# Operationalising Conflict Prevention as Strong, Resilient Systems: Approaches, Evidence, Action Points

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## Introduction

Conflict prevention is experiencing renewed momentum within and outside the United Nations system. This momentum is built on growing understanding that timely investments towards tensions and stress factors yield significant results in political, economic and social terms. To fully unlock the potential of preventive action to consolidate peace and end violence, there needs to be better communication across sectors and institutions: on how conflict prevention practice has evolved over the last decade, and on the changing nature of conflict itself. What is more, there is a need for a more pronounced effort to distil the concrete evidence about when and how conflict prevention works.

In order to advance these objectives, this paper distils the discussions of a multi-stakeholder meeting of experts on strengthening international support for conflict prevention.[1] The paper locates conflict prevention within the emerging practise of strengthening resilient national systems, and explores operational issues about how to better assist such conflict prevention. The paper also reviews various conflict prevention approaches that have emerged from the fields of armed violence reduction, mediation, or the private sector. Overall, this paper finds:

- The greatest potential for conflict prevention lies in fostering the strength and resilience of local social and political networks and institutions that identify and mobilise constructive responses to tensions and stress factors. These networks and institutions define what this paper calls 'strong, resilient systems'. Initiatives or programmes that are proactive, multi-layered, multi-sectorial, and locally-rooted represent the most promising practice for lasting conflict prevention.

*There needs to be better communication across sectors and institutions about the changing nature of prevention practice, and about what works in what context*

*The greatest opportunity for conflict prevention lies in fostering the strength and resilience of social and political networks and institutions on the ground*

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*International support should focus on better connecting short term responses and long term assistance*

- International support for conflict prevention is not a choice between short term action to imminent crises, or long term programming on stress factors; rather, international support should focus on better connecting short term responses and long term assistance so as to strengthen resilient national or regional systems of conflict prevention.

- To fully unlock the potential of preventive action, international actors should adjust their framing of problems and solutions to local understandings, as well as to the changing nature of armed violence, threats, and instabilities. Ownership of the responsibility to anticipate, mitigate and respond to conflict needs to be more deeply embedded as an integral part of national, regional and international planning.

- The record of preventive action of private mediating organizations and business must be better understood and integrated into prevention activities by formal actors, including national governments, the United Nations, and regional organisations.

The paper also proposes a series of action points to strengthening international support for conflict prevention. The proposed actions are to:

- Better communicate conflict prevention in terms of disseminating programming innovation and good practise, facilitating exchange between institutions and sectors, and better connecting short term responses to known tensions with long term programming against risk factors.

*International actors should adjust their framing of problems and solutions to local understandings and the changing nature of violent conflict*

- Strengthen local monitoring capacity so as to improve assessment and analysis about evolving tensions and risk factors, and integrate knowledge of local complexities and concerns into decision-making mechanisms at local, national, regional and international levels.

- Build individual, organizational, and external-facing capabilities within the United Nations, development agencies, NGOs, and businesses to better operationalise collaboration on multi-layered, multi-sectorial conflict prevention.

- Design more flexible financing mechanisms for conflict prevention, including a shift from earmarked to un-earmarked contributions within the UN.

- Expand the ownership of conflict prevention with emerging economies, and with conflict-affected and fragile states.

Box 4 summarises research opportunities in the field of conflict prevention related to costing methods of armed violence, monitoring and evaluation, private sector conflict prevention, as well on hybrid political orders.

## Conflict prevention as strong, resilient systems

Work on conflict prevention dates back to the very beginning of the United Nations, especially to Under Secretary-General (SG) Dag Hammarskjöld between 1953 and 1961. Since then, the United Nations has continuously broadened and diversified its approach to 'prevention'. While 'preventive diplomacy' took a prominent role in the 1992 Agenda for Peace, UNSG Kofi Annan broadened efforts on 'conflict prevention' as a comprehensive and coherent approach. He thereby expanded prevention outside the traditional role associated to the UNSG's good offices mandate. [2]

Diversification continues. There is now a UN Special Representative on the Prevention of Genocide. 'Prevention' is a central component of the Responsibility to Protect, and the Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action promotes inter-agency cooperation on early prevention. 'Prevention' also features in the mediation work of the Department of Political Affairs. What is more, larger programming efforts have emerged that focus on stress factors of violence and fragility. Such programmes have been advanced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, the World Bank's World Development Report 2011, as well as the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development. [3]

*Prevention has become a truly cross-cutting theme within and outside the United Nations*

Perhaps as a result of the broadening and diversification, prevention has become a truly cross-cutting theme within and outside the United Nations. Consequently, very different meanings are associated to the concept of 'prevention' by different constituencies. For example, in the context of the intervention in Libya in 2011, 'prevention' was even understood by some as a short-hand for 'military intervention'. Such understanding of conflict prevention significantly misrepresents the focus and intent of preventive action, and risks jeopardising over two decades of work by the United Nations and other actors in the name of 'prevention'. It is therefore critical to explain better what 'conflict prevention' represents, how it works, what we know about its performance in specific contexts. Working towards a joint understanding is critical to structure multi-sectorial and -institutional partnerships in support of conflict prevention.

There are a series of features that such a joint understanding of conflict prevention may be built upon:

- Conflict prevention is a profoundly 'local' effort that involves existing national or sub-national actors, networks, or institutions; but that is embedded in an international context and activities.

- Conflict prevention occurs along the entire timeline of instability, conflict management, crisis management, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

- Conflict prevention requires the work or support of all actors, local and international, that have a bearing on a specific context. It cannot be delegated to any single actor.

- Conflict prevention is inherently cross cutting, with many modalities intersecting with security, development, peacebuilding and statebuilding.

- The definition of conflict prevention must be bounded enough to be actionable. These bounds can be defined by a focus on the strength and resilience of social and political networks and institutions that identify and mobilise responses to known tensions and stress factors.

These features fall within the context of three main perspectives on conflict prevention. The first places prevention within indigenous responses to known tensions or stress factors as enabled by local networks and institutions. The second perspective captures conflict prevention activities or programmes that are designed and implemented by international actors. These can include activities of international donors or international NGOs, whether acting in solidarity and together with local actors or overriding domestic concerns or needs in pursuit of an international agenda. The third perspective is about the politics of conflict prevention within the United Nations. This discussion is state-centric and takes place within the political dynamics associated with the Security Council or General Assembly.

This paper is more concerned with the first two perspectives in as much as it takes an operational perspective on the nature and practice of conflict prevention. Nevertheless, a better understanding of the current and emerging conflict prevention practice on the ground has significant implications for the politics of conflict prevention. In particular, such an understanding corrects the perception of 'conflict prevention' as a neo-interventionist tool, and places the practical benefits of preventive action into the service of conflict-affected and fragile states and communities. It also places 'prevention' into the context of the current efforts to accompany the political transitions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and other regions.

> Box 1: What is 'local'?
> "Local" may perhaps best understood as an imprecise yet useful marker for being as close as possible to the problems and solutions, inclusive of varied voices and interests. The word 'local' can mean "community-based," for example, where questions of re-integration of ex-combatants arise. "Local" can also be at the interface of community and national structures, for example, where conflict over land tenure must be resolved with reference to both traditional and state notions of ownership and land use. "Local" may even be supra-national, when dealing with the regional impact of population displacement, for example, or illicit cross-border trade.

The most recurring observation about the nature of conflict prevention has been that it is a profoundly 'local' effort (see Box 1). Local actors have substantial comparative advantage in understanding the history and drivers of disputes or violence, identifying sources of strength and resilience, calibrating appropriate responses, mobilizing timely action, and evaluating its impact. Local experience translates abstract concepts of "conflict" or "peace" into concrete priorities with tangible as well as symbolic value that will vary greatly from place to place. In contexts where fast, efficient and effective responses are called for, local actors are often more astute and more nimble than their international counterparts (even though the capacities and agendas of local actors must be fully understood to manage expectations in local prevention efforts). Heavy-handed or overly-directive international intervention has a strong likelihood to miss the mark. In the worst cases, such interventions disturb or derail the development of indigenous networks, institutions, or agendas for conflict prevention.

## Operationalizing conflict prevention

The local imperative does not discount critical roles for international partners in conflict prevention. Some roles involve accompaniment of local leaders and organisations, providing funding and helping build capacity, share comparative learning, and support the emergence of local agendas, movements and their eventual institutionalisation. Some roles involve diplomacy or good offices to help create space for local agendas to succeed, for example, where emerging national governments may be suspicious of strong civil society actors or doubtful of their agendas, or tied to "Mano Dura" strategies, for example, against gangs in Central America, that have shown their shortcomings. Some roles involve advocacy for sound national and international policy and planning, for example, vis-à-vis engagement of non-state armed actors. Still other roles involve the development of local, national and international capacity for dialogue, learning and alignment across the multi-layered, multi-sectored dimensions of conflict prevention.

Strengthening conflict prevention along an understanding of strong, resilient systems has various challenges to address. The first of these challenges is that international actors must inform their framing of problems or solutions with local understandings. This requires a significant change in the way international actors analyse and understand local context, and how much such analysis is based on perspectives from the ground. In this sense, broad-brush programming around "pillars of state-building" or even around "conflict prevention" itself, may find less traction locally than a focus on dignity, public health, the ability to engage in commerce without corruption, employment creation, the empowerment of women, the reduction of armed violence, or another agenda as defined by local stakeholders.

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*International actors must inform their framing of problems and solutions with local understandings*

What is more, the adaptation of international action frames is also necessary as the nature of armed violence and instabilities change. For example, many formal institutions have been modelled on the needs to manage inter-state wars, but have over the last two decades adjusted to the challenge of intra-state armed conflict. Many formal institutions now face yet another need to adjust as many conflict-affected and fragile states undergo transitions that are neither war, nor peace. There is rather a state of prolonged turbulence and insecurity, blurring distinctions among peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. In this context, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development documents that 9 out of 10 people dying at the hands of armed violence occur in non-conflict contexts (only 1 out of 10 dies in inter- or intra-state armed conflict), thus emphasising the urgency for formal institutions to adjust their action frames to a changing world. [4]

The second challenge is that the international rhetoric of "local ownership" must be made substantially more real. This is certainly not just a challenge for conflict prevention efforts, but for external assistance more generally. Making local ownership "real" involves not just improving the way local information is gathered and evaluated. It involves an attitudinal shift that, first, takes local perceptions and attitudes seriously; and secondly, more accurately balances the analyses of "insiders" and "outsiders" to a specific context or conflict situation. Work in the field by organisations such as Peace Direct, the Quaker United Nations (QUNO) and Interpeace has demonstrated how locally-led peacebuilding can make significant impact.

The third challenge is to mitigate adverse effects on local prevention efforts of the "industrialization" of development and peacebuilding assistance. This "industrialization" can systematically sideline local efforts and views because implementation relies on centrally-determined frameworks and priorities, ever larger programme grants, a relentless focus on delivery against plan, as well as an orthodoxy of quantitative impact measures. In this context, the improvement of international assistance for conflict prevention may not only imply the identification of a new "vocabulary" of international intervention, but also a shift from "programme delivery" to a focus on – and legitimation of – strategic and catalytic roles. These roles can include impartial analysis, networking, accompaniment, alignment, comparative learning, and movement-building.

The fourth challenge is to identify new strategies to manage situations where the strengthening of conflict prevention on the ground meets political resistance. Conflict prevention understood as strong, resilient systems will inevitably have political dimensions, and these dimensions will pose difficulties for some local or international actors. Such "differences of views" about how best to proceed in the service of "peace" can imply the existence of multiple, competing efforts, both formal and informal. A recurring feature is the disconnection between elite-agreements that may help stabilise a situation in the short term, and community-based peacebuilding programmes that target the transformation of conflict drivers. Bridging such approaches constructively may point to understanding elite agreements as an important marker of progress, or one aspect of a multi-layered process, rather than as the single most important goal.

# Approaches and evidence

Recent years have seen significant innovations in conflict prevention. These are particularly visible when looking beyond the classic focus on preventive diplomacy or inter- or intra-state armed conflicts.

Conflict prevention analysis is improving, particularly with a focus on local and inclusive processes. Analysis provided by, for instance the International Crisis Group, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, or Jane's Intelligence Review has played an important role in enabling international policy makers to be better informed by detailed conflict analysis. Peacebuilding organisations such as Conciliation Resources and International Alert have for some time emphasised conflict analysis by local actors, often in an interactive and iterative process. This at the same time informs their own programme planning, helps to educate international actors, and provides a space for dialogue and networking among actors in the conflict environment. It also mitigates the tendency to use conflict analysis to simplify the narrative of a conflict, or to overemphasise elite voices, which can result in the unintended amplification of conflict drivers, as a recent Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment on Madagascar has shown. [5]

A growing number of Armed Violence Monitoring Systems (AVMS) can be understood as an institutionalisation of such local analysis. An AVMS gathers and analyses data on an on-going basis with a view to informing evidence-based programming and policy-making. An analysis of AVMS in Colombia, Jamaica, South Africa, Sudan, and the United Kingdom in a report by the Geneva Declaration Secretariat highlights the challenges inherent in on-going data collection in a conflict-affected setting, but also shows that quality data is an indispensable ingredient for concrete armed violence reduction and prevention programmes.[6] The analysis shows that one of the major assets of an AVMS is its capacity to bring together different stakeholders and hence facilitate both the quality of the analysis and the development of multi-sectorial responses.

*Armed Violence Monitoring Systems bring together different stakeholders and facilitate both the quality of the analysis and the development of multi-sectorial responses*

Moving from analysis to action, there is increasing emphasis on "insider mediators." These may be leaders of civil society organizations, churches, trade unions, or business councils who can leverage trust, respect, deep knowledge of the dynamics and context of the conflict, and a high level of legitimacy that is rooted in their position in a society, their personality, and their skills. They help build confidence, maintain dialogue, and diffuse tensions, particularly at the subnational level, helping identify solutions and mobilise commitment by all parties. One development is towards institutionalisation of the insider mediator role, recognising on the one hand that prominent citizens have always played such roles, and on the other that they benefit from enhanced legitimacy and support. Examples include the Concerned Citizens for Peace structures in Kenya and the Conflict Management Panels in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Further institutionalisation of local conflict prevention roles can be found in national "infrastructures for peace" (see Box 2) Many of these take inspiration from South Africa's National Peace Secretariat, established to supervise the implementation of the 1991 Peace Accord. That accord was notably not a

resolution of outstanding political issues, but rather an agreement on how to maintain the peace so that negotiations could continue. A broadly inclusive National Peace Secretariat established eleven regional and more than 260 local peace committees uniting representatives from political organizations, trade unions, business, churches, police and security forces. These deployed more than 15,000 trained peace monitors throughout the country, legitimised inquiry into the causes of violence, and in some cases set up special tribunals. Committees opened lines of communication, tabled issues and strengthened accountability where state structures were inadequate or implicated in the violence, and popularised the very notion of negotiations and peaceful conflict resolution. They mobilised against threats of violence and resolved disputes in the run-up to the first democratic elections in 1994.

Contemporary infrastructures for peace incorporate a number of lessons from South Africa's experience. First, coordinated local action is critical to conflict prevention. Second, a forum that is widely seen as legitimate is useful to bring together government, political opposition and civil society - endorsed but not controlled by state structures – both to take practical action and model collaborative relationships. Third, a layered approach in which regional and national resources can be brought to bear helps address dynamics beyond the capacity of a local committee to manage. Finally, and drawing on contemporary South African reflections on the perhaps-premature dismantling of the Peace Committees, the establishment of democratic government does not obviate the value of the architecture for peace. These lessons are being applied in Ghana's National Peace Architecture, as one example, with many other national projects on the drawing board

Further lessons are being learned for international actors. Annex 1 lists documents that aim at distilling good practices of preventive action in the fields of violence prevention, armed violence reduction, peace mediation, and disarmament. The principle overarching lesson emanating from these documents is that operations become more effective if conflict prevention is multi-layered (involving coordinated action at local, national and international levels); multi-sectorial (drawing on comparative strengths of various state and non-state actors); and broadly owned (i.e. not dominated by or delegated to any singe actor).

Many programmes emphasise the persistent need to build human resources and practical skills in conflict prevention. This may both include development of skills, better career opportunities and incentives for prevention, as well as increasing the role of women in conflict prevention. The OECD Fragile States Principles Barometer (2011), which notes that donor commitments to implement "do no harm" and to "agree on practical co-ordination mechanisms between international actors" are "off track," is perhaps one sign that international actors have not yet fully adapted to the complexities of contemporary conflict prevention. In addition to human resource development, it may also be necessary to build stronger systems and processes within organisations.

*Operations become more effective if conflict prevention is multi-layered, multi-sectorial and broadly owned*

**Box 2: Infrastructures for peace**

Infrastructures for Peace (I4P) are a network of interdependent structures, mechanisms, resources, values, and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and statebuilding in a society. In other words, such infrastructures constitute a society's collaborative capacity to facilitate finding internal solutions to disputes through multi-stakeholder dialogue. Underlying to I4Ps is a cooperative, inclusive, problem-solving approach to conflict based on dialogue and mediation. In practical terms, I4Ps include diverse components. While different in their manifestation in specific contexts, these components include:

- National, district and local peace councils comprised of trusted and highly respected persons of integrity who can bridge political divides and who possess competence and experience in transforming conflicts;
- National peace platforms for consultation, collaboration and coordination of peace issues, such as a government bureau, department or ministry of peacebuilding;
- Legislative measures to create an 'Infrastructure for Peace' with appropriate budget, as exemplified by Ghana's National Architecture for Peace;
- Capacities of national peacebuilding institutions, related government departments, peace councils and relevant groups of civil society actors; and
- Traditional perspectives and methodologies for dispute resolution.

Over the last several years, the UNDP has played a critical role in supporting the initial phases of I4Ps in many countries including in Ghana and Kenya. A further 10 countries have expressed interest in building an I4P and several more are watching closely, including Costa Rica, Philippines, Togo, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Uganda, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands.

I4Ps also illustrate the tremendous cost-effectiveness of preventive action. The setting up of various councils and committees in one country – including training and capacity building – amounted to approximately USD 2 million. The yearly expenditure to maintain the I4P amounts to less than USD 1 million per year. Such investments in prevention are minimal if compared to the costly effects of failed prevention that can go into the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars.

*The presence or absence of violence is a lagging indicator, and in isolation an unsatisfactory metric for conflict prevention*

A recurring lesson is the difficulty of accounting for conflict prevention results. While increasing violence may indicate that conflict prevention efforts in the aggregate are insufficient, they tell us very little about a specific conflict prevention approach or programme. Politically motivated killings rose in South Africa in the period 1991-1993, for example, even as it was widely agreed that the levels of violence were reduced from what they would have been without the National Peace Committee structures. Additionally, the presence or absence of violence is a lagging indicator, and in isolation an unsatisfactory metric for conflict prevention.

Leading indicators would include local capacity to analyse and mobilise in response to heightened risk of violence; the inter-connectedness of efforts at different layers and across different sectors of society; and confidence in state institutions in relation to conflict prevention. Efforts related to peacebuilding and statebuilding, as well as local initiatives across public security, public health, and other sectors, produce useful data. But so far these do not add up to clear metrics or measurement of the conflict prevention architecture and its effectiveness. The science of tracking non-escalation outcomes and related trends of behavioural, attitudinal and institutional change needs further development. The inclusion of peacebuilding and statebuilding goals in the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework could be an important impetus for the development of more sophisticated indicators related to conflict prevention.

At the programme level, international interveners tend to attempt to measure the ultimate outcomes of their conflict prevention efforts, even though these may only be modest contributions to broader socio-political and socio-economic developments with results visible only across years. This is particularly problematic when international donors attempt to include violence reduction targets or other broad metrics in their assessments of local conflict prevention programmes. Certain conflict transformation dynamics – for example, creation of political momentum around a new agenda – may require substantial community empowerment, institutional development, or nurturing of complex coalitions before key conflict dynamics can be confronted and therefore substantive progress towards ultimate outcomes expected. This may be particularly true where the key target actors are marginalised or disempowered communities. A frequent outcome is frustration, both of the donor facing pressure for greater accountability, and of the recipient struggling to stay focused on resilient social and political networks and institutions.

> **Box 3: Beyond the Logical Framework Analysis**
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> Where organisations work to empower local communities to develop and commit to their own conflict prevention agendas, the ubiquitous Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) may be an inadequate tool for coordination and communication among local actors, their NGO or development agency partners, and donors. An evaluation of the LFA for the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) found that "the more people that participate in developing the logic of the programme and completing the matrix (often through complex negotiations), the more difficult it is going to be to adapt the programme to a rapidly changing environment." Maximising participation and managing complex negotiations to build stable coalitions and create political momentum, however, are two defining characteristics of conflict prevention work. This makes the log frames more optimal use as a fluid and amendable summary highly challenging. The study goes on to suggest that "the LFA is not working and something new must be tried." It suggests that donors "support some more experimental approaches to development programming."[7]

*The science of tracking non-escalation outcomes and related trends of behavioural, attitudinal and institutional change needs further development*

Complementary to ultimate outcomes measures may therefore be definition and measurement of the optimal role of the outside intervener – whether the UN, a bilateral partner, or an INGO – in local conflict prevention efforts. Focus on assessing, for example, how well international intervention has helped improve analysis and its application, empower communities, develop resilient institutions, nurture complex coalitions, or align multi-layered, multi-sectorial action may be more realistic and indeed more useful than ultimate metrics of violence or peace in programme design, monitoring and evaluation. This also implies a need for better tools of coordination and communication among international and local actors (see Box 3). New approaches are required that support conflict prevention intervention that is at the same time more rigorous, more flexible, and more accountable.

## Private sector perspectives on conflict prevention

The call to work across sectors and institutions is emphasised in emerging practice in the fields of armed violence reduction, peace mediation, and human rights protection. While the comparative advantage of private mediation organizations for preventive diplomacy has been explained elsewhere[8], this section focuses on the business sector.[9] Lessons, however, emerge for a variety of interveners in conflict-prone environments.

The past decade has seen notable improvement in the understanding of business sector actors as they relate to conflict prevention policy and practice. On the one hand, the need to confront companies that may be indifferent to the negative impact of their actions is increasingly clear. The scramble for resources in Iraq, for example, has led to competing authorities granting overlapping contracts for oil extraction, leading both to delays in needed government revenues from production, and to deepened political divisions. On the other hand, the engagement of private sector resources including investment capital, market understanding, and business skills to facilitate broad-based growth and social stability is rising on the international agenda. A challenge for policy makers may be to keep focus on desired roles and company action, rather than resorting to broad rhetoric about either business and conflict, or business and peace.

A company will likely focus on conflict prevention in the first instance because it directly benefits from a stable operating environment. Increasingly international scrutiny of company behaviour by media, socially responsible investors, civil society actors, and others also serves to keep conflict prevention on board and senior management agendas. Corporate discussions of "political risk management" – that is, preventing possible negative impact on the business from geopolitics, socio-political developments, government action, or stakeholder pressure – may seem foreign to government and NGO actors. But this may be largely a problem of lexicon. At least at the level of corporate policy, most global companies active in fragile environments acknowledge that it is in their best interest to manage their own operations in ways that help prevent conflict.

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Furthermore, company leaders recognise that they are stakeholders in broader efforts to promote long-term socio-political stability, and that this requires a developed capacity to work locally with both public officials and the communities impacted by their operations.

All the same, many companies find the move from policy to effective practice a difficult one. It seems increasingly clear that this, at the very least, requires treating management of social performance more like management of health, safety or the environment within the company, ensuring that core operating plans reflect conflict risks and mitigation strategies. It also requires compliance mechanisms within the company adequate to ensure performance against plan. When the system is working well, formal decision points built into the project management process allow managers to consider financial and technical performance as well as socio-political risks side by side, preferably before major financial commitments have been made. This avoids the problem, for example, of multi-million dollar equipment rental contracts being entered into before stakeholder analysis uncovers compelling reasons for project delay, creating pressure to move forward despite conflict risks. At the same time, understanding and discussion is broadened within the company of its potential positive and negative roles in a fragile environment.

*Corporate experience mirrors the increasing conflict prevention focus on strong local networks and institutions*

Corporate experience to some extent mirrors the increasing conflict prevention focus on strong local networks and institutions. Company engagement with local communities is historically often associated with paternalistic provision of services, putting the company in the business, for example, of running schools or health clinics. From a company perspective, this invited increasing community demands, and created perverse incentives among local actors to be the wheel that squeaked loudest and therefore received the most grease. From a conflict prevention perspective, the company risked undermining the development of indigenous capacity to build consensus, plan, deliver services, and resolve disputes. More recent approaches attempt to empower communities through shared ownership of the social investment process. A company may enter into a memorandum of understanding, for example, that provides a multi-stakeholder forum controlled by the community itself with stable, multi-year financing to pursue its own agenda with its own partners of choice. It may be difficult for companies to transition to local decision-making systems that they do not control, but results appear to be encouraging.

*A key challenge is making good business practice systematic*

At the operational level, a key challenge is making good business practice systematic. There is little consistency among industries engaged in fragile environments, or often even across the many operations of a single global company. Greater due diligence may be called for, both by companies themselves, and by institutional investors, project finance lenders, insurers, or governments concerned with company performance. Here increased attention to management skills, company systems and processes, and inter-organisational mechanisms will be useful, as evidence strongly suggests that these are often not sufficiently robust within companies in relation to the conflict prevention challenges faced.

At the policy level, there may be value to international and national action that helps level the playing field. An extractive company that attempts to incorporate good practices into its local operations may be competing for concession rights against a company that is less attentive to conflict prevention but offers a more attractive financial package to the national government. International standards in tender processes and clearer expectations against which business can plan and deliver should be designed to help mitigate pressures to engage in a race to the bottom.

Looking beyond the leading global corporations, many companies have been left out of the conflict prevention conversation. Increased engagement is required of emerging market multi-national enterprises, particularly as south-south investment grows in importance. More innovative approaches may be required to reach national and sub-national actors, working with industry associations and local chambers of commerce and industry, for example, to reach smaller actors who all the same may play critical roles in local conflict prevention efforts. Given the common requirement that outside investors partner with national actors, more attention may be also required to manage the challenge of private-sector enterprises in which non-democratic governments or their close allies are partners.

Companies, inter-governmental agencies, and non-governmental organisations almost certainly have much to learn from one another. The company challenge to better imbed management of non-technical risks in operating units is directly analogous to challenges faced in mainstreaming "do no harm" analysis and planning within development organisations. Building conflict prevention sensibilities and capabilities within predominantly technical organisations will likely not be so different between a for-profit mining company, for example, and a not-for-profit agricultural development agency. All external actors must balance the need to engage rather than bypass local political structures with the desire to promote transparency and ensure inclusion of women and other marginalised voices. The challenges of managing within a multi-layered, multi-sectorial environment are also shared by all. Increased cross-fertilisation can improve policy and practice; at the same time it builds trust and understanding across sectors whose collaboration may still be sub-optimal.

## Conclusion: Action points to strengthen international support for conflict prevention

The practice of conflict prevention has become significantly more diverse over the last decade. This diversification is evidenced by the practice of multiple actors and sectors in support of strong, resilient systems at local, national and regional levels. Approaches such as architectures for peace, networks of insider mediators, armed violence reduction and prevention programmes, corporate non-technical risk management strategies, as well as United Nations peace and conflict advisors are all innovations which aim to consolidate peace, and end violence.

*Increased engagement of emerging market multi-national enterprises is required, particularly as south-south investment grows in importance*

*Building conflict prevention sensibilities and capabilities within for-profit and not-for-profit entities is unlikely to be much different. There is much that companies, international agencies, and NGOs can learn from each other*

A critical practical lesson has been that interventions or programmes with lasting prevention effects are multi-layered, multi-sectorial, and as broadly owned as possible. Effective prevention is less about the dominance of any particular approach – such as elite-focused preventive diplomacy, community-based peacebuilding, or armed violence reduction strategies – but about how these approaches communicate with each other. This is especially the case between approaches that target known and imminent tensions, and approaches that focus on risk factors of armed violence and fragility through long term programming.

The recent revival of interest in preventive action opens new opportunities to strengthen international support for conflict prevention. Concrete action points to further this aim are:

**Better communicate conflict prevention:** These communication efforts should occur at least at three levels:

(1) Communication about the nature and practise of conflict prevention as a means to diffuse programming innovation, and to increase the confidence in the concept of 'conflict prevention'. These exchanges could involve a series of workshops in regional United Nations hubs, and work towards a set of 'Principles of Conflict Prevention' that present a broad but unified vision about the nature of and approaches to conflict prevention. This discussion can be based on the UNSG reports on more effective mediation and preventive diplomacy.

(2) Communication among different actors and sectors about conflict prevention approaches, especially between formal state or United Nations actors, private mediation organisation, business, and humanitarian actors. These dialogues would aim to expand the evidence base of promising practices, and identify guidance for situations in which there is a "crowding" of actors providing prevention services. They may also aim to develop guidance as to the necessary independence, professional integrity, and regional knowledge to further prevention engagements on the ground.

(3) Communication between short term responses to imminent tensions, and long term programming on risk factors. These conversations would aim to bring closer together those actors focusing on high-level preventive diplomacy, or Track 1 peace mediation, and those focusing on community-based peacebuilding or armed violence reduction. Objectives of these encounters could be the identifying joint-interests, complementarities, and entry-points for accompanying transition local processes, as well as mutual learning across professional cultures. To this end, improved interaction between international and local actors is critical to better informed policies and more efficient deployment of resources.

*Effective prevention is less about the dominance of any particular approach, but about how these approaches communicate with each other*

**Strengthen local capacities for monitoring:** A critical aspect for effective prevention is to have timely information about evolving tensions and risk factors, and integrating this knowledge into decision making mechanisms. Efforts to establish so-called Armed Violence Monitoring Systems provide a useful innovation in this direction in the sense that they combine data and information gathering, analysis, and dissemination with evidence-based policy making. These platforms also represent an opportunity to integrate perspectives across institutions and sectors, and improve the prospects of context sensitive analysis by applying a diverse set of analytical methods and placing more attention to capture local attitudes and voices. Concretely, this is an opportunity to better connect architectures for peace, mediation support networks, and Armed Violence Monitoring Systems, especially in relation to advancing monitoring and evaluation. In contexts of persistent violence or fragility, there is also need to provide more dependable, long-term funding and technical support for independent monitoring, analysis, and convening of stakeholders that is not bound to any particular programme or intervention.

**Build capabilities for multi-layered, multi-sectorial approaches:** Effective and efficient action along multi-layered and multi-sectorial lines is a critical ingredient of lasting prevention. In practice, such action is often challenging, but not impossible. Building capacities for cross-sectorial communication and collaboration should be based on a framework for understanding the specific conflict prevention capabilities – individual, organizational, or external facing – that provide the greatest leverage for conflict prevention across different sectors. It should inform how these capabilities can be optimally deployed, particularly within development agencies, NGOs, or businesses that do not have conflict prevention as their primary mandate. Greater insight is also required on leading indicators of an organisation possessing an adequate level of conflict prevention capabilities, so that decision-makers are alert to an organisation that is not effectively identifying and preventing conflict, before disruptive conflict breaks out.

**Design more flexible financing mechanisms for conflict prevention:** Financing needs for conflict prevention occurs in situations that are inherently fluid and turbulent, and sometimes involve quick decision making to exploit a window of opportunity. Activities involve both rapid reaction as well as assistance to strengthen resilient systems on the ground. Financing arrangements therefore need to be flexible to allow both early investment and quick deployment. In practice, this 'flexibility' means shifting financial assistance from earmarked to un-earmarked contributions. Both greater appetite for risk for short term funding as well as longer term investment and policy instruments that build incentives to invest in prevention and resilience are needed. What is more, there needs to be a diversification of funding sources. While much funding for prevention emanates from Western donors, there is much room to attract financing from emerging economies. This diversification of funding sources may ultimately also make conflict prevention more broadly owned internationally.

*Armed Violence Monitoring Systems provide a useful innovation; they combine data and information gathering, analysis, and dissemination with evidence-based policy making*

*Financing arrangements need to be flexible to allow both early investment and quick deployment*

**Expand the ownership of conflict prevention:** Strong, resilient systems of conflict prevention must be locally owned, yet internationally embedded, to unfold their full potential. In order to achieve such an outcome, there should be an effort to expand the ownership of conflict prevention at various levels and across sectors. With the increasing investment of emerging economies in conflict-affected and fragile states, there is ample policy space to engage such states in preventive efforts, thereby addressing the perception that prevention is a "Western" policy discourse. The dialogue on conflict prevention with large developing countries, such as the BRICS, needs to intensify. What is more, expanding the ownership of prevention also means recognising the increased demands for architectures for peace from national authorities and respective civil society organisations, allowing these actors to adjust existing frameworks to their specific contexts, and structuring international assistance for conflict prevention not according to international blue prints, but along a broadly owned strategy.

> *Strong, resilient systems of conflict prevention must be locally owned, yet internationally embedded, to unfold their full potential*

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**Box 4: Research opportunities in the field of conflict prevention**

The diversification of conflict prevention activities brings with it a series of research challenges. Opportunities are related to current research on costing methods, monitoring and evaluation, private sector conflict prevention, as well on hybrid political orders.

**Costing armed violence to build the case for conflict prevention:** Over the last decade there have been significant advances in methods and models on costing armed violence. In some contexts there is now better data available, especially at national and sub-national level where Armed Violence Monitoring Systems have been established (even though in many other contexts the availability and quality of data remains a challenge). So far, however, these innovations in costing have not been well leveraged to increase support for conflict prevention, especially with respect to efforts to build momentum for conflict prevention for those communities highly affected by the cost of armed violence. Specific research questions would be whether current costing methods and models can increase the 'stickiness' of the costs of armed violence, so that these costs can be more easily attributed to specific actors, such as ministries, companies, sectors, or communities. Another research question would be if such demonstration of costs would trigger a behaviour change by these actors to support conflict prevention.

**Leverage innovation in monitoring and innovation for conflict prevention:** Approaches and methods for monitoring and evaluation have advanced in recent years. While most efforts focus on empirical or statistical evaluation tools and methods, there have also been advances in the application of so-called mixed methods combining attitudinal research, key informant interviews, and data analysis. While the challenge for the monitoring and evaluation in conflict prevention have been related to the need to monitor events that do not occur (violence), or to transformations that are difficult to capture empirically, there are opportunities to apply new survey methods to capture attitudinal changes in societies. Such methods relate to crowd sourcing or surveys though messages from mobile telephones or social media, as well as remote sensing in relation to structural risk factors (environmental changes, population pressures).

There may also be an opportunity to link reflection on monitoring and evaluation in conflict prevention to existing efforts on peacebuilding and statebuilding as driven by the OECD's International Network on Conflict and Fragility, the World Bank, the United States Institute of Peace, or the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office. One critical research question may focus on the identification of the adequate metrics and measures to monitor effective conflict prevention at the local level, as well as effective international intervention.

**Systematising the evidence of business in conflict prevention:** Existing scholarly work suggests that attention to individual skills, organisational capabilities and inter-organisational mechanisms will enable companies to act more constructively in conflict environments, and provide a complementary lever for conflict prevention. Now needed is a broader effort to move from an anecdotal to a more rigorous understanding of capacity for conflict prevention. Such an effort would address three critical questions: (1) Which specific conflict prevention capabilities provide the greatest leverage for mitigating the risks of disruptive conflict, particularly in environments of already-heightened socio-political tension? (2) Where within the company should any crucial reserves of expertise be established, and how broadly must capabilities be instilled across the organization in order for them to constitute a critical mass of sensitivity to, and skill for preventing conflict? (3) What are the leading indicators of an organisation possessing an adequate level of conflict prevention capabilities, such that we know if an organisation is not effectively identifying and preventing conflict before disruptive conflict breaks out?

**Hybrid political orders as entry points for conflict prevention:** While 'context sensitivity' is a central concept to structure conflict prevention (and more broadly international assistance) to conflict affected and fragile states, there is little practical understanding about what 'taking the context as a starting point' really implies in practise. On the ground, this can mean engaging with "hybrid political orders". These orders are characterised by the co-existence and overlap of competing forms of order, conflicting claims to legitimacy and economic resources, and a weak social base. The OECD has identified hybrid political orders as the 'normal' form of governance in most conflict-affected and fragile states.[10] In terms of research, there is a gap to close in terms of exploring the benefits of adopting a more positive appreciation of hybrid political orders, and changing the optics from a mere understanding these orders as something deficient, undesirable, and dangerous. Concretely, there is a lack of knowledge about patterns of engagements in hybrid political orders, the prevention functions of such orders, as well as the practical trade-offs inherent in the context of negotiations with entrenched stakeholders in such orders. This research would be relevant for contexts that are characterised by parallel economies or the presence of transnational crime networks.

*Attention to individual skills, organisational capabilities and inter-organisational mechanisms will enable companies to act more constructively in conflict environments*

*Adopting a more positive appreciation of hybrid political orders can open new policy opportunities*

## Annex 1: Recent documents on innovative programming and best practices in the field of conflict prevention

Dress, T.P. (2005) *Designing a Peacebuilding Infrastructure: Taking a Systems Approach to the Prevention of Deadly Conflict*, New York and Geneva: United Nations

Eavis, P. (2011) *Working Against Violence: Promising Practices in Armed Violence Reduction and Prevention*. Geneva: Geneva Declaration Secretariat.

Eskandarpour, A. and A. Wennmann (2011) *Strengthening Preventive Diplomacy: The Role of Private Actors*. CCDP Issues Brief. Geneva: The Graduate Institute and Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

FDFA, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and OECD (2011) *Improving International Support to Peace Processes: Key Recommendations*, Bern and Paris: FDFA and OECD.

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Gilgen, E, and L. Tracey (2011) *Contributing Evidence to Programming: Armed Violence Monitoring Systems*. Geneva: Geneva Declaration Secretariat.

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OECD (2011) *Supporting Coherent Transitions from Conflict to Sustainable Peace : Key Messages for Policymakers*, Paris : International Network on Conflict and Fragility.

Smith, R., and S. Deely (2010) *Insider Mediators in Africa: Understanding the Contribution of Insider Mediators to the Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Africa*. Summary Report of Phase 1, 26 July. Prangins: PeaceNexus Foundation.

UNDP, United Nations Development Programme (2010) *Armed Violence Reduction and Prevention: What Works?* Geneva and Oslo: UNDP and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

UNSG, United Nations Secretary-General (2011) *Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results*, Document S/2011/552, New York: United Nations.

UNSG (2009) *Report of the Secretary General on Enhancing Mediation and Its Support Activities*, Document S/2009/189, New York: United Nations.

WHO, World Health Organization (2009) *Violence Prevention: The Evidence – Overview*, Geneva: WHO.

# Annex 2: List of participants

Strengthening International Support to Conflict Prevention
Geneva, 1 December 2011

1. Bernardo Arévalo de León, Deputy Director-General, Research and Development, Interpeace, Geneva
2. David Atwood, Associate Fellow, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Geneva
3. Hakeem Balogun, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Ghana, Geneva
4. Henk-Jan Brinkman, Chief, Policy, Planning and Application Branch, Peacebuilding Support Office, United Nations, New York
5. Tilman Brück, German Institute for Economic Research, Berlin
6. Andy Carl, Director, Conciliation Resources, London
7. Scilla Elworthy, Founder of Peace Direct and the Oxford Research Group, London
8. Brian Ganson, Senior Researcher, The Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement, University of Stellenbosch Business School, Cape Town
9. Todd Howland, Principal Officer on Special Assignment, Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva
10. Laetitia Kirianoff, Political Division III, United Nations and other International Organizations, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern
11. Sabina Läderach, Political Division IV, Human Security, Policy Unit, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern
12. Youssef Mahmoud, Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute, New York
13. Luigi de Martino, Coordinator, Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, Geneva
14. Gerard McHugh, President, Conflict Dynamics International, Boston
15. David Jensen, Head of Programme, Environmental Cooperation for Peacebuilding, United Nations Environment Programme, Geneva
16. Erica Molin, CEO, International Council of Swedish Industry, Stockholm
17. Chiyedza Nyahuhe, Board Member, Envision Zimbabwe Women's Trust, Harare
18. Tarja Pesämaa, Minister-Counsellor, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Finland, Geneva
19. Alexandra Pichler, United Nations Department of Political Affairs, New York
20. Inge Relph, Director, Arab International Women's Forum, London
21. Stéphane Rey, Second Secretary, Political Affairs, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, New York
22. Gay Rosenblum-Kumar, Senior Secretary, United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action, New York
23. James Schofield, External Affairs Advisor, Shell International Exploration and Production, The Hague
24. Andrew Tomlinson, Director, Quaker United Nations Office, New York
25. Julien Thöni, Head, Multilateral Peace Policy Section, Political Affairs Division IV, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Bern
26. Wolfram Vetter, External Action Service, European Union, Brussels
27. Achim Wennmann, Executive Coordinator, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, Geneva
28. Jonathan Woolley, Director, Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

## Endnotes

[1] Strengthening International Support for Conflict Prevention, Geneva, 1 December 2011, organised by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. For a list of participants see Annex 2.

[2] United Nations Secretary-General. 2001. Preventing Armed Conflict. Document S/2001/574. New York: United Nations.

[3] For various documents distilling best practice see OECD (2009) Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development, Paris: OECD. OECD (2009) Preventing Violence, War and State Collapse, Paris: OECD. WHO (2009) Violence Prevention: The Evidence – Overview. Geneva: WHO. UNDP (2010) Armed Violence Reduction and prevention: What Works? Geneva and Oslo: UNDP and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. OECD (2011) Investing in Security: A Global Assessment of Armed Violence Reduction and Prevention Initiatives, Paris and Geneva: OECD and Geneva Declaration Secretariat.

[4] Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011) Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[5] Jütersonke, O. and M.Kartas (2010) Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) Madagascar. Geneva: Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP), Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

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[7] Bakewell, O and A. Garbutt (2005) The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach: A Report for the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

[8] See Eskandarpour, A. and A. Wennmann (2011) Strengthening Preventive Diplomacy: The Role of Private Actors. CCDP Issues Brief. Geneva: The Graduate Institute and Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

[9] For a more detailed analysis see Ganson, B. (2011) Business and Conflict Prevention: Towards a Framework for Action. Platform Paper No.2. Geneva: Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

[10] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2011) Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series. Paris: OECD, p. 25.

## About this paper

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