

Constellating Peace from the Inside Out

A Global Gathering and Immersive Peer Learning Event

THE PLACE RESORT AT TOKEH BEACH, FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE 1-5 APRIL 2019



osted by US-based operating foundation Catalyst for Peace (CFP), in partnership with Sierra Leonean NGO Fambul Tok and the Government of Sierra Leone, Constellating Peace from the Inside Out illuminated the stories, practices, structures, and theory at the heart of a system of peace that centers the people and communities most affected by conflict, inviting all who were there into a more fully embodied practice of peacebuilding.

During twelve years of partnership in Sierra Leone, Catalyst for Peace and Fambul Tok have lived into a shared vision of a whole, healthy, and inclusive international peace and development system, from the local community through the national and international level. This vision centers local community creativity and agency not merely in rhetoric, but in practice—by building structures and holding space for local people and communities to claim their potential and achieve their priorities. We have been inspired, time and again, by what ordinary people can achieve when they are invited into their leadership. Through this work, we have seen rural communities in Sierra Leone lead in their own healing, both from the tragedy of civil war and the devastation of Ebola. We have seen these same communities undertake major development projects without waiting for outside aid. We have seen them open the doors to a peaceful, sustainable future that they choose and co-create.

Supporting local people and communities who are stepping into their full capacity requires rethinking the role of the outside supporter as someone not merely providing resources and expertise but creating and holding space; inviting, supporting and connecting local leadership; and building connections to the next levels of governance infrastructure. This way of working transforms everything from program design to budgeting decisions to staffing structures; at its most powerful, building peace and development from the inside out also means working from the best of ourselves, our whole selves—at every stage of the process.

Constellating Peace marked the launch of CFP's next phase of work: strengthening a global community of practice in peace and development that works **from the inside out.** We envision a community of working practitioners from every sector, engaged at all levels of peace work, and from any organizational perspective, who feel called, as we do, to live in and into a whole system with local people and communities at the center.

This report is an invitation to step into the reflective and learning space we built together with the participants of *Constellating Peace* and which we will continue to grow and nurture as a global learning community.

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BEGINNINGS



arly in the morning on the first of April, between the bungalows of the spacious and tranquil Tokeh Beach Resort Hotel, two dozen Sierra Leonean women in bright dresses and elaborate head wraps began singing and dancing, inviting newly arrived visitors out of their bungalows and into the sunlight of Sierra Leone. These were Fambul Tok Peace Mothers, the women who grounded and expanded the fambul tok way of working in their communities by building collaborative economic projects, holding space for community dialogue and conflict resolution, and supporting their fellow Peace Mothers in individual initiatives, from seeding new cassava plants to running for local office.

The power of the Peace Mothers was palpable as they welcomed the 75 delegates and 50 opening day guests of *Constellating Peace* into their circle of celebration. Together, they danced upward into the formal meeting room, where the gathering officially opened with formal welcomes from John Caulker, executive director of Fambul Tok; Libby Hoffman, president of Catalyst for Peace; and several officials from the Government of Sierra Leone, including Chief Minister Prof. David J. Francis; Minister of State for the Vice President Francess Piagie Alghali;

Over five days, an inside-out approach to peace was explained, witnessed, and embodied.

Prof. David J. Francis, chief minister for Sierra Leone, gives opening remarks. then-Minister of Local Government and Rural Development Anthony Y. Brewyah; and Director of National Planning at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development Dr. Sheka Bangura, all of whom pledged their support for this important way of working.

Over the next five days, an inside-out approach to peace and development was explained, witnessed, and embodied in group presentations, dynamic interactions, and visits to rural communities. Mornings began with an invitation to stillness and deep inner listening through a sacred opening of multi-faith prayer, silence, and deep reflection—a critical support to working from the inside out as we have practiced it. Afternoons included large-group presentations by Fambul Tok staff and community leaders, small





Fambul Tok Peace Mothers gift Libby Hoffman with a hand-embroidered blanket, an example of the work they sell to support their communities' activities.

group discussions among practitioners from the same global region or concentrating on the same topical questions, and vibrant exchanges between and among participants, Peace Mothers, program leaders, and others.

The goal was not only to explain inside-out peacebuilding or exchange ideas among experts, but to begin transforming how conflict and its resolution are imagined. Dr. Ali Ahmed, chief technical advisor on stabilization and governance at Somalia's Ministry of the Interior, characterized the invitation he felt as shifting a programmatic focus from "what is wrong with communities to what is *strong* in communities."

Constellating Peace delegates came from Somalia, Zimbabwe, the Netherlands, the Central African Republic, the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States, Kenya, Afghanistan, South Sudan and across Sierra Leone. Many traveled for two or more days through multiple airports and layovers to get to Sierra Leone, a place not known for holding global events. They were all people who understood the importance of being in the place where the work

of peace and development was happening and of learning directly from those who were doing it, especially front-line leaders who would have great difficulty getting visas to travel outside of Sierra Leone.

The delegates represented community-based organizations, funders, national organizations, national government ministries, and international organizations, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme. They were a diverse group with a common commitment to work in ways that center local people in their own peacebuilding and development—a cohort described by one delegate as "a remarkable group of practitioners and visionaries who put communities at the center." Drawing together such experience and diversity represented a living expression of the gathering's title. Each participant and each organization was a star in this new, expansive, inclusive constellation of peace from the inside out.

The week was co-hosted by the Government



Delegates engage in creative conversation about inside-out peacebuilding in their own contexts.

of Sierra Leone, which only two months before had formally launched its new National Development Plan, incorporating the core elements of Fambul Tok's People's Planning Process (PPP) as the foundation for people-centered national planning. This is part of the Government's implementation of the Wan Fambul National Framework for Inclusive Governance and Local Development, which represents a commitment to fully scale the PPP, after it was successfully piloted in three districts across the country. The PPP allows villages to articulate their priorities and visions, and the Wan Fambul National Framework makes those priorities the drivers of national development for the first time in the country's history. "The Wan Fambul National Framework in my view and in the view of the government is a unique experience of government policy designed to put people at the heart of development," said Prof. David. J. Francis, chief minister of Sierra Leone. "This framework ensures that our country's development is led and owned by the people."

John Caulker, executive director of Fambul Tok, said, "From the very beginning, we felt people knew their needs best and that they had the answers—the knowledge and the capacity—and the commitment to address them. We have seen time and time again the incredible things communities of ordinary people can do when they have the space and the invitation."

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ike the Wan Fambul framework, Constellating Peace was community-centered, in spirit and in action. Delegates spent two of their five days together traveling to and from Fambul Tok communities in rural Sierra Leone. This journeying out echoed one of Fambul Tok's central valuesthe importance of going to and walking with the communities you are intending to support. Those central values have always been the starting point for Fambul Tok's work —in village-level reconciliation, in the section- and district-wide People's Planning Process, and incorporated by the Government in the Wan Fambul National Framework. That starting point is an assumption: that the answers are there, in the communities and their people. Answers aren't imported from the outside, but an outsider's role is to invite, amplify, and mirror back the answers that are called forward by communities themselves, and to recognize and strengthen the resources that are already there. The Fambul Tok staff carried those beliefs as they met with inclusive clusters of people in thousands of communities across Sierra Leone and invited them to trust themselves and their potential and to envision and then begin co-creating a positive future for themselves, with the resources they already had. Listening to and trusting that vision, the staff accompanied communities as they rebuilt their social fabric, renewed their confidence in their potential and power, and realized and expanded their leadership capacities.

Encountering the people and communities who had experienced this process proved to be transformative learning for event participants.

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Ten groups visited ten locations, witnessing a variety of Fambul Tok-facilitated activities, from Peace Mothers making soap or cassava flour for roadside sales to a chiefdom reviewing and validating its People's Plan, the final step in the PPP facilitated by Fambul Tok before the plan is forwarded to the district for inclusion in the official development agenda. The visits offered embodied learning about the possibilities of an inside-out way of working—of the untapped potential that can be unleashed whenever communities are invited to lead their own growth and development. For conference participants, being welcomed with abundant warmth and hospitality into the spaces of fambul tok communities opened hearts, crystallized new ideas, demonstrated the power of language,





John Caulker, executive director of Fambul Tok, talks with community members at the Koinadugu Inclusive District Committee meeting.

and made the work vivid, real, and lived.

It also expanded the way participants saw Sierra Leone—and even the way they saw themselves and their home settings.

"I felt like new life has been breathed again into the lives of our people who have been affected badly by violence and by war and Ebola. I saw new energy," Selline Korir, technical support team lead for Rural Women's Peace Link in Eldoret, Kenya, said. "It reminded me of the African way of making decisions, which was lost. It is really being restored by Catalyst for Peace."

Jane Anyango, founding director of Polycom Development Project in Kibera, an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, put it even more concisely: "I saw the true face of Africa."

These comments point to the power of a deceptively simple idea: "changing narratives." These are easy words to use but difficult to embody, yet when lived out they have the potential to create and amplify social transformation. The field visits cemented participants' vision of the possibilities and lived realities of "changing narratives," as exemplified in the reflections of one conference delegate:

Lets Us Change the Paradigms
Lets Change the Natratives.

The fire fare too long we have been given the Napradive that;

-We have Disease, you Do Not Have Tood - We Do Not Know What We Want - We Do Not Have Solutions For our own Issues, You Need Help few attides - We have to Depend on Outsiders and Donors to come out of our Issues problems

Change the Narrative - We have the Answers We have the Solutions
We know the Type of Sustice We heed We have one two Resources.

We need to De Bruk the Dependency syndrome:
We know what we want - We know what we want our felablished ourselves. II



Constellating Peace delegates visit the Madina Community Health Post, in Kasunko Chiefdom in Koinadugu District. Community members raised the needed funds and helped build the post.

The transformative power of putting the wisdom, dignity, and capacity of local communities at the center—of the peacebuilding work and of the *Constellating Peace* cohort—was not limited to visitors to Sierra Leone. One of the Peace Mothers attending the program wrote that meeting participants from troubled places around the world showed her how far Sierra Leone has come. "My country is more peaceful than other countries," she wrote in a reflection. Another wrote, "Sierra Leone people can do things that can be admired by other nationals, to the point they will want to replicate it in their own countries."

The comments reflected one of the many reasons we wanted to hold *Constellating Peace* in Sierra Leone: we have seen again and again how transformative it is for Sierra Leoneans to see themselves being seen by others in a positive light.

We hope, as the energy and lessons from the event reverberate for its participants and throughout our global learning community, that we can all see ourselves collectively building the whole, healthy relationships between the "inside" and the "outside" that truly transformative work requires.

Being welcomed with abundant warmth and hospitality into the space of fambul tok communities opened hearts, crystallized new ideas, demonstrated the power of language, and made the work vivid, real, and lived.

How to create space for transformative learning

1. Centering Community

What it looked like

We opened the gathering with an invitation by the Peace Mothers to join their song and dance, follow them to our formal gathering space, and listen deeply as they talked about all they had achieved and learned from the *fambul tok* way of working.

What we were thinking

This was not only a joyous way to begin the week together; it was a deliberate choice in order to embody the theory at the core of inside-out peacebuilding: grounding the collective work in the wisdom and vision of the local community.

2. Embodiment

What it looked like

Participants reflected on what they saw and heard during their time at *Constellating Peace*, building a human sculpture of people representing sectors in the peace and development system (the target community, NGOs, donors, INGOs, government, media, etc.). They first inhabited an image of the way they see the system working now, and then of how, using an inside-out lens, they think the system should work.



What we were thinking

Just as the community visits were a powerful form of embodied learning, we chose a form of embodied reflection, leaving the pen and paper of individual thought aside for a moment and inhabiting system representations in groups. Feeling the levels of disconnection between sectors and what it could be like in an embodied way created a kinesthetic as well as intellectual memory. It also opened an accessible way into thinking about a complex idea like 'the peace and development system.'

3. Inviting People's Whole Selves

What it looked like

Any well-planned gathering will have a letter of welcome, sent just before delegates arrive and offering logistical details and teasing how exciting or special the coming time together will be.

We re-visioned this letter as an invitation to bring our whole selves and to reflect, ahead of time, on what it might mean to embody the values important to grounding our emerging global learning community, including drawing on culture, both our own and others; acknowledging harmful historical patterns and their contemporary legacies, especially in relationships between African countries and European countries or the United States; mutual listening, which requires acting as both teachers and learners, knowing the group would provide an intelligence we cannot find on our own; conversing between layers of peacebuilding structures, local to national to international; and keeping communities always at the heart of our work.



What we were thinking

This letter of welcome is only one example of how we refashioned many of the usual conference accessories to convey the values our work builds out from. From the conference logo design and other visual imagery to the pre-conference communications to the agenda, we wanted to convey that we welcomed—indeed, we needed and expected—individuals to bring the wisdom, experience, and diversity of perspectives each held within them. The tone, timing, and content of our communications created an expectation that we would hold a space that respected the fullness of each individual and their desire to work from their highest values.

4. Including the Whole System

What it looked like

Our invitation list might seem like a roster of individuals affected by and effecting change in conflict or post-conflict conditions. And to some extent, it was. But it was designed with much more intention than that.

What we were thinking

At the heart of the inside-out approach to peace-building is a shift in notions of hierarchy. The image of "working from the top down" or "from the grass-roots up" – which suggests a hierarchical system and linear flow — is replaced by the image of nested circles or bowls, with a flow moving from the inside, out and from the outside, in. A vertical orientation becomes horizontal, and the relationships that sustain the work become more lateral.

With advice and consultation from many friends and partners, we carefully constructed a participant list that represented every level of a vertically-integrated system – local community workers; district and national government officials; traditional NGOs; international donors; intergovernmental organizations. We named and valued distinct roles, while also equally valuing the dignity and contribution of everyone and every role present. These actions flattened the hierarchy. Minimizing protocol and other formalities created a relaxed environment that invited forward participants' spirit and creative energy, in an acknowledgment that these expressions are just as valuable as people's titles or their spoken contributions to the dialogue.

5. The Value of Spaciousness

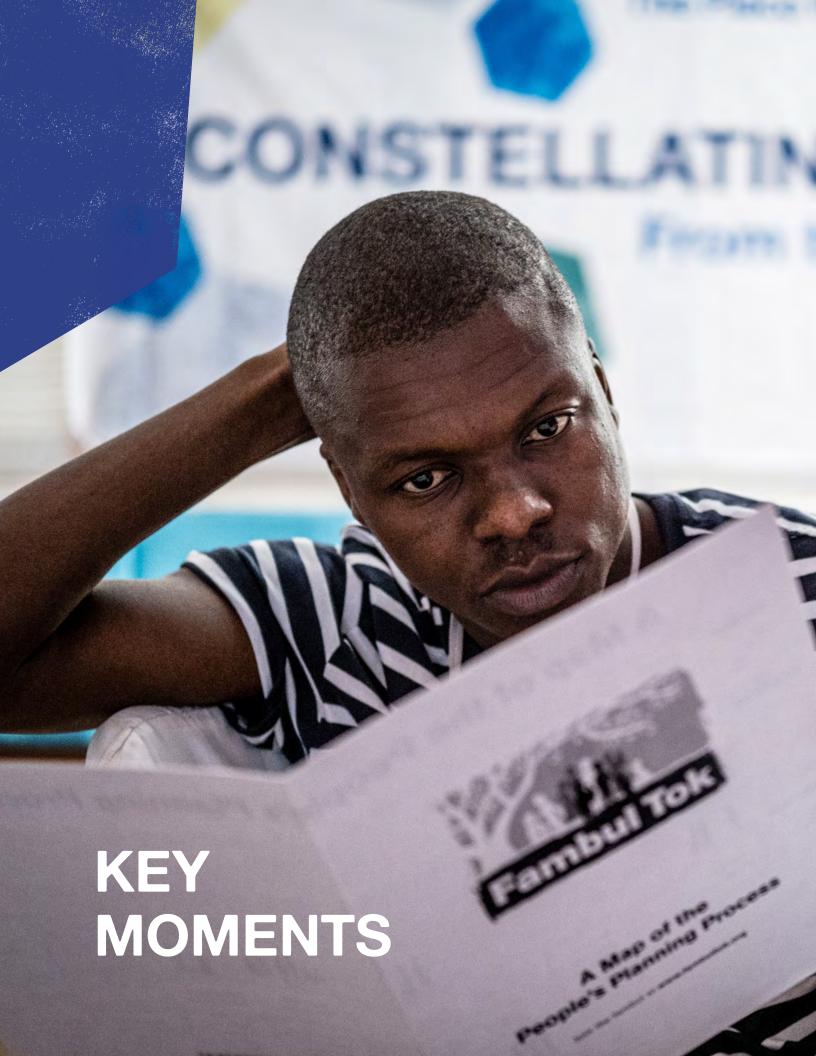
What it looked like

Openness and spaciousness in the agenda

What we were thinking

The value of spaciousness anchored the program agenda, which was deliberately constructed with long breaks and unstructured meals so that participants had time to discuss and reflect further together. It influenced the flow, as organizers listened for the needs and energy level of the group and adapted the program flow accordingly.







Libby Hoffman demonstrates the 'broken cup' metaphor that is central to peacebuilding from the inside out.

The power of metaphor— the possibility of a paradigm shift

One of the most powerful ideas for many practitioners was this metaphor:

Imagine a community as like a cup, or a bowl. Humanitarian aid, whether for peacebuilding, health, education, economic development or any other purpose is like a bottle of water.

When there is a crisis, resources get poured into the bowl—but they just go right through. The bowl itself is cracked. And if you keep pouring water into a cracked container, it widens the cracks and can even damage it further—while also depleting the supply of water. Not a healthy cycle for anyone. The community container itself is invisible in the system, and the work of repairing the cracks completely absent.

An inside-out approach to peace is not about pouring water into a community. The work is about repairing the container. When the cracks in the bowl are fixed—when a community is healed and whole—it holds water, and the community's own resources flow over.

Repairing the cracks is the heart of peacebuilding from the inside out.

When CFP President Libby Hoffman demonstrated this idea—with a punctured cup and a bottle of water—it brought clarity to the room. The power of the metaphor was further demonstrated when delegates heard it echoed by community members in nearly every field visit during the week. This represented a powerful learning for Stephen Wicken of Humanity United: "Immediately, the way the community explained to us what they were doing was through the broken cup. If you can find the way to explain what you're doing that's simple and powerful, how extraordinary that can be."

Following the demonstration of the cup, Libby pulled out a brightly colored set of nested mixing bowls to further explain the larger frame for the inside out approach. The nested bowls indicate that the community cup, or "bowl," is not alone. It is part of a bigger system, in relationship with local government, organizations, national government policy and even international organizations and donors. Instead of these different levels being disconnected and acting on each other and the local community, they are nested and functioning as a whole and connected system, with a clear focus on the wellbeing of the local communities, in the center. A core purpose

INSIDE OUT

Distinct locations, roles, resources and needs **all working together** as part of a larger whole



of each larger bowl is to hold the space for the bowl inside to be repaired and whole while working in alignment with each other in a way that centers local community wellbeing and capacity. Together they form a synergistic whole of healthy, mutual partnerships—a living model of constellating peace.

Lilian Chigwedere, deputy chairperson of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission in Harare, Zimbabwe, reflected deeply on the ways the two metaphors illustrate the systematic work an inside-out approach requires. "This work takes a whole mind shift. I think most countries, they wait: They put a bowl in there, the bowl breaks down, and we wait for the funder to come repair it again. Building that mind shift for people, for me, brings out the whole essence of self-sustenance —that the resources are there, and external help comes in to support."

The opportunity to exchange knowledge

During the portion of the program dedicated to practitioners sharing their own work with their colleagues, Ali Muhammad Ali and Ghulam Rasoul Rasouli, both from Afghanistan with different roles working on the Citizens' Charter process, told a rapt room about their work to establish the Citizens' Charter, a partnership between the Afghan state and thousands of its communities. Kaltuma Noorow, Angi Yoder Maina and Belkys Lopez from Green String Network, a national NGO based in Nairobi, Kenya, shared about the Kumekucha program, a community-based 12-week trauma healing program facilitated by trained community members.

Jina Moore, sharing from her perspective as long-time journalist, offered ideas about how to support appropriate storytelling in conflict-affected communities. Charles Gibbs, CFP senior partner and poet-in-residence, engaged participants in an exploration of creating a space of absolute belonging, spaces where people show up as fully themselves to listen to our individual and collective inner knowing as a foundation for the work of peace, justice, and healing.

The meaning of mirroring

From our earliest days, Catalyst for Peace has built storytelling into our work because we knew the world could learn much from Sierra Leone. What we found over and over was that the writing, film, and other storytelling work we produced for external audiences also served the program needs—and Sierra Leonean audiences—in important ways. Documenting the stories of what communities were accomplishing and mirroring their work back to them, especially in visual forms, created a powerful tool to help them claim and value their own potential, strengthening their leadership capacity and helping the work grow.

At Constellating Peace we saw the meaning and value of mirroring ripple outward, reflecting back new insights and affirmations about the work our cohort of peace leaders has been engaged in:

"The insight I will take away is that we, as an organization, still need to take a number of steps to put the community at the center of our thinking, feeling, and working," one person wrote.

Joseph Muyango, director of the Central African Republic Interfaith Peacebuilding Program of Catholic Relief Services, spoke of seeing a mirror for his own work during his community visit to Konbora chiefdom, where residents were validating a plan for their collective development priorities. "We did a community mapping of resources in Central Africa, a similar exercise, but it was validating to see how communities in Sierra Leone were committing their resources and themselves, and that they can make change. They were validating their plan, but it also validated our own community-based approaches.

We saw the meaning and value of mirroring ripple outward, reflecting back new insights and affirmations about the work.



Gratitude

Charles Gibbs' invitation, on the second day, to the challenge of saying "thank you" a thousand times a day as a practice of spiritual transformation lived within the imaginations of so many people. On our last day together, we shared an opportunity to reflect on what all of us were grateful for from the gathering, and appreciation poured forth. There were so many powerful expressions of gratitude; the following are just a few:

"I am grateful for the opportunity to hear people out and to be able to serve. This is a gift that I will be able to offer people who I love and who love me."

"I am grateful for being alive. Most of us take this for granted."

"I am grateful to my family who allowed me to be away for all the time to experience Fambul Tok process."



"If you want to be a community, you cannot just rationalize and analyze. You really have to open up."

t's no small thing to create a space that invites openness from experienced professionals, proficient in technical jargon and practiced in adapting to industry buzzwords to tap into funding pools that keep the work alive. Constellating Peace was designed to embody many of the principles it discussed with delegates, beginning with the question: What would it mean to work—during the event week and, more broadly, back home—from our whole selves, and from our vision of a whole and healthy system?

The sacred openings that began each morning were central to creating this sort of space, to providing participants with an experience of bringing their whole selves into the room. On the first morning, Amy Czajkowski, CFP's director of global learning, and Charles Gibbs invited everyone into the room, into their bodies, and into their inner core. Charles shared images that helped everyone see themselves in the larger context of our planet and the cosmos. The opening provided an embodied experience of a kind of inward journey that invites one's whole self and full capacity into the room. It sprang from CFP's belief that touching this depth in ourselves opens us to engaging it in and with the others in the room, opening the door to the authenticity and creative risk-taking that are the seedbed of transformation from the inside out.

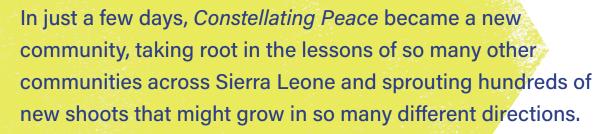
"There was not an exclusive focus on learning, on brainwork. There was a nice balance between the brain and the heart," said Kees Schilder from Mensen mit een Missie, a Dutch non-governmental organization and donor based in The Hague. "And if you want to be a community, you cannot just rationalize and analyze, you really have to open up."

The power of that openness—to oneself and to one's vision of a whole and healthy system—made itself felt throughout the week. A delegation of peace leaders from Zimbabwe convened conversations

that would have been impossible back home, given the political pressures around reconciliation, justice, and peace issues. The Zimbabwean delegates made commitments to work together in ways they never would have imagined possible in the meeting rooms of Harare.

"When we speak of mistrust, it's not just mistrust of the government from the community level," said Eugenia Mpande, manager of training and supervision at Tree of Life, a community-based trauma healing organization in Zimbabwe. "It's also mistrust around people supporting the communities. So there is a need for us to actually find each other, the different players working in the Zimbabwean communities, and come together to find a way of engaging with each other while putting the people at the center."





Lilian Chigwedere of Zimbabwe's National Peace and Reconciliation Commission voiced her experience this way: "When people start talking to each other, that is the beginning of peace. That's what I see. That's what I've carried out of here."





Amy Czajkowski leads delegates in thanking Fambul Tok staff for their inspirational work.

ollowing the event closing, there was an informal discussion about how to keep moving forward with the conversation about building peace from the inside out, so that inside-out practices can expand. One delegate shared that being at the event resulted in "a greater recognition that there is a community of practice that already exists. And as a result, [I have] a greater comfort and confidence to keep on chipping away at these highly complex obstacles and incentives that prohibit people from taking back their own power."

In the next phase of our work, Catalyst for Peace is creating more spaces to gather and strengthen a community of practice. We imagine spaces committed to mutual learning and encouragement. We know there are major challenges to working in this way. Mindsets need to shift, practices need to change, and structures need to be reimagined. One delegate commented that we didn't spend enough time during the event on the challenges, and there are many. Creating a space to engage those challenges and share successes in working through significant organizational and cultural roadblocks is critical in meeting them.

Our greatest hope is that the generative synergy between the work in Sierra Leone and the global community of inside-out peace practitioners continues and deepens.

In the meantime, the unique partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok, and Catalyst for Peace moves forward—a partnership that embodies healthy relationships between national governance, civil society, and international donors. The process and infrastructure for implementing the Wan Fambul National Framework across the country also continues to grow. Our greatest hope is that the generative synergy between the work in Sierra Leone and the growing global community of inside-out peace practitioners continues and deepens.







FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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FOR FURTHER READING:

"Building Peace from the Inside Out: A transformational approach to partnership," by Libby Hoffman, Catalyst for Peace.

"Wan Fambul National Framework: National framework for inclusive governance and local development in Sierra Leone," a joint publication of the Government of Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok International, and Catalyst for Peace.

"Community Healing from the Inside Out: Systems lessons from Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone," by Libby Hoffman, in *Locally Led Peacebuilding: Global Case Studies* (September 2019).

All of the above titles are available at www.catalystforpeace.org

