



The BEP Team met in October 2021 on GMU's Arlington Campus

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Winter 2021 Newsletter Issue 6

Our Mission

The mission of the Better Evidence Project (BEP) is to contribute to stopping and preventing wars by promoting and facilitating the use of evidence to guide the support, design, implementation and assessment of peacemaking initiatives.



Messages from BEP's Leadership

**Principal Investigator's Message:
Dr. Susan H. Allen**

Dear BEP Community,

When I spoke with Milt Lauenstein about the vision of the Better Evidence Project, as we founded BEP in spring 2020, I highlighted the many colleagues already working on making peacemaking more effective by researching what works and what doesn't work. I knew that to be successful, we would need to synergize with ongoing efforts. That is happening, thanks to all of you who have engaged so collaboratively around our shared goals!

I am sincerely grateful to all in the BEP community for your input during BEP's formative stages, including your responses to our multiple inquiries about how we can present evidence that will be most useful to your work in preventing and ending wars. Thanks to your input, we have begun the long process of populating the online Resource Center. Please note two resources we have recently posted:

- [Soldiers without Guns](#), an award-winning documentary by William Watson featuring unarmed peacekeeping in Bougainville. Thanks to Mr. Watson, we are able to bring this film to you for you to stream from our website.
- [Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking](#) by Ronald J. Fisher, published by Lexington Books, 2005. This book is available in open access format for free download.

I also want to gratefully acknowledge the exceptional work of BEP's recent Interim Executive Director, Dr. Margarita Tadevosyan, who stepped in to manage BEP for three months while we completed an international search for a long-term BEP Executive Director.

I am pleased now to welcome Dr. Jeffrey Helsing, BEP's Executive Director as of October 1, 2021. Jeff comes to BEP after decades of work at the United States Institute of Peace, leading Education and Training initiatives there. He brings to BEP a wealth of experience in building collaborations to strengthen peace efforts. Please read Jeff's welcome message in this newsletter, and watch for further communications from him about BEP. Jeff and I look forward to working with all of you as together we decrease warfare with Better Evidence.

Susan H. Allen, Ph.D.



Messages from BEP's Leadership

Executive Director's Message: Dr. Jeff Helsing

Dear BEP Community,

I am very pleased to join the Better Evidence Project as the new Executive Director, and to join the community of the Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason. I come to this young program after 22 years working at the United States Institute of Peace which, since its inauguration in 1984, has been very closely connected to the Carter School, its faculty and its students. In fact, in 1979, President Jimmy Carter asked Dr. James Laue—a scholar, teacher, civil rights activist, and mediator—to chair a commission to establish a national academy to teach peacemaking techniques. Dr. Laue had co-founded and chaired the National Peace Academy Campaign and the work of the Peace Academy commission led to the creation of the U.S. Institute of Peace as a government agency established to promote research, education and training on international peace and conflict resolution. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Laue became the Lynch Professor of Conflict Resolution at George Mason, the nation's first endowed professorial chair in that field.

What excites me most about joining the Carter School is that I have become part of a community of scholar-practitioners, people who, like James Laue, bridge theory and practice and work to build greater capacity to address the causes and legacies of violence. And the mission of the Better Evidence Project is to provide a platform to share ideas and explore ways to leverage some unique and relevant research in order to stimulate and strengthen new approaches to making peace and preventing war. Our goal is that, in a compelling and timely manner, the Better Evidence Project can help highlight and clarify lessons from conflict-related research shared and discussed by policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers. We will soon be reporting on the results of 9 small grants that the Better Evidence Project funded last spring. These small grants aim to develop evidence on effective ways to support local peacebuilders and create more useful indicators and measurement methodologies. They also reflect innovative approaches to ensuring results-driven, measurable, and cost-effective successes in peacemaking while adding to our collective understanding of evidence that can contribute to preventing wars. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read about vital work being done by the HAWENKA coalition of women mediators in Northeast Kenya, which typifies the kind of impactful long-term work we hope to promote.

The Better Evidence Project is also strengthening connections between local and global peacemaking efforts in order to help bring policy, practice and research in closer alignment. To that end, the Better Evidence Project is developing a Resource Center in order to collect and maintain in an accessible and user-friendly online format a growing body of evidence on what works and what does not work in peacebuilding and peacemaking at all different levels. The resource center will launch soon, and will cultivate and archive materials—case studies, peer-reviewed research and scholarship, impact assessments and project evaluations, government and NGO reports and monographs, data bases, and audio-visual content. This useful evidence will blend together generalized guidelines and context-specific insights to support decision-making. By synthesizing and sharing knowledge, the Better Evidence Project Resource Center will help organizations, practitioners, policymakers and scholars learn from each other, multiplying the impact of many people already doing good work. Ultimately, if we can't recognize success or failure we can't learn from either. Better evidence, therefore, will drive smarter approaches, which in turn will yield better results. We look forward to bringing our new resource on-line soon and expect that you will find it a useful and growing resource.

Jeffrey W. Helsing, PhD
Executive Director

HAWENKA: The Impact of a Local Peace Initiative

The Better Evidence Project awarded a grant to HAWENKA (Horn of Africa Women Empowerment Network Kenyan Agency) in the spring of 2020 to assess and promote the success stories of a local, women-led NGO. At the heart of HAWENKA's work has been the use of women-led initiatives in the Northeastern Kenyan counties of Mandera and Wajir and then later scaled up to other counties. Based on indigenous knowledge, conveyed through cultural and religious norms, they managed to resolve major conflicts between the Garre and the Ajuran clans and between the Garre (the Murrule and Garre) and Degodia Clans. The following is a synopsis of the evaluation of their efforts.

In assessing the impact of HAWENKA's initiatives, the grant studied how and why local peacebuilding efforts succeeded where well-funded initiatives by the government and international organizations had failed over the years.

What did HAWENKA as an umbrella organization, and other local organizations, do differently from previous interventions? And, what lessons can be learned from the success of such local women-led initiatives?



Women Leadership Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshop in Mandera

Workshops for Leadership Training of Trainers was key to the success of the women-led initiatives



During a time of increased violence and killings, indigenous women peacemakers confronted elders, religious leaders, and youth, in order to get them to accept unofficial peace talks. At its core, local women organized informal mediated discussions aimed at “restoring relations between victim clans and offending clans.” The women very intentionally discussed and addressed the obstacles that were preventing progress during the formal peace negotiations.



BEP Research Validation Workshop in Garissa

The women leaders, under the stewardship of Dekha Ibrahim, creatively developed a rallying slogan which appealed to their ‘Rer wajirhood’ (we are Wajirans). This term reflects a special bond of sharing locality and childhood that becomes a binding factor, including during funeral ceremonies and prayer meetings.

A key lesson that emerged from the BEP-funded study has been that the participation of indigenous women in the peace process is most effective because it is continuous and not time-bound.

The initiatives also worked to overcome some traditional cultural barriers which often limit women to the roles of either mothers or wives and portray women, predominantly in conflict situations, as the face of victims of violence. In doing so, one woman leader asserts that, **“the innovations by indigenous women in Northern Kenya demonstrate they are thinkers who do not take the backseat ‘wailing’ when conflict erupts between the clans, but they devise nonviolent strategies to engage.”**

The HAWENKA initiatives were informal while also amplifying the voices of women in the daily lives of the community. This ran counter to the rules of more rigid program and time planning often used in the formal interventions by many outside NGOs. The BEP-funded study shows that groups of women in Northern Kenya **prefer working together through social events** such as oath-taking (Dhaarin or Qasaama), weddings (Aroos) and child-birth ceremonies (Waqlal or Caqiiqa) to form stronger personal bonds that are more functional than are ethnic bonds.

They also effectively engaged in trauma healing, including Abay Abay (Sister to Sister), an important trauma healing framework that has been particularly effective in addressing inter-communal conflicts, most effectively in post-conflict reconstruction and demobilization of clan militias.

Such interventions provide a platform of ownership and commitment by local communities because they are embedded in values very few protagonists would dare to challenge. By contrast, the study concluded that interventions that are led by government institutions and donor agencies from outside the locality face skepticism and mistrust.

One woman noted, **“I would appeal to the government and all the INGOs intending to work in our local areas to stop being reactive but rather proactive in peacebuilding, what I mean is, being ready to learn instead of them always developing programs aimed at monoculturally ‘empowering’ the women and the youths within the communities.”**

The study demonstrated that it is important to acknowledge that indigenous women have some knowledge from which the international programs can learn, but there are other knowledge, skills and perspectives that cannot be learned and replicated by outsiders. This reflects that the local women **already are equipped with knowledge, skills, and insights more suited to their context than what outsiders can bring.**



A Community Peace Meeting at the Village Level

Partner Events

Peace Con@10 January 26th-28th, 2022

The Better Evidence Project encourages all interested in evidence-based peacemaking to attend PeaceCon@10, COVID, Climate, and Conflict, Rising to the Challenges of a Disrupted World.

You can find the agenda [here](#):

COVID, Climate, and Conflict, Rising to the Challenges of a Disrupted World

PeaceCon@10 will be held digitally this year from 26-28 January 2022 with the theme COVID, Climate, and Conflict, Rising to the Challenges of a Disrupted World. This year, there will be discounted student tickets of only \$10 and general admission is only \$80 to cover all three days. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Humanity United and individual donors, local peacebuilders can attend PeaceCon free of charge with application. All registration information can be found [here](#).

There will be a number of sessions dedicated to Evidence and Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. In particular, the Better Evidence Project and Search for Common Ground will be co-hosting and co-facilitating the following session on **Friday, January 28th at 2:00:**

Connecting Our Evidence: Creating Alignment in Measuring Peace and Conflict

Additional sessions in the Evidence and Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning space include:

- The Impact of COVID-19 on Social Cohesion and Violence: Challenges and Opportunities
- Impact Evaluations and Peacebuilding: An Interactive Workshop on how Evidence can Improve Programming and Policy
- Responding to Population Displacement: Practical Solutions for the Climate-Conflict-Migration Nexus
- Learning from Environmental Peacebuilding Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): An Interactive, Problem-Solving Workshop

During the three days of the conference, PeaceCon@10 will feature 50+ outstanding panel conversations, interactive workshops, and keynote addresses sharing how the peacebuilding community can #RiseToBuildPeace.

Insights from the Field

Key Takeaways

The Conveners' Community of Practice Consultation By Margarita Tadevosyan

The Center for Peacemaking Practice at the Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution convened a working meeting of the Conveners' Community of Practice on October 12, 2021. The Conveners' Community of Practice (CCOP) is a collaborative space where scholars and practitioners who work on convening Track 1.5 or Track 2 processes come together to share their experience, discuss ongoing challenges, process particular puzzles that they are grappling with and generate joint learning to support colleagues working in the field.

CCOP is a unique space for practitioners as it emphasizes a comprehensive process of dialogue convening that goes beyond the process of facilitation and includes purposeful thinking and consideration of dialogue structure, process, participants, immediate and larger environment, logistics and many other aspects. The October meeting was the 4th annual meeting convened within the framework of this format. The first CCOP meeting took place at the Carter School's Point of View, with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Subsequent meetings have been held at the Ottawa Dialogue and the US Institute of Peace.

The October discussions focused on the discussion of several key issues that were put forward by the participants as issues of concern or stumbling blocks in their current work. In particular, the participants discussed ways of moving forward dialogue work in environments where there is a visible erosion of trust and fading motivation to engage. Another central topic for discussion was around various challenges faced by conveners in the COVID-dominated world where in-person convening continues to remain highly challenging.

Reflecting on their own work and the specific area of peacebuilding work that convening occupies, the participants noted the need to map the existing dialogue efforts as well as develop contingency approaches to dialogue decisions. Different working groups within CCOP plan on continuing specific consultations around some of these issues.

**Carter School
Fall 2021
Peace Week
Events**

**Save the Dates!
Carter School
Spring Peace Week
April 4th-8th, 2022**

Emergent Evidence Based Practices Supporting SDG16

If you missed BEP's Fall 2021 Peace Week Events, please click on the link in the title above and use this password to view: @iU4yi!q Dr. Susan Allen moderated the conversation which included experts from the field of peacebuilding and monitoring and evaluation: Adeline Sibanda, Dr. Tammy Smith, Dr. Ekaterina Romanova, Yahoska Berrios, and Dr. Margarita Tadevosyan. Panelists articulated the importance of engaging local communities in co-designing and co-creating evidence collection processes. Panelists argued that we need to build new models and frameworks for the collection of evidence that are decentralized and developed from the ground up. These approaches provide the space for accountability, agency, and to target the needs of affected communities more effectively. Many noted that local practitioners are often driven by evidence, that there is therefore a need to invest and empower local practitioners. There was a general agreement that there is a disconnect that exists with international donors and funders (priorities), noting that evidence is often not translated or even collected in ways that can help reshape thinking about programmatic impact. This showcases a gap between the evidence presented to the international community and donors, and what is happening on the ground. Read more on the takeaways from this event [here](#).

Movie Night: Soldiers Without Guns

If you missed our movie night, stream it from our website. Click on the title to access the film. Featuring speaker and owner of TMI Films, William Watson, this 2.25-hour session includes an introduction from the award-winning film maker, a screening of the film, and a Q and A and discussion with film maker William Watson. Discussion focuses on Soldiers without Guns, but also will mention as relevant to SDG16 Watson's other recent award-winning film "Savage" which looks at an individual's life path that leads to violence as an enforcer in New Zealand street gangs.



**Peace Week Events will be uploaded on the
Carter School YouTube channel.
Click on the YouTube logo for more!**

Email bep@gmu.edu
to get involved and
learn more!

Get Involved

Submit Your Work & Research

Do you want your work to be included in our resource center?

Email bep@gmu.edu with the work you would like to submit, your resume, and why you think this resource would benefit our mission to provide lessons learned and evidence-based practice.

Become a Reviewer

Fill out this [form](#).

Submit a 3 Minute Thesis

Email bep@gmu.edu

Working Groups

Join Peacemaker Security Workshop

The peacemaker safety and security working group aims to bring together experts and practitioners to focus on threats to the safety and security of peacemakers. The group looks to gather evidence, conduct new research, and craft policy and practical guidelines to help peacemakers and organizations deal with the security landscape in the areas they are operating in.

The group welcomes members from different sectors and disciplines that have an interest in promoting a safer and more secure environment for peacemakers. If you are interested in joining the BEP facilitated working group on peacemaker security please email: zalachka@gmu.edu

Join Peacemaking Case Study Working Group

The Case Study Working Group includes a variety of organizations and individuals seeking to build case studies as contributions to our evidence base. Working together, we will increase the access in our field to quality case studies that can inform our understanding of what works (and doesn't work) in peacemaking. The group welcomes others to join in these efforts. Please e-mail sallen29@gmu.edu.

Follow Us



Spring 2022: Call for Interns

The Better Evidence Project (BEP) in the Center for Peacemaking Practice is offering Spring 2022 student internship opportunities, available to undergraduate and graduate students. The BEP Student Internship Program is designed to provide students substantive learning experiences in conflict prevention and mitigation. Working with The Better Evidence Project will enable you to get an inside look at how applied conflict research is conducted, shared, and translated across practice, policy, and donor communities. You will see the daily operations of applied peace and conflict fields and contribute to BEP's efforts to develop evidence of what works and doesn't work in peacemaking and war prevention. You will also gain valuable work and research experience relevant to your future professional career. In addition to the networking opportunities and mentorship that will support your long-term career development, responsibilities include a combination of the following

- Engaging in research and contributing materials to BEP's new on-line Resource Center;
- Participating as a full member of the BEP Team in the development and maintenance of the Resource Center and at a variety of public events;
- Contributing to stakeholder outreach for the Resource Center;
- Drafting, editing, or contributing to reports and public conflict briefings for BEP's website;
- Supporting large events that convene major players in peacemaking, including the Spring Peace Week in April

Interns will report directly to BEP Executive Director, Dr. Jeffrey Helsing, who will provide feedback and guidance related to their work. The BEP Internship Program is unpaid but can earn undergraduate and graduate university credit. This program can also satisfy the required Field Experience for George Mason undergraduates. There is an expected commitment of 15-20 hours per week.

**Applications
Due
January 24th,
2022**

**Send to
bep@gmu.edu**

Applications must include:

- A resume
- A statement of interest (no more than 500 words) that describes your background, interests, and how you could contribute to helping BEP achieve its mission.
- In addition, please include at least one academic reference with contact information.