conclusion

The policy guidelines outlined in this document represent a concerted effort to address the challenges in accessing and utilising data for peacebuilding. Adhering to these guidelines will improve data accessibility, usability, and ethical integrity, empowering peacebuilders to make informed decisions and enhance the effectiveness of their interventions.