CHAPTER 3:
PREVENTING AND MANAGING VIOLENT CONFLICT
**Introduction**

The prevention of violent conflict, often referred to as ‘conflict prevention’, refers to approaches, methods and mechanisms used to avoid, minimise, and/or contain potential violent conflicts; and in post-conflict environments, to prevent violent conflict from re-emerging. Prevention is critical for avoiding the devastation and immense human suffering associated with war. It is also prudent as the financial and political costs of managing conflict are much higher once violent conflict has already erupted. In addition, there are a broader range of response options available before conflict has fully escalated. Conflict prevention has also been found to be effective. A reported decline in armed conflict since the Cold War has been attributed in part because of an extraordinary increase in activism by the international community directed toward conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding (Human Security Report 2005).

Prevention approaches and mechanisms are generally classified as direct/operational prevention or structural prevention, although there is often overlap. The former refers to short term actions taken to prevent the often imminent escalation of potential conflict (e.g. workshops, dialogue, confidence-building measures, sanctions, coercive diplomacy, special envoys, preventive deployment); whereas structural prevention entails long term interventions that aim to transform key socioeconomic, political and institutional factors that if left unaddressed, could lead to violent conflict in the future. These long term preventive mechanisms overlap with approaches adopted in the aftermath of conflict in order to prevent a renewal of violence. The UN has introduced a third category of conflict prevention, ‘systemic prevention’, to describe measures that address trans-national conflict risks.

Most preventive action has been taken in a small number of high-profile cases concentrated in Europe and the Middle East. Asia has received comparatively little attention. The most common tools for early prevention are verbal pronouncements and facilitation; coercive measures are very rarely used.

Conflict prevention is now official policy in the UN, the EU, the G-8 and in many states. It has been successfully applied in a range of places at the national level, including in South Africa, Macedonia, the Baltic states, Crimea, and the South China Sea. The many successful violence prevention efforts on the community and sub-national level, often remain invisible. Much conflict literature emphasises that despite these developments, conflict prevention has not been pursued sufficiently. There is still a lack of strategy and capacity for prevention efforts, and inadequate local knowledge and local networks. In order to fill the gap between conflict prevention rhetoric and practice, prevention needs to become a full-time professional and governmental endeavour. Only then, it is believed, can the devastating impacts of violent conflict be systematically avoided.
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What are the trends in and effects of early conflict prevention during the escalation of ethnic crises? This article uses a new dataset to analyse operational conflict prevention measures prior to the outbreak of war in intrastate ethnic conflicts between 1990 and 1998. Most preventive action is focused on a few high profile cases, and Asia in particular receives little attention. Diplomatic measures and relief efforts both have conflict dampening effects, while carrots (inducements) increase the likelihood of war. Other measures show no significant effects. Expectations about the effectiveness of coercive preventive measures may thus be overstated.

What are the interpretational differences in conflict, conflict prevention and conflict management? How do we come to terms with the lack of consensus within the academic and policy community? This paper provides an overview of the conceptual terms. Traditional assumptions are challenged with the three concepts viewed as inter-related rather than as separate. An integrated, holistic approach is recommended.

This report documents the dramatic, but largely unknown, decline in the number of wars, genocides, and human rights abuse over the past decade. The Report argues that the single most compelling explanation for these changes is found in the unprecedented upsurge of international activism, spearheaded by the UN, which took place in the wake of the Cold War and was designed to stop ongoing wars, help negotiate peace settlements, support post-conflict reconstruction, and prevent old wars from starting again.

See full text

What works and what does not in armed violence reduction and prevention? To begin to address this question, this report draws on a large-scale mapping of AVRP activities around the world, focusing on programming trends in the varied contexts of Brazil, Burundi, Colombia, Liberia, South Africa and Timor-Leste. The most promising AVRP activities are based on inter-sectoral partnerships and operate simultaneously at local and national levels. Development agencies need to adopt integrated approaches to AVRP, and link the AVRP agenda to the promotion of peacebuilding and statebuilding.

**Conflict prevention theory and approaches**

There are ongoing attempts to develop conflict prevention into a proper discipline. For example, Lund has attempted to develop theory and methodology for prevention, designed to help in determining the appropriate mix of tools in varying stages of conflict and contexts. He identifies the key stages as: latent conflict, manifest limited conflict, and escalating violent conflict. He argues that structural prevention interventions (e.g. helping specific governments to address socioeconomic sources of conflicts or institutional and policy deficits that keep countries from addressing tensions meaningfully and peacefully) are most appropriate in earlier (latent) stages. There is a greater likelihood of being able to implement more far-reaching measures during latent conflict stages, as there are lower levels of inter-party and societal suspicion and mistrust. At later
stages, the aim is more often direct prevention, aimed at preventing or containing escalation and the hardening of positions. Wallensteen has developed a methodology to measure effectiveness, in order to help ensure that conflict prevention interventions are tailored to achieve best results.

**Theory and methodology**


Why does there seem to be a gap between the promise and the actual pursuit of conflict prevention? How can decision makers devise effective conflict prevention policies? This chapter reviews the concepts, activities, and impacts of conflict prevention, focusing on the ‘primary prevention’ of prospective new conflicts. Policymakers need to consolidate lessons learned from past experience, and apply that knowledge to weak states through multilateral country consultations with key actors to develop jointly formulated, multifaceted conflict prevention strategies.

Wallensteen, P. and Möller, F., 2004, ‘Conflict Prevention: Methodology for Knowing the Unknown’ Uppsala Peace Research Papers, no. 7, Department of Peace and Conflict Research Uppsala University

What are the most effective means of preventing violent conflict from escalating into war? How do you develop a theory of conflict prevention? This study looks at the research on conflict prevention and proposes a more effective way of analysing it. It argues that if conflict prevention strategies are to be improved, there must be a more nuanced understanding of why current strategies fail or succeed.

**International and donor approaches**

International organisations and donor agencies have developed their own approaches and guidelines to conflict prevention. They include the use of aid to address the structural causes of conflict as well as joined-up approaches to a range of development, trade, foreign policy and security issues involving coordination across departments.


The changes that have taken place in the world since the Millennium Declaration demand that consensus be revitalised on key challenges and priorities. What are these and how can they best be achieved? This report argues that security, development and human rights must be advanced together, otherwise none will succeed. The Millennium Development Goals can be met by 2015, but only if all governments dramatically increase their efforts. The report also commits the United Nations to strengthen international regimes and norms to support prevention of armed conflict.


While a culture of conflict prevention is taking hold at the United Nations (UN), an unacceptable gap remains between rhetoric and practice. This progress report by Kofi Annan examines the current status of conflict prevention at international and national operational, structural and systemic levels. All relevant actors need to accept and act upon the principles of shared vulnerability and mutual responsibility so that conflict prevention becomes a deeply-rooted norm embraced at all levels of the community of nations.
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Why has conflict prevention been neglected in the ongoing debates over global security? This article examines attitudes toward the international community’s responsibility to prevent conflict since the publication in 2001 of the report The Responsibility to Protect. In explaining the relative neglect of prevention in debates about The Responsibility to Protect, it argues that the answer can be found in a combination of doubts about how wide the definition of prevention should be, political concerns raised by the use of prevention in the war on terrorism, and practical concerns about the appropriate institutional locus for responsibility.


How can government development agencies play a part in tackling the problems that contribute to violent conflict? This paper seeks to show how DFID understands and responds to conflict across the breadth of its work. It proposes to place a greater emphasis on resolving conflict before it becomes violent, to make its response to armed conflict more effective by improving its support to peace processes and enhancing the conflict-management capacity of relevant bodies, and to make its development work more ‘conflict-sensitive’. The paper includes case studies from Brazil, Indonesia, Colombia, Uganda, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Nepal, Sudan and Yemen.


All development cooperation strategies and programmes must help societies to manage tensions and disputes without resorting to violence. How can international donors best promote peace-building and post-conflict reconciliation? A task force, established in 1995 by the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, has produced detailed guidelines covering the design and implementation of development cooperation for conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery. Development cooperation must be coherent, comprehensive, integrated and aimed at helping address the root causes of conflicts.

For resources and discussion on the responsibility to protect, see the peacekeeping and peace support operations section of this guide.

Early warning and early response systems

Conflict prevention requires careful monitoring of indicators of rising tensions and taking measures to ease them. Early warning consists of data collection, risk analysis, and the transmission of information with recommendations to targeted recipients. Early response systems refer to timely and appropriate prevention initiatives, usually undertaken during latent stages of perceived potential violent conflict. Early warning and early response systems have been adopted by international organisations, bi-lateral agencies, research institutions and NGOs.

There is much critique, however, that early warning has not translated into early or effective response. While the formulation of accurate predictions is challenging, the more difficult aspect has been persuading political leaders and the public to act upon warnings. Often civil society organisations end up playing the dual role of warning as well as implementing measures in response.
Some analysts stress the need to recognise that early warning is inherently political – in terms of ‘who is warning whom and to what end?’, and in terms of which warnings are heeded. It has also been emphasised that early warning must monitor human security indicators that include protection of gender and minority rights. Notable violations of such rights can be indicators of rising tensions and incipient conflict. Recent research on regional organisations suggests that the key constraint facing early warning systems is not lack of quality data, but rather organisational weaknesses and internal political divisions.

**Concepts and guidance**


Are early warning and response systems prepared for the conflicts of the future? This report reviews recent literature on early warning and response to assess their value and their role in the prevention of violent conflict and for peacebuilding. It concludes that early warning and response systems require further support to ensure their future relevance.


How can early warning and response systems be improved? This study suggests that although a rich literature exists on how early warning and response should be carried out, little is known about how early warning actually happens. There needs to be a community of practice where the issues and dilemmas of early warning and response can be refined, experiences shared and empirical theory built from practice.


Why is there a gap between warning and response in many conflicts? Why do regional organisations not use early warning and response (EWR) mechanisms more effectively? Current EWR mechanisms have four key weaknesses to address; they need to adequately consider causal chains, the local space, the impact of small events, and under what conditions they can be effectively replicated. Regional organisations do not use EWR effectively because of political interest, institutional rigidity, a lack of information that is tailor-made for decision-makers, and a lack of capacity. Concepts need to be developed on the precise role of regional organisations in EWR.


How can the increasing use of new information communication technologies assist international actors, governments, and civil society organizations to more effectively prevent violence and conflict? This report examines the contributions that cell phones, social media, crowdsourcing, crisis mapping, blogging, and big data analytics can make to short-term efforts to forestall crises and to long-term initiatives to address the root causes of violence. Case studies from Africa, Asia and Latin America show that using new technologies for conflict prevention has very different results depending on the context and whether or not those using the technology take that context into account.

**See full text**
This handbook is intended for development practitioners who seek to mainstream peace and conflict analysis into their long-term development programs. The conflict diagnostic framework enables planners to take a ‘snapshot’ of peace and conflict dynamics in a given country, and stimulates discussion of possible development activities that can support peace.
See full text

Preventing violent conflict requires early warning of likely crises so that preventive actions can be planned and taken. This report provides practical guidance on how different quantitative and qualitative models can be used together to generate more accurate forecasts for political instability and mass violence. The best results for early warning are most likely obtained by a combination of quantitative analysis based on forecasting models with qualitative analysis that rests on explicit causal relationships and precise forecasts of its own.
See full text

This paper demonstrates how the integration of disaster risk management (DRM) with insecurity programming can expand the scope of risk management to the mutual benefit of communities and aid agencies. DRM programming has to be ‘conflict sensitive’ and peace-building has to be ‘hazard-proof’. The common objectives and the combined impact of the various approaches to DRM, IP and relief and recovery operations can be harnessed to develop a long-term strategy leading to peace and resilience to all forms of threats and hazards. The integration of these approaches would lead to more streamlined operations and a more efficient use of funds. Programming can be adapted to many insecure contexts by using a graduated management system based on multi-hazard threats surveillance and an early warning system.

Minority rights and gender early warning indicators

Minority issues lie at the heart of many of the world’s conflicts. Yet minority rights are often marginalised in peace processes and conflict prevention programmes. This study looks at Chechnya, Darfur, Kashmir, Kosovo and Sri Lanka. Understanding the warning signs provided by minority rights violations could prevent conflicts. Groups should not be separated along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines as a way of creating peace, as such divisions can entrench old hatreds and wounds in the long term.

What lessons can we learn from international engagement in the conflict in Darfur? This paper analyses events in the terms of structural and operational conflict prevention. It argues that the catalogue of political and institutional failures before and during the civil war indicates a need to address minority rights issues at every stage of conflict prevention. Institutional improvements in conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms will help avoid repeating the mistakes of Darfur.
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**Direct prevention mechanisms**

*Preventative diplomacy*

The term, ‘preventive diplomacy’ was coined by UN Secretary General Hammarskjöld in the 1960s and referred to preventing the escalation of Cold War proxy wars in developing countries into global confrontations. After the end of the Cold War, attention shifted to the threat of internal wars. Secretary General Boutros-Ghali adapted the term then to mean not simply keeping regional conflicts from going global, but using diplomatic techniques (i.e. diplomatic persuasion, sometimes combined with military intervention) to prevent armed conflict between or within nations from arising in the first place.

How can deadly conflict be prevented? This article examines the choice of decisions taken in escalating deadly conflict in Lebanon, Liberia, Somalia, Zaire, Haiti and Yugoslavia. It analyses the characteristics of alternative policies to begin the process of creating a new polity out of conflict, the incentives and disincentives required for such policies and the reasons for their rejection at the time. Opportunities tend to constitute a period of time in the life of the conflict when preventive diplomacy is possible, after which entry becomes much more difficult.

This article examines the concept of preventative diplomacy and its supporters. It is critical of the purported benefits of preventative diplomacy and conflict prevention.


What are the recurrent obstacles and emerging opportunities in relation to preventative action? There is increasing interest in investing in preventative action despite preventative diplomacy and conflict prevention having gained limited traction in policy and practice. The lack of uptake is fundamentally connected with the changing nature of violence. Recommendations for moving preventative action forward include: share but don’t align conflict analyses; align conflict analyses to local understandings and terminology; research drivers of peace separately from drivers of violence; study the micro-determinants of success in preventive action; begin a dialogue on
coordination of preventive action; and ensure sufficient and flexible financing for preventive action. See full text

**Incentives and sanctions**

International policy makers often use incentives, sanctions and conditionality as tools to influence the behaviour of key conflict actors and to alter conflict dynamics. Incentive-based measures include economic incentives (e.g. development aid), political incentives (e.g. diplomatic relations, recognition in international/multilateral institutions such as the EU), and security guarantees. Targeted sanctions, which have been the subject of increasing attention, focus on applying direct pressure on individuals who have political decision-making power in governments and groups that are parties to the conflict. This is considered to be an effective mechanism, and avoids the infliction of harm on the broader civilian population.

Some conflict analysts argue that incentives and sanctions, on their own, are unlikely to be sufficient to shift parties into the constructive problem-solving mode that is usually necessary for successful prevention. As such, they should be regarded and enforced as part of a comprehensive peacemaking strategy.


Do sanctions, incentives and conditionality support or undermine the peace process? This edition of Accord assesses whether these instruments can persuade conflict parties to engage in peacemaking. Used effectively, these tools can tip the balance towards a settlement by increasing the costs of fighting and rewarding peace. But unless developed as part of a coherent and strategic approach to peacemaking they can be ineffective and have sometimes exacerbated tensions and fuelled conflict. Sanctions, incentives and conditionality must be responsive to parties’ own motivations and support pre-existing conditions for conflict resolution.


How can the international community improve the management and implementation of targeted sanctions? This paper suggests that targeted sanctions have the potential to be an effective tool in conflict prevention and management. However, sanctions policy and practice is in need of major reform to ensure better implementation, coordination and evaluation.

For resources on ‘peace conditionalities’, see the conflict negotiation section of this guide.

**Peacemaking - dialogue**

Dialogue is considered a critical tool in peacemaking. It differs from mediation and negotiation in that dialogue is process-focused and does not aim to produce a resolution or formal agreement. The purpose of dialogue rather is to get conflicting parties to talk, to build up trust and to transform relationships. It is a long-term inclusive process that can occur at political and community levels. It requires a safe space for parties to come together, to self-reflect and to speak their mind. It demands a willingness to address root causes; to recognise one another’s humanity and demonstrate empathy; to recognise differences and commonalities; and to show a capacity to change. Dialogue is not appropriate in situations where violence, hate and mistrust are too strong that they block any movement toward consensus; or where there is an imbalance of power.
Inter-faith dialogue has been receiving growing attention as a potentially effective way to counter negative stereotypes of the ‘other’ and to develop trusting relationships. It aims to defuse inter-faith tensions that could cause future conflict or that derive from prior conflict. Other forms of religious peacemaking include religious activism, whereby religious actors directly oppose repression and seek to promote peace and reconciliation, for example the civil disobedience of the Buddhist monks in Burma (Myanmar); and mediation and facilitation by religious leaders. The incorporation of religion in peacemaking, which has traditionally been a secular arena, is in part due to the recognition that many cultures are heavily influenced by religion and thus people from such cultures may be more open to religious peacemaking efforts.

Dialogue, and peacemaking more generally, is not an end in itself however. Larger structural causes of conflict also need to be addressed. Still, aspects of dialogue – such as inclusiveness, can reflect some the elements of structural change required.

Dialogue


How effective is mediation and dialogue in protracted violent conflict? This paper explores approaches to and formats of mediation and dialogue, and the relevance and effectiveness of these strategies in the context of protracted violent conflicts, particularly in the South Caucasus. Mediation and dialogue cannot be contained in an ivory tower and need to be placed in a real-life conflict context characterised by violence, mistrust, political opportunism, vengeance and systemic injustice. The EU needs to develop a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of mediation and dialogue and the conflict context in which it operates.


What is dialogue and how can it respond to the need for wider participation in the public sphere? The first section of this handbook outlines the need for dialogue and how it can make a difference in pursuit of peace, development and democratic governance. The number of dialogue processes taking place around the world has increased, as has the need for a greater understanding of effective dialogue.


See full text

Religious peacemaking


Under what conditions does faith-based mediation of armed conflicts occur? This article uses a global cross-country dataset to explore faith-based mediation in armed conflict. Faith-based mediation primarily occurs in situations where religion is not part of the conflict itself. The organisation of faith-based mediation is significantly different in the Christian and the Islamic contexts. There has been a decrease in the frequency of faith-based mediation between 1989 and 2008, which could indicate a trend of decreasing international peacemaking engagement from the faith-based communities or the rise in armed conflicts over religious issues. See full text
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The threat of religious extremism is real and well documented, but the contribution that religion can make to peacemaking – as the flip side of religious conflict – is only beginning to be explored and explicated. This selection of studies edited by the USIP explores and analyses a number of case studies of faith-based interventions in peacemaking. It finds that faith-based institutions can engage in some of the most pressing conflict issues, particularly in religiously based conflicts.


What potential do religious actors have for acting as constructive peacemakers? How does the fundamental identity of the peace broker affect the chances of success? This article examines the role of religious actors in peacemaking. Three facets of religion – norms, identity, and organisation – are analysed. Each may feed into the emergence or escalation of conflict, and each is in itself transformed through exposure to armed conflict. Similarly, each facet forms part of the peacemaking potential of religious actors. Religious brokers may be of three distinct types: the 'liaison', the 'coordinator', and the 'representative'. Religious actors should not be assumed to have inherent peacemaking capability, but religion is an integral dimension of most attempts to foster peace and must not be neglected.

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For additional resources on peacemaking, see the Ending Violent Conflict component of this guide.

Structural prevention

Structural conflict prevention comprises long term interventions that aim to transform key socioeconomic, political and institutional factors that if left unaddressed, could lead to violent conflict in the future. This encompasses a broad range of factors, including but not limited to: addressing inequality, exclusion and marginalisation; developing social capital and social cohesion; promoting livelihoods, local development and economic opportunities; and promoting legitimate and equitable political, justice and security institutions.

Many of these interventions are similar to those undertaken to promote peacebuilding: see the peacebuilding component of this guide. For discussion and resources on local conflict management, see the non-violence and local conflict management section in the ending violent conflict component of this guide.

Additional resources

For discussion and resources on state-building, see the GSDRC's fragile states topic guide. For materials on equitable service delivery, see the service delivery and fragile states topic guides.
For discussion and resources on promoting democracy, political participation and voice and accountability, see the GSDRC’s political systems and voice and accountability topic guides. For materials on the promotion of human rights, rule of law and access to justice and security, see the human rights and justice topic guides.

For discussion and resources on promoting social inclusion and social protection, see the GSDRC’s social exclusion and social protection topic guides.
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Introduction

The processes and aims of conflict management and conflict resolution can overlap with those of conflict prevention. Conflict management refers to measures aimed at limiting, mitigating and/or containing a conflict without necessarily solving it. Conflict resolution refers to attempts to resolve the underlying incompatibilities of a conflict non-violently, including efforts to get the parties to mutually accept each other’s existence (Swanström and Weissmann 2005). The methods involved in conflict management and resolution may include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, joint problem-solving and search for integrative solutions, and/or customary or traditional methods.

Similar to conflict prevention, conflict management and resolution activities often seek to identify and address the perceived root causes of conflicts, in order to tailor appropriate solutions. The applicability of democratisation and economic development, for example, which are commonly proposed solutions to conflict, may vary depending on the root causes of conflict. Where the root cause is political marginalisation or the absence of a social contract, democratisation may play a positive role in conflict resolution; whereas if the root cause concerns identity politics, democratisation may not be the appropriate response and in some contexts may exacerbate the risk of conflict.

Other recent research stresses that effective conflict management and resolution requires instead a shift in attention from root causes only to also the dynamics (actors and motivations) and impact of conflict (changes wrought by the war itself), especially its impact on the conflict-affected populations; and to the ‘causes of peace’ (political arrangements necessary to settle power struggles and limit the use of violence).


What are the interpretational differences in conflict, conflict prevention and conflict management? How do we come to terms with the lack of consensus within the academic and policy community? This paper provides an overview of the conceptual terms. Traditional assumptions are challenged with the three concepts viewed as inter-related rather than as separate. An integrated, holistic approach is recommended.

What are conflict resolution (CR) strategies and how do they benefit those involved in wars? This chapter looks at the expanding field of CR in recent decades. CR offers many strategies that are relevant for combatants as well as for the intermediaries trying to mitigate destructive conflicts. CR ideas are increasingly influential and new developments are largely a response to the changing international environment. However, they are still insufficiently understood and utilised.

A focus on “root causes” of civil war would not improve peacebuilding interventions and could even be counterproductive. This paper disputes the explanation that interventions fail in part because they fail to address root causes of civil war. The most pressing question for peacebuilding missions is not why civil war occurs, but how we intervene and improve on currently inadequate results.

Can democracy and development constitute a blueprint for conflict resolution? This study uses data from African countries to explore the relationship between democracy, economic development and conflict resolution. It finds that economic development is a more important variable than political legacy, and the social impact of growth is more important than growth itself. However, neither democratisation nor economic development, nor a combination of them, can be applied under all circumstances for conflict resolution.

What is the evidence that existing approaches to the resolution of violent conflict have achieved their intended effects to improve the lives of conflict-affected populations? This paper takes a people centred approach to review the evidence base that underpins contemporary approaches to the resolution of violent conflict. Current approaches to conflict resolution are often based on weak evidence and normative objectives, and make problematic assumptions with regard to the actors and conflict structures involved, and to the conflict resolution strategies employed. Existing models of conflict resolution often fail to effectively deal with the vulnerabilities and insecurities of the daily lives of people affected by violent conflict.

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Conflict negotiation

The main purpose of negotiations is to reconcile the conflicting positions of the relevant parties. This is a challenging process that needs to take into consideration many variables and factors, including but not limited to: timing and sequencing; leadership preferences; degree of inclusiveness in terms of parties and content; and methods of leverage.

The most difficult part of conflict negotiations is often getting the parties to the table. In the Mozambique peace process, for example, it took ten years from the first peace initiative and dialogue until formal negotiations started. Negotiations also frequently collapse. The existence of
alternative channels and different actors that can connect to the conflict parties is therefore required to keep the process going until the parties return to the table and formal negotiations restart.

Ripeness

The concept of ‘ripeness’ refers to the belief that parties to a conflict will be open to negotiation processes when they arrive at ‘mutually hurting stalemates’ (MHS). Mutually hurting stalemates are situations in which parties find themselves locked in a mutually costly conflict that neither party can win. These situations have in the past provided the occasion for successful conflict resolution interventions. In many conflicts, however – particularly internal conflicts, there are no clear ripe moments, and external actors may need to create opportunities and entry points.

How can the timing of peace initiatives help to resolve conflicts? This article argues that parties resolve their conflicts only when they are ready to do so – when alternative, usually unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked. Practitioners need to take advantage of this ‘ripe moment’ when it exists, or help produce it, or stand ready to act on it when it does not exist.

How can ripeness theory be improved to further understanding of conflict resolution processes? This paper recasts ripeness theory to create a new variant, ‘readiness theory’. The recast theory argues that an actor’s readiness for conflict resolution is a function of both motivation to end the conflict and optimism about the success of negotiation. The model defines ripeness as the breadth of the ‘central coalition’ of ready individuals and of subgroups, a coalition that spans both sides of the conflict divide.

Process

The process that leads to a peace settlement is likely to play an important role in determining its success. A comprehensive approach to peace negotiations, where key issues are frontloaded may be preferable to an incremental approach, which presents opportunities for trust to break down.

How can peace be made between warring groups with seemingly incompatible aims? The concluding chapter of this publication examines five case studies of recent peace processes. It argues that in order to resolve ethno-national conflicts, peace processes should address border issues directly, use third parties and adopt a fast-track approach to peacemaking.

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Negotiating with non-state armed groups

Non-state armed groups have become key actors in violent internal and regional conflicts. They refer to non-conventional combatants (insurgents, partisans, rebel groups, terrorists, guerrillas, freedom fighters, the mujahedeen, separatists, national liberation movements and de facto
governing authorities). While still considered controversial in some contexts, the need to negotiate with non-state armed groups for purposes of securing the peace and implementing development activities has been increasingly recognised in conflict and development literature.

The agreement of non-state armed actors for development activities to take place on territory under their control is essential. The exclusion of non-state armed groups from negotiations and peace processes can also result in continued resort to violence by those left out. Recent research argues that the engagement, and in turn legitimation, of insurgent or ‘terrorist’ groups through talks may be a means to transform a conflict away from violence. Engagement by international actors with warlords and divisive local leaders, and the targeted use of incentives and sanctions, can also influence changes in behaviour to more peaceful methods of leadership.

When engaging with non-state armed groups, it is important to conduct assessments to understand the group’s structure, command and control, and the capacity of its leadership to influence the behaviour of its members. It is also important to examine the group’s relationship to the state, as the state/non-state distinction is often not clear-cut.

Should Armed Non-State Actors be engaged in development dialogue? Would this be tantamount to negotiating with terrorists? Armed Non-State Actors are now an important feature of violent conflict within and between states. This paper identifies opportunities and challenges for engaging Armed Non-State Actors from a development perspective. It refutes the idea that this engagement legitimises violence and suggests there is widespread support for such work.

How do we understand the nature of armed groups? What is the importance of perceptions in regards to motivation and goals? This paper reflects on the questions of ideology, power and representation; examining the implications for conflict resolution strategies. It is found that the conflict resolution community tends to ignore certain issues that do not fit into current conceptualisations, while a deeper understanding of how to build relationships is required.

Why do conflict stakeholders make the shift from being state challengers to being peace- and state-building actors? This report shares the finding of a two-year participatory research project on the timing, sequencing and components of post-war security transitions, from the perspective and self-analysis of conflict stakeholders who have made the transition to peace. Transition processes must be inclusive of all key conflict stakeholders. A participatory approach will guarantee its sustainability. International support should be light-handed and empower local actors. The process should be holistic, with DDR and SSR programmes embedded into the political, economic and social context.


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Does negotiating with terrorist groups legitimise them? How can policymakers engage with multifaceted, horizontal organisations such as Al-Qaeda? This article argues that legitimacy and complexity can contribute to non-violent resolution of conflicts involving terrorist violence. It also argues that naming groups as ‘terrorist’ makes non-violent responses to terrorism less possible.

What is the role of local political leaders in conflict and peacebuilding? This study explores the roles played by local leaders in starting, perpetuating and ending conflict in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Sierra Leone. While local leaders play a key role in starting and perpetuating conflict, it is the pressure from, and involvement of, the international community which has been the pivotal force for change in these countries.

Inclusive peace negotiations – women, minority groups, and civil society

Inclusiveness in negotiations and peace processes relates not only to non-state armed groups, but also to other non-state actors. The activities of various non-state actors have often helped to create the conditions for formal peace negotiations to take place. In order for negotiations to have a greater likelihood of securing and sustaining the peace, they need to incorporate the active participation, perspectives and needs of women, minority groups, community groups, civil society more generally, and other non-state actors. This is important not only because these actors have important perspectives to contribute, but also because their participation early on in peace processes can help to guarantee their subsequent participation in new decision-making institutions that are often designed during negotiations.

The difficulty with inclusiveness is its feasibility. Mediators often argue that the inclusion of too many people at the negotiation table makes an already difficult task almost impossible. Thinking about a variety of ways to link otherwise excluded groups to a negotiation process is thus an important part of the negotiation set-up. In Guatemala, for example, a civil society assembly was held parallel to the official negotiation process and produced proposals that were often taken into consideration by the official negotiating parties.

Including civil society actors into peace settlements substantially increased the durability of peace. How and under what conditions can civil society actors be included in peace negotiations? This article gives an overview of nine models of inclusion, from most to least direct involvement of civil society, supported by illustrative case studies. It is possible to broaden the participation of local civil society actors in peace negotiations without decreasing the negotiations’ effectiveness. These models are presented to encourage mediators, negotiators, conflict parties, and civil society leaders to discuss and contextualize options for inclusion.

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How and why should women be involved in peace processes? This paper highlights the importance of involving women at every stage of peace negotiations and gives recommendations for how this
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might be achieved in practice. It argues that when approaching the task of ending war, the stakes are too high to neglect the resources that women have to offer.


Minority issues lie at the heart of many of the world’s conflicts. Yet minority rights are often marginalised in peace processes and conflict prevention programmes. This study looks at Chechnya, Darfur, Kashmir, Kosovo and Sri Lanka. Understanding the warning signs provided by minority rights violations could prevent conflicts. Groups should not be separated along ethnic, religious or linguistic lines as a way of creating peace, as such divisions can entrench old hatreds and wounds in the long term.


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How can civil society most effectively work for peacebuilding? This paper presents the findings of a comparative research project which analysed the performance of civil society in regards to protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialisation, social cohesion, facilitation, and service delivery in situations of war and armed conflict. It concludes civil society can play an important supportive role, but the effectiveness of its activities varied substantially. Contextual factors may limit or strengthen its ability to contribute to peacebuilding.


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**Peace conditionality**

Peace conditionality can be defined as “the use of aid as a lever to persuade conflicting parties to make peace, to implement a proposed peace accord, and to consolidate peace” (Frerks 2006: 16). There are differing positions within the donor and academic community with regard to the desirability and feasibility of such conditionality. While some believe that aid can be an effective incentive to negotiate and to reduce social tensions, particularly when tied to specific steps to build peace; others assert that aid alone cannot affect conflict dynamics or transform conflict. The effectiveness of aid as an incentive in a peace process also depends on the level of aid dependency of the country in question.


How can peace operations be made more effective? Can the application of so-called ‘peace conditionals’ be helpful towards increasing the effectiveness of conflict-related activities? This study looks at the lessons-learned on peace conditionals in post-conflict reconstruction. It shows that issue itself is contested on political and moral grounds, as is the question of whether it actually works. However, despite the limitations regarding the effectiveness of conditionality, there are a number of best practices that can be followed.
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Case studies and guidance

Is the United Kingdom (UK) government’s response to violent conflict appropriate? Is it effective in helping warring parties create lasting peace agreements? This study suggests that there are conceptual, policy, institutional and practice gaps in the UK’s responses to violent conflict. The government should direct more of its diplomatic, political and economic resources to the resolution and prevention of conflict through increasing and improving support for peace processes.

What do the Burundi peace negotiations reveal about the neo-liberal conception of peace that informs conflict resolution in Africa? Using the Burundi peace negotiations as an example, this article examines neo-liberal conflict resolution in Africa. Peace negotiations should be seen as political struggles, beyond that between the belligerents, due to the involvement of supporting actors promoting vested interests. Resulting peace agreements are not necessarily consensual or compromises for the sake of peace, but rather temporary stalemates between international, regional and local actors.

What are the options for securing justice in peace negotiations? What role can mediators play in ensuring that peace agreements effectively address issues of justice? This report provides guidance on the parameters and policy options for justice in peace negotiations. It argues that recent practice shows that there are ways to secure both justice and peace. While much depends on negotiating parties, mediators can better equip themselves to offer advice to ensure stronger attention to justice issues in peace agreements.

To what extent have peace agreements incorporated mechanisms for dealing with justice issues? This study analyses 77 verified peace processes from around the world between 1980 and 2006. Negotiating justice is a complex and difficult process, especially within a peace agreement involving a whole range of additional issues.
Third party mediation

Third party mediation can be broadly defined as ‘a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties’ own negotiations, where those in conflict seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider to change their perceptions or behaviour, and to do so without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law’ (Bercovitch 2009: 343). The ‘outsider’ may be an individual, a group, an organisation or a state. Mediation strategies and tools can range from the channelling of information to parties to the provision of incentives and pressure designed to influence the bargaining process. Although mediation is non-binding, it can contribute to a cessation of hostilities, a peace agreement, or a full settlement of a conflict.

The study of mediation has given much attention to the motivation of mediators and parties to the conflict to engage in mediation. Some argue that mediators are not always neutral, altruistic ‘outsiders’, but may have their own aims. Through the act of mediating, they become an actor in conflict relationships and dynamics.

Despite the potential for mediation to contribute to conflict management and to a lesser extent to conflict resolution, it has largely been treated as an isolated discipline. Though mediation has received much attention in academia, politicians and activists have not given it the same level of attention as peacekeeping and aspects of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The international climate for mediation has changed radically in the last ten years, with a rapid increase both in the diversity of actors involved in peace processes and the frequency of interventions. The field of third party mediation has faced a number of challenges which include the ‘global war on terror’, the growing influence of new powers such as China and India, and ongoing divisions within the UN. Recent research on the African Union has suggested that efforts should be made to build the capacity of international and regional organisations to engage in mediation, and to develop strategies and mediation units within the organisations.

The success of peace negotiations is determined by a number of factors, including the space and resources given to the process, the credibility of the facilitator and the characters of the negotiating teams and mediators. The success of mediation efforts can be enhanced if the motivations of conflict actors are carefully analysed and understood.

Can particular mediation strategies be linked with successful outcomes? This chapter discusses definitions of mediation, its performance, influential factors and evaluations of outcomes. Certain styles of mediation tend to be more effective in certain situations; intense conflict, for example, is likely to require directive forms of mediation. Mediation may well offer the most coherent and effective response to current conflicts, but greater understanding of the process and consistent guidelines are needed.

This paper suggests that peacemaking will remain a central requirement for managing conflict and identifies some of the critical challenges for peacemakers. It identifies areas of consensus within the peacemaking field, highlights continuing debates, and discusses ‘new emphases’ that affect the way state-based or unofficial peacemakers operate. Capacity building for peacemaking at the regional and subregional levels should be prioritised, and greater coherence in peacemaking efforts should be pursued.
Chapter 3: Preventing and Managing Violent Conflict

See full text

This paper examines the strategic and institutional dimensions of mediation. It argues that international mediation should involve confidence-building rather than coercive diplomacy and should be pursued (by highly proficient and experienced mediators) as a specialised activity. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union should establish the Panel of the Wise, a sub-structure of the Council, as an expert mediation unit that is independent of states.

While there has been a growing literature on conflict resolution and mediation, there are few studies that specifically examine the experience of individual mediators. This chapter examines the ‘art’ of mediation in armed conflict. Drawing on the experience of high-level mediators in Iraq, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Cyprus and Aceh, it argues that the character and actions of mediators are critical variables in determining the outcome of peace negotiations.

What is the role of mediation in contemporary conflict? This paper reflects on ten years of mediation by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. It argues that mediation is at a critical juncture. Drawing on experience in Africa, the Middle East and South and South East Asia, the authors discuss challenging patterns of armed conflict. They emphasise that mediation has transformed dramatically over the last decade. The United Nations is no longer the sole multilateral mediator: regional organisations are playing an important role, and individual states are increasingly active. Mini-coalitions of states have emerged to support peacemaking and there has been a rise in the number of independent mediators.

Giessmann, H. and Wils, O., 2009, ‘Conflict Parties’ Interests in Mediation’, Berghof Policy Brief 01, Berghof Centre for Conflict Resolution
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Track two mediation

The terms ‘track one’ and ‘track two’ are used to distinguish between governmental and non-governmental diplomacy. They also serve to acknowledge that mediation and dialogue should not be the sole domain of elites, but should take place at varying levels of society. Track two mediation is also referred to as unofficial mediation, private diplomacy and/or transformative mediation. Participants include, but are not limited to, civil society leaders, students, journalists, ex-combatants, and private sector actors. Strategies used here are mostly linked to conflict resolution.
Official mediation is expected to produce solutions that contribute to the termination of violent conflict and that address the core conflict issues; whereas unofficial mediation is ongoing and geared more toward dialogue and relationship transformation. The literature stresses the importance, however, of linking and coordinating track one and track two efforts in order to increase the likelihood of effective mediation outcomes.


How effective is mediation and dialogue in protracted violent conflict? This paper explores approaches to and formats of mediation and dialogue, and the relevance and effectiveness of these strategies in the context of protracted violent conflicts, particularly in the South Caucasus. Mediation and dialogue cannot be contained in an ivory tower and need to be placed in a real-life conflict context characterised by violence, mistrust, political opportunism, vengeance and systemic injustice. The EU needs to develop a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of mediation and dialogue and the conflict context in which it operates.


Under what conditions can "track-two" mediation conducted by non-governmental actors contribute to the prevention of violence in intrastate conflicts? This paper presents results of a case study of two intrastate mediation processes conducted by track-two mediators in Aceh. Results indicate that track-two mediation has the potential to prevent violent intrastate conflict as long as mediators enjoy political expertise and moral leverage.


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Monitoring and evaluation

Although it may be difficult to attribute quantifiable results to specific mediation activities, attempts have been made to devise a framework of questions that can be used in assessing mediation activities.


How can accountability mechanisms be established for international peace mediation given that it takes place in extremely complex contexts and its contributions are difficult to grasp? This study has developed a framework for evaluating international mediation activities that differ from standard methodologies. It proposes a series of non-suggestive evaluation questions that allow a systematic but flexible assessment of aspects of peace mediation.

Case studies


Why isn’t Asia a focus for third-party conflict management? Asia has a high number of warring parties and long-lasting civil wars. Yet it receives relatively little attention from third parties. This article focuses on Southeast Asia, where most Asian civil wars take place, and examines the
effectiveness of third-party involvement. It argues in the absence of adequate diplomacy, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction, civil wars in Southeast Asia will continue to pose a serious threat to regional and international security.

What explains the success of the Helsinki agreement in securing a peaceful settlement of the Aceh conflict? This article uses interviews and first-hand accounts to analyse the political context that surrounded the Helsinki negotiations. It finds that the conventional explanations for the agreement’s success fail to capture the complexity of the process and underestimate the beneficial influence it has had on Indonesia’s democratic development.

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**Peace agreements**

Peace agreements are formal agreements aimed at ending violent conflict and creating the conditions for durable peace. They include ceasefire agreements, interim or preliminary agreements, comprehensive and framework agreements, and implementation agreements. The way in which the conflict ends – whether by compromise, or a one-sided victory, for example - typically has implications for the nature of the peace.

The signing of a peace agreement is often considered to signal the end of the conflict. Much of the literature argues instead that this signals only the beginning of a process toward ending the conflict. Given that relapse into violence is common, full implementation of the peace agreement is seen as another key milestone.

The failure of peace agreements to end violence and armed conflict has been attributed to both national and international actors. Key parties to the conflict may agree to peace agreements for tactical reasons, without being genuinely committed to the peace process. International interveners are also often blamed for pressuring parties to sign agreements that are likely to fail due to insufficient resolution of key issues and root causes, or due to unrealistic time frames for implementation. In addition, peace agreements often fail to address important regional dimensions of conflict. Overall, the key challenge is to ensure that peace agreements address, and do not avoid, difficult areas such as power-sharing arrangements, composition of the army and transitional justice.
Dealing with ‘spoilers’

Spoilers are defined as ‘leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it’ (Stedman 1997: 5). Peace agreements and peace processes can be sabotaged by adversaries who may take advantage of a settlement, dissatisfied followers who consider peace a betrayal of their key values, and excluded parties who seek to alter the process or destroy it. It is essential to assess who the potential spoilers are and to develop, coordinate and implement strategies to manage them.

More recent literature expands the definition of potential spoilers to include a range of geographically external actors, such as ethnic or national diaspora groups, political allies and multinational corporations.

The notion of a binary view of spoilers as either for or against conflict settlement and peace has been critiqued in recent research. Peace agreements themselves may be flawed and considered unjust. The liberal peace framework adopted in many peace agreements can exacerbate conflict in certain situations (see the peacebuilding models section of the peacebuilding component of this guide). ‘Spoilers’ in these contexts would not be aiming to destroy the peace, but rather to create a more durable peace. It is therefore important to analyse who is defining an actor or a group of actors as ‘spoilers’ and to develop a thorough understanding of the issues at stake.

How can spoilers of peace processes be managed? This article argues that choosing an appropriate strategy to manage spoilers requires the correct diagnosis of the type of spoiler. To make an accurate diagnosis, an international actor must overcome ‘organisational blinders’ such as prior commitments to the spoiler. International actors’ success in spoiler management will also depend on factors such as a coordinated strategy and the ability to create an external coalition for peace.

International actors face recurrent challenges coordinating their efforts to implement peace agreements to end civil wars. This paper identifies strategic coordination amongst third-party actors as a critical element of successful peace implementation. Incoherence and inconsistency in strategy can undermine the viability or the effectiveness of implementation efforts. Strategic coordination is a growing policy challenge due to the increasing proliferation of actors with overlapping mandates, competitive relations and minimal accountability.

Why do many ceasefires and peace agreements in civil wars fail? How and why do some groups actively seek to ‘spoil’ the peace process? This article examines the concept of spoilers as a threat to security. It argues that imposed or ill-conceived peace processes can encourage spoiling. The presence of spoilers, however, does not necessarily indicate that a peace process is doomed to failure.
Power-sharing

Power-sharing refers to political arrangements that bring rival groups into joint governments and guarantee them representation in political and security institutions as well as a stake in the country’s wealth. Power-sharing has increasingly become a component of peace agreements, particularly in conflicts defined as identity conflicts.

There is a key debate between those who assert that power-sharing is a necessary and effective tool for convincing parties to sign a peace agreement, for creating a new shared political order, and for protecting minority rights; and those who argue instead that power-sharing freezes wartime power balances, excludes new entrants, institutionalises identity divisions and prevents long-term societal transformation. A proposed compromise is to make power-sharing a temporary arrangement that evolves over time to include participation at the elite-level beyond parties to the agreement and of society in general. A more critical body of literature has argued that the recent international preference for power-sharing agreements has created perverse incentives for armed groups to continue fighting.


Power-sharing transitional governments are common components of peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts. They guarantee the participation of representatives of significant groups in political decision-making and reduce the danger that one group will become dominant. Power sharing among former enemies is difficult to manage and potentially conflict provoking. This paper argues that the international community therefore has an important role to play in assisting power-sharing governments to manage their country’s political transition. It draws on examples from Burundi, Iraq, Cambodia, Nepal and Liberia.


Why do peace and democracy not often go together in countries emerging from violent civil conflicts? This article argues that short term peacemaking, in the form of external imposition of power-sharing in order to end civil war as quickly as possible, creates conditions which are not favourable to long-term peacebuilding. Power-sharing builds wartime divisions into post-war political structures. The persistence of wartime cleavages tends to lower public confidence in newly established governmental institutions. Thus, power-sharing is likely to function as an institutional barrier to the establishment of democracy in the long run.

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Peace agreements that place a heavy emphasis on power-sharing often preclude people’s interests and can impede sustainable peace. This paper analyses the impact of power-sharing arrangements in recent African peace agreements. Many peace agreement failures are caused in part by the international community’s support of power-sharing that benefits armed rebel movements to the detriment of long-term conflict solutions.
Ending Violent Conflict

This article argues that inconsistencies in Western political engagement, as well as a shift in international attitudes towards insurgent groups, have affected domestic power struggles across Africa. In particular, Western efforts to resolve conflicts through power-sharing agreements (providing rebels with a share of state power) have created incentives for politically ambitious leaders to start insurgency warfare. Power-sharing agreements may therefore contribute to the cycle of insurgent violence and undermine conflict prevention.

See full text
For more discussion and resources on power-sharing in conflict contexts, see the elections in post-conflict or fragile environments section of the GSDRC’s Political Systems guide

Decentralisation

The effectiveness of decentralisation in securing the peace has also been debated. In some situations, decentralisation may contribute to peace processes by resolving grievances, for example identity grievances. Decentralisation can allow for the expression of diversity and attention to local needs, such as language protection and local development. In other contexts, however, the creation of sub-districts that coincide with identity politics can reinforce and legitimise ethno-religious identities and create tensions. The establishment of local conflict-management mechanisms are essential in these cases.

Does political decentralisation reduce ethnic conflict and secessionism? Or does it actually increase these threats to stability? This article explores why decentralisation is more successful in reducing conflict and secessionism in some countries than in others. While decentralisation may increase opportunities for participation in government, it can also indirectly increase ethnic conflict and secessionism by encouraging the growth of regional parties. The overall effect of decentralisation on ethnic conflict and secessionism therefore depends on the strength of regional parties.

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How does decentralisation affect local-level conflict dynamics? Decentralisation can be a useful conflict-mitigating mechanism, but can also generate new tensions in communal, ethnic and religious relations. This paper examines grievances, demands, and identity in the context of decentralisation in Nigeria and Indonesia Decentralisation processes need to address inequalities between groups and have in-built conflict management mechanisms if they are to improve rather than worsen conflict situations, or to avoid triggering new tensions in previously stable communities.
Chapter 3: Preventing and Managing Violent Conflict

See also:


How has decentralisation affected conflict dynamics in Indonesia? This paper examines the history of grievances, demands and identity politics since independence and explores the relationship between structural change and conflict management in Central Sulawesi. Decentralisation has had both positive and negative indirect impacts on conflict. Whilst it has brought changes that interact with and potentially stimulate local tensions, effective interventions and strategies can channel these tensions into productive outcomes.

Sector-specific provisions

Peace agreements act as blueprints for recovery and peacebuilding processes. As such, it is important to ensure that sectors that are vital to securing the peace and transforming societies, such as justice and education, receive proper treatment and consideration - and give due attention to different groups in society including men and women, children and youth and minorities. Recovery in these sectors also signals a renewal of the social contract.


To what extent have peace agreements incorporated mechanisms for dealing with justice issues? This study analyses 77 verified peace processes from around the world between 1980 and 2006. Negotiating justice is a complex and difficult process, especially within a peace agreement involving a whole range of additional issues.


How has education been addressed in peace agreements? This paper aims to fill a gap in research by providing a systematic overview of the way education has been included in peace agreements and its role as a peacemaking strategy. The way in which education is addressed varies significantly in terms of what it entails, how it will be provided and to whom. Education should be considered an important element both of peace agreements and peace-building processes.


What role can the education system play in conflict prevention? Peacebuilding and prevention of conflict must be a permanent aspect of immediate and long-term national education planning and decision-making. This paper describes a range of conflict prevention initiatives and examines the role of policy makers, youth, women, and the media in maintaining and restoring peace as part of a holistic vision of education. Education planning must be flexible and rapid in implementation, and responsive to local needs. Training and research in sustainable development, and skills for peaceful interpersonal relations, good governance, the prevention of conflict and peacebuilding are key.

See full text

For discussion and resources on justice mechanisms in peace agreements, and the debate concerning peace versus justice, see the transitional justice section of the GSDRC’s justice guide.
Ownership and civil society participation

The degree of ownership of peace agreements and the establishment of realistic timelines can determine whether agreements succeed. The 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), for example, is considered to have failed in large part because the international community did not allow sufficient time for parties to overcome their mutual distrust, to tackle critical issues and to consult with their supporters in Darfur. The final content of the DPA was therefore not a product of locally negotiated compromises and agreement.

The extent to which peace agreements include provisions for civil society and IDPs can also impact upon the durability of agreements and the promotion of peace. Provisions have ranged from their involvement in humanitarian relief to their participation in transitional governance. It is commonly assumed that the more extensive the role of civil society, the greater the likelihood of achieving broad-based peace. New research cautions, however, that civil society organisations are not neutral and uniform in their advocacy for peace agreements; some organisations are identity-based, with particular agendas and some have actively opposed peace agreements. This opposition may stem from an effort to improve upon agreements (see dealing with ‘spoilers’ section above).

How did the manner in which the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was negotiated contribute to its failure to establish peace? This article examines the process of negotiations that took place between November 2005 and May 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria, leading to the signing of the DPA. It argues that the deadlines imposed by officials and the intransigence of the parties at the talks prevented effective mediation and contributed to the failure of the DPA to achieve peace. Ending civil wars requires patience and peace agreements have to be shaped and owned by the parties, not forced upon them.

Why did the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) fail to create conditions for civilian protection? This paper argues that this was largely a result of the failure to secure effective ceasefire arrangements, a prerequisite for the achievement of a political settlement. A potential ceasefire was lost to short-term political expediency that imposed a premature ‘comprehensive’ peace agreement on the parties. Peace agreements require coherent, effective and specific security provisions and transition strategies that link short-term stabilisation with longer-term security sector transformation.

To what extent do peace agreements support participatory democracy? This article analyses the provision made by post-1990 peace agreements for civil society. It demonstrates the importance of peace processes to theories of civil society. It does not, however, draw conclusions about the relationship between provision for civil society and the success of peace agreements. Further research is needed to evaluate the role of civil society organisations in transitions towards peace.

How do civil society organisations (CSOs) impact upon conflict dynamics and conflict resolution efforts? This paper provides critical assessments of local CSO contributions in five conflict cases. It finds civil society facing similar problems across these five intractable conflicts. CSOs could develop this sector further through a number of measures, including actively promoting the values of democracy to be learnt and experienced on the ground.


Conflict transformation

Conflict transformation refers to “approaches that seek to encourage wider social change through transforming the antagonistic relationship between parties to the conflict” (Buckley-Zistel 2008: 21). It is process and structure-oriented with an emphasis on social change. Conflict scholars and practitioners, such as Burton, Galtung, Lederach and Mitchell, have emphasised that peace agreements and peace processes will produce only a fragile peace in the absence of fundamental social change and transformation. Change and transformation require confronting myths, perceptions and stereotypes of the ‘other’; and developing and entrenching tolerance and respect for the ‘other’.

Dialogue across fault-lines is considered essential for changes in attitudes and conflict transformation, in particular, empathetic, respectful dialogue that explores the conflict (The Transcend Method). Finding entry points for communication, based on shared problems; and a focus on mutual responsibilities as opposed to the apportioning of blame are important elements of fostering such dialogue.

Culture is also seen as a critical resource, as opposed to an obstacle. The transformation of societies is said to require culturally appropriate models of conflict mediation and resolution aimed at empowerment and recognition. Furthermore, the recognition of cultural diversity as a positive and enriching factor can over time contribute to the de-politicisation of identity and the promotion of coexistence.

Galtung, J., 2000, ‘Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means (The Transcend Method)’, Participants’ and Trainers’ manual, United Nations Disaster Management Training Programme (UNDMTP), Geneva

The Transcend Method is based on the central thesis that to prevent violence and develop the creative potential of a conflict, there has to be transformation. At the root of the method is the understanding of conflict as incompatible goals, meaning a problem to be solved; not as incompatible parties (persons, countries etc.), meaning one or more parties to be controlled (usually not oneself). This manual gives an overview of the approach and explains how to put it into practice. Transforming a conflict requires transcending the goals of conflicting parties, defining other goals, disembedding the conflict from its original situation and embedding it in a more promising place. This is achieved through dialogue based on empathy, non-violence and joint creativity. Failure to transform conflicts leads to violence. Updated version, 2013.


What is the relationship between conflict and change? How can an understanding of this relationship help resolve conflicts? This paper sets out a framework for thinking systematically
about conflict and change. This distinguishes between change that: produces conflict, exacerbates conflict, reduces conflict or resolves conflict. While protracted conflict imposes numerous constraints, one universal factor can lead to change: the fact that human beings learn and, through learning, change.

How can the termination of a conflict lead to a more sustainable peace? This chapter examines how different methods of violent conflict termination relate to prospects for long-term social change. Settlement, resolution and transformation differ significantly with regard to their understanding of the causes and nature of violent conflict. At the same time, the three different methods each involve assumptions about external conflict resolution, the effect on participants and wider impacts. Transformative methods - particularly traditional conflict resolution mechanisms - seem the most promising but are likely to require adaptation if they are to deal with violent intra-state conflict.

Dialogue is the essence of relationship; its goal is to create new human and political capacities for problem-solving. This chapter focuses on the definition and practice of dialogue. How does one craft a space for dialogue to unfold? Can it shift attitudes from power politics to relationship building? Sustained dialogue affords new opportunities in conflict resolution, but its achievements are limited in a short-term time frame.

What kind of conflict resolution approaches can effectively address intra-state wars based on identity? Liberal peace models were designed to deal with inter-state conflicts, and when applied to inter-ethnic conflicts bring limited success and often disastrous results. This article argues that identities should be seen as key assets in building sustainable peace, justice and reconciliation. Regional peace and security mechanisms and traditional justice approaches should be used and international justice mechanisms approached with caution.

For further discussion and resources on conflict transformation and relationship building, see non-violence and local conflict management below and the reconciliation, social renewal and inclusiveness section of the peacebuilding component of this guide.

Non-violence and local conflict management

Non-violent resistance

The basic principles of non-violent resistance encompass “an abstention from using physical force to achieve an aim, but also a full engagement in resisting oppression, domination and any other forms of injustice” (Dudouet 2008: 3). Actions range from non-violent protest and persuasion (e.g. formal statements, public assemblies and processions) to non-cooperation (e.g. strikes) to non-violent intervention (e.g. sit-ins and fasts). Non-violent resistance is considered particularly appropriate at early stages of latent conflict as a tool for marginal or disenfranchised communities.
It has the power to encourage popular empowerment, apply pressure on opponents, and win sympathy of powerful third-parties – thus providing a stronger position from which to negotiate.


In what context and under what conditions can nonviolent resistance (NVR) contribute to successful and sustainable conflict transformation processes? This research analyses constructive conflict transformation through NVR in the first Palestinian intifada (1987-1993). It argues that nonviolent struggles might support the goals of peacemaking and peacebuilding by transforming unbalanced power relations in preparation for conflict negotiations. Furthermore, by using self-limiting conflict strategies, it reduces inter-party polarisation and encourages democratic practices.


What are the effects and challenges of training for peacebuilding and non-violent action? This paper draws on experiences of the work of the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA) in the Western Balkans. CNA is a peace organisation driven by local activists that focuses on cross-border activities. There is no recipe for designing effective training but the content of training must match reality. The quality of the training depends on the trainer team’s sense of what is right and fair.

Local conflict management

The capacity for non-violent local conflict management refers to processes, mechanisms, and institutions in a society that can peacefully and constructively manage conflict. This may include informal and/or traditional approaches to conflict resolution, community meetings, a culture of tolerance, a strong civil society, traditional courts and local judiciary.

Informal social networks of individuals and/or collectives, for example, are considered to have contributed to the absence of violent conflict in Northeast Asia, despite high levels of military expenditure and intra-regional distrust. These ongoing networks have provided some form of connection and understanding of the ‘other’. They have countered demonization of the ‘other’ and allowed for the building of trust and long-term relationships.

Traditional conflict management mechanisms in Africa tend to focus on whole communities as parties to a dispute, as opposed to individuals. The aim of conflict management mechanisms is to restore social relationships and harmony; and to provide restitution through apology and compensation. The benefits of adopting local mechanisms are that they facilitate ownership and have greater resonance in societies than Western conflict management approaches. They may also be more effective in strengthening group unity. Disadvantages, however, are that they may exclude key groups such as women, children and youth. In addition, they are limited in their ability to address more far-reaching conflict between local communities and outside actors that follow different traditions and customs, such as state authorities or multinational enterprises. The existence of numerous, different parties to the conflict in Nigeria, for example, have resulted in complex conflict management approaches. The most effective method adopted is considered to be the development of a non-adversarial, participatory approach that allows the various stakeholders to share information and opinions and to engage in joint problem-solving.

Can informal social networks be effective in conflict prevention? This study looks at whether informal networks can have an impact on conflict preventive mechanisms, or function as such a mechanism by themselves. It also examines their potential as part of a Northeast Asian way of conflict prevention. Although informal networks are no panacea for conflict prevention and peace, they offer more customised methods of conflict prevention and reduce the risk of conflicting parties being drawn in to conflict.


Is there a role for traditional actors and institutions in peacebuilding? This paper assesses traditional approaches to conflict transformation in the context of contemporary violent conflicts in the South. The hybrid nature of contemporary conflicts needs to be taken into account for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Attention must be given to non-state traditional actors and methods and their combination with modern forms of conflict transformation. The analysis of conflict and approaches to the control of violence must overcome a state-centric perspective.


How can a participatory approach help quell violent conflict? The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented spate of violence related to the impacts of oil and gas production. This paper recommends a collaborative problem-solving approach to conflict management in the region. This avoids problems associated with more adversarial approaches and gives all participants the chance to express their views and influence decisions. However, the participatory approach requires very careful planning, determination on the part of all stakeholders, plus highly skilled facilitators.

For further discussion and resources on local conflict management, see the non-state justice and security systems section in the transitional justice component of the GSDRC’s justice guide.

Peacekeeping and peace support operations

The standard definition of peacekeeping refers to a “United Nations presence in the field (normally involving civilian and military personnel) that, with the consent of the conflicting parties, implements or monitors arrangements relating to the control of conflicts and their resolution, or ensures the safe delivery of humanitarian relief”. It is a technique initiated by the United Nations as a means for maintaining international peace and security (UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations). Although there are a number of individual examples of failed peacekeeping missions, research suggests that, in general, peace support operations have helped to maintain stability.

UN peacekeeping and peace support operations have controversially expanded in recent years beyond this standard definition to incorporate concepts of humanitarian intervention, exemplified by the ‘responsibility to protect’ doctrine; aspects of humanitarian aid delivery and post-conflict peacebuilding; as well as counterinsurgency operations. This has resulted in increasing overlap between military and civilian actors (humanitarian actors, development agencies, civil society etc.) and the need for more coherent and coordinated actions. This trend has also led to overstretch, with limited resources struggling to deal with a growing number of interventions.
Furthermore, other organisations have increasingly engaged in peacekeeping operations including other international and regional organisations like NATO, the European Union, and the African Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (see regional peace and security architecture).


What are the key challenges for peacekeeping operations? How might these be overcome? This paper argues that peacekeeping should be thought of as a strategic tool, rather than a strategy, since it is not an end in itself. Many current peacekeeping missions are expected to carry out a mixture of protection, peacebuilding, and counter-insurgency. They require hybrid approaches that need to be better coordinated. A doctrine for ‘peace enforcement’ as the use of robust force for limited purposes must be developed.


Does the presence of international peacekeepers contribute to more durable peace in the aftermath of civil war than when they are absent? This article analyses all civil conflicts between 1944 and 1997. Controlling as much as possible for the degree of difficulty of a particular case, it is clear that intervention by the international community does help to maintain peace. Across the various types of peacekeeping missions, the presence of peacekeepers reduces the risk of another war by over 55 per cent.


How do peace operations work? This book offers a new approach to studying the effectiveness of peace operations through a local lens. It focuses on the relational power in peace operations and its local legitimacy. Peace operations work by influencing the decisions and behaviour of diverse local actors in host societies. Peace operations work better when they receive high quality local cooperation. Peace operations are more likely to attain such cooperation when they are perceived locally to be legitimate. Local actors can be moved towards cooperation by altering their material incentives and shaping their beliefs and interests.

See details on publisher’s website


See full text

‘Responsibility to protect’ and humanitarian intervention

The ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P), adopted at the 2005 United Nations World Summit, mandates that “each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”. The international community is to assist States in exercising this responsibility and in building their protection capacities (the prevention component). Where a State nonetheless fails to protect its citizens, the international community should be prepared to take collective action in a “timely and decisive manner” through the Security Council and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (the flexible response component).
The endorsement of R2P was a critical step in establishing a new global norm for the protection of civilians. Development and implementation of R2P, however, has been limited. The ‘prevention component’, although identified as the most important aspect in the ICISS report cited below, has received minimal political and academic attention. Regarding, the ‘flexible response component’, which has received much greater attention, states have still been reluctant to go very far in breaching state sovereignty. Further, the post-9/11 counterterrorism agenda and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have limited the political willingness and military capacity of Northern countries to take part in R2P missions. They have also produced scepticism on the part of Southern countries about humanitarian interventions.

In order to address these limitations, the UN Secretary-General appointed Edward Luck as Special Advisor on the Responsibility to Protect in 2007. There has also been increasing focus on the adoption of R2P principles by regional organisations. The African Union, for example, has established norms similar to that of R2P. This, however, has not yet been matched by the institutional capacities to deliver on its responsibilities.


The responsibility to protect embraces three specific responsibilities; to prevent, react and rebuild. It is important to address both the root and direct causes of internal conflict and other man-made crises putting populations at risk. States should respond to situations of compelling human need with appropriate measures, which may include coercive measures like sanctions and international prosecution and in extreme cases military intervention. States must provide full assistance with recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation, addressing the causes of the harm the intervention was designed to halt or avert. This paper stresses that prevention options should always be exhausted before intervention is contemplated, and more commitment and resources must be devoted to it.


See full text


Why has conflict prevention been neglected in the ongoing debates over global security? This article examines attitudes toward the international community’s responsibility to prevent conflict since the publication in 2001 of the report The Responsibility to Protect. In explaining the relative neglect of prevention in debates about The Responsibility to Protect, it argues that the answer can be found in a combination of doubts about how wide the definition of prevention should be, political concerns raised by the use of prevention in the war on terrorism, and practical concerns about the appropriate institutional locus for responsibility.


How are civilians being protected in armed conflict? Protecting civilians encompasses actions to protect the lives and dignity of civilians in armed conflict, to enable them to access essential humanitarian assistance, and to create a secure environment over the long term. The norms and policies governing the protection of civilians have dramatically expanded in recent decades, yet this has not translated into improved protection on the ground. Poor prioritisation and monitoring of outcomes have hindered the operationalisation of norms, law and policy. The needs and
experiences of civilians themselves must be placed at the centre of any response to the dangers they face.  

See full text


How have peacekeeping and military intervention evolved since 9/11? This article argues that Western states have become reluctant to engage in the types of humanitarian interventions they undertook in the 1990s. A new model of operations is emerging, lying between traditional United Nations peacekeeping and classical humanitarian intervention. This new generation of peace operations indicates movement towards the view that the international community has a duty to intervene in internal conflicts and crises.

See full text


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**Humanitarian aid delivery**

The involvement of the military in humanitarian activity has increased in recent years due to its adoption as a strategy in counterinsurgency operations to ‘win hearts and minds’. While this may in some contexts be a useful tactic for military operations, there are concerns that this interaction compromises humanitarian principles and undermines the security of humanitarian staff.

See full text


Does increased civil-military integration in peace operations lead to increased effectiveness? This paper examines emerging trends in civil-military integration in recent humanitarian interventions. While some integration might be appropriate, (based on careful analysis of involved actors and their interests), the benefits of greater military involvement should not be assumed. Further study is needed into the causal mechanisms of effectiveness in complex peace support operations. It may be best to preserve the humanitarian space based on the impartiality, neutrality and independence of humanitarian organisations.

See full text
For further discussion and resources on the involvement of the military in humanitarian aid delivery, see the stabilisation section of this guide.

Peacekeepers as peacebuilders

The recent expansion of UN peacekeeping missions into a range of peacebuilding activities has been the subject of much debate. Critics argue that peacekeeping missions are not properly designed for peacebuilding as they have limited mandates, resources and duration, as well as limited leverage over national decision-making. In addition, peacekeepers are usually not trained in peacebuilding and may lack the necessary understanding of the situation or the history of the conflict. Proponents assert that military involvement in peacebuilding operations can be beneficial so long as guidelines are established for effective civil-military coordination that goes beyond humanitarian activities.

Are peacekeeping missions equipped to handle peacebuilding tasks? The role of UN peacekeeping missions has expanded beyond traditional tasks to include political, economic, and humanitarian activities. This article argues that peacekeeping missions are a poor choice for peacebuilding given their limited mandates, capacity, leverage, resources and duration. Peacekeepers should focus on peacekeeping, and laying the foundation for peacebuilding. Peacebuilding should be the primary task of national governments and their populations.

Can UN civil-military coordination (CIMIC) policies that have been developed to manage the relationship between humanitarian actors and military forces during the humanitarian emergency phase of conflict, be applied to manage the relationship between all civilian actors and UN military units during peacebuilding? This research suggests that UN CIMIC actions can make a positive contribution to the overall peacebuilding process if the military components’ resources, energy and goodwill can be positively channelled in support of the overall mission objectives.

How do principles from the literature on UN peacekeeping compare with lessons emerging from UN peace-building operations? This article identifies from the literature eleven clusters of factors for success and failure and tests these against four case studies – Cambodia, Mozambique, Rwanda and El Salvador. Although results largely confirm the factors for success and failure found in the peacekeeping literature, theory on UN peacebuilding operations still needs adjustment.

Peacekeeping is no longer only about keeping peace and maintaining security but also about performing the tasks of early peacebuilding. However, peacekeepers currently lack the tools to build peace effectively. How can we develop integrated multidimensional interventions where peacekeepers’ and peace-builders’ activities are well defined and complement each other? This article proposes a two-step human security approach as a policy guideline. This two-step human security approach will help policy makers detect case-specific needs, highlight interconnected factors, and facilitate the identification of short- and long-term responsibilities, drawing the line between peacekeepers and peacebuilders. See full text
Chapter 3: Preventing and Managing Violent Conflict

*Gender, peacekeeping and protection*

Reports of peacekeeper involvement in sexual exploitation and abuse of local populations emerged in the 1990s. This resulted in the adoption of a zero-tolerance policy in UN peacekeeping operations. It also confirmed the need for a greater female presence in peacekeeping forces.

The inclusion of more women in peacekeeping forces has been recognised as desirable for several reasons. In addition to countering the incidences of exploitation and abuse, studies have shown that the presence of women in peacekeeping missions broadens the range of skills and styles available within the mission and improves access and support for local women. Women in conflict/post-conflict environments are more comfortable approaching women officers to report and discuss incidents of sexual assault. Given the high levels of sexual violence in conflict, this access and support is essential. In addition, in more conservative societies such as Afghanistan and Sudan, the presence of women peacekeepers has been imperative, as women there may be reluctant to speak with male officers. The presence of women officers can also provide role models and incentives for other women to seek leadership positions.


Post-conflict conditions can create possibilities for the transformation of gender relations. This paper discusses the participation of women in post-conflict organisations. A comparison of the impact of women in peacekeeping missions in South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates that women help defuse post-conflict tensions and increase awareness of gender issues. The participation of women in peace processes indicates progress, but more transformative measures are needed to achieve gender equality.

Vasu Gounden (ed), 2013, Gender Mainstreaming in Peacekeeping. Conflict Trends, Issue 2. ACCORD

What is the impact of gender mainstreaming on peacekeeping? Including gender perspectives in peacekeeping work is crucial for the continued credibility of peacekeeping and the overall achievement of sustainable peace and security. The UN and the African Union have demonstrated increasing commitment to gender mainstreaming in their peace operations. However, the successful implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in peace operations remains limited and inconsistent. This Special Issue reflects on the central role of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping in Africa and how to increase operational effectiveness.

See full text


Is the zero-tolerance policy toward sexual exploitation and abuse having a positive impact on UN peacekeeping missions? This report reviews evidence from missions in Haiti and Liberia and concludes that the policy is yielding mixed results. It contends that the policy’s difficulties stem from implementation problems and contextual challenges that would be eased by better communication and clarity as to the intents and purposes of the zero-tolerance approach.


See full text
The following study attempts to map the implementation of human rights and gender mandates in various UN and EU peace operations, such as the missions in El Salvador, Cambodia, Haiti and the Balkans.

See full text

Case studies

What are the causes and problems of militarised law enforcement in peace operations? How can these be addressed? This paper examines the role of the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While the military can contribute to law enforcement, such involvement is generally hindered by fear of ‘mission creep’ and lack of preparedness. Preferable alternatives to military involvement (such as international civil police forces collaborating with local officials) are obstructed by lack of political will. Law enforcement should be addressed early and systematically by the deployment of robust forces that avoid excessive use of force.

ICG, 2009, ‘China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping’, Asia Report, no. 166, ICG, Brussels
See full text

Additional Resources

For discussion and resources on coherence and coordination of various actors in peace and security missions, see the section on peace and security architecture of this guide.