



The Peace and Conflict Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on an integrated conflict perspective and peaceful and inclusive societies, in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

With an integrated conflict perspective opportunities to contribute to conflict prevention and inclusive peacebuilding are identified, and risks of conflict insensitive practices are mitigated.

[THEMATIC OVERVIEW]

Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and challenges in implementing key policy commitments and priorities

INTRODUCTION

Since 2010, the number of armed conflicts has been on the rise. More than a handful of high intensity conflicts are on-going and some 70 contexts experience low-intensity violent conflict.¹

War and armed conflicts leave deep scars in society and affect individuals and communities for generations to come. The development gained over decades is often lost in a short period, and the negative effects are often spread to close-by regions, and in some instances, even globally. Human suffering in terms of loss of lives, displacement and increased levels of poverty are devastating for the women and men, girls and boys directly affected by violence and conflict.

Conflict prevention is not only a moral imperative for international donors; it also makes sense from a development perspective since violence contributes to poverty. Conflict makes the pathways out of poverty more difficult and post-conflict recovery consumes considerable resources that could have been used for poverty reduction. Measures to peacefully prevent violent conflict cost, on average, a tenth of post-conflict recovery.²

Yet, conflict prevention remains critically under-prioritised and under-financed. For decades, the approach to peace and security has been dominated by responding to conflict and it has proven difficult to persuade decision-makers to invest in prevention. Moreover, in its States of Fragility Report 2016, the OECD establishes that “(...) ODA is often targeted at the symptoms rather than real drivers and root causes of fragility”.³ Donors are recommended to “invest in prevention,” as (...) prevention saves lives, resources and money”.⁴

Purpose and intended use:

This Thematic Overview turns to Sida managers and staff, implementing partners and other external stakeholders committed to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In this overview, we present the rationale of investing in conflict prevention, and identify some of the opportunities and challenges with supporting conflict prevention from an inclusive peace and development perspective. The overview provides guidance based on Swedish and international policy commitments and priorities, successful practical experiences as well as lessons learned in providing conflict-sensitive support to conflict prevention.

Peacebuilding and **conflict prevention** are overlapping concepts and processes. Conflict prevention does not only refer to preventing the outbreak of conflict, but also resolving or preventing a relapse into conflict. Theory and evidence, however, suggest that structural prevention is most effective in the early (or latent) stages of the conflict.

WHAT IS CONFLICT PREVENTION?

Conflict prevention is about making societies' resilient to violent conflict by strengthening the local capacities for peace (systems, resources, structures, attitudes, skills).

International conflict prevention initiatives are often distinguished from other peacebuilding concepts and approaches mainly by *when* it comes into play in the conflict cycle,⁵ and to some extent by the specific tools and approaches applied. Early prevention initiatives seek to improve the relationship of parties before the outbreak of violent conflict, while late prevention pertains to resolving or preventing the recurrence of violent conflict. The methods, approaches and mechanisms for engagement are often categorised as *direct prevention* and *structural prevention*, although the methods often overlap and so do the phases of the conflict cycle. Direct prevention refers to shorter-term initiatives that are put into place in a critical moment with the aim to have a direct de-escalating effect on tensions or violence. Such initiatives include for example dialogue, mediation and other confidence building measures, preventive international deployment and the establishment of peace zones. Structural prevention refers to longer-term development cooperation initiatives in a variety of sectors that aim to address root causes of tension and violence. From an inclusive peace and development perspective, structural prevention is the most relevant aspect of conflict prevention, and is the main focus of this Thematic Overview. Structural prevention entails long term initiatives that aim to transform key socio-economic sources of conflict, political and institutional factors that keep countries and societies from addressing tensions meaningful and peacefully and could lead to the outbreak of or relapse into armed conflict.

Sida's specific engagements in inclusive dialogue and mediation will be presented in a separate brief.

SWEDISH AND GLOBAL POLICY COMMITMENTS AND PRIORITIES

Sweden's commitment to conflict prevention is established in the [Policy Framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance](#),⁶ emphasising the promotion of inclusive dialogue and mediation processes and civil crisis management to prevent, manage and resolve armed conflict. [Sweden's National Commitments at](#)

[the World Humanitarian Summit](#) (WHS) also outlines five core commitments to prevent and end conflict.

In the Policy framework, [Sweden's national action plan to implement the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325 \(2000\) on women, peace and security](#) (NAP) 2016-2020, the WHS commitments, as well as in several bilateral, regional and global development cooperation strategies – Sweden undertakes a leading role to support the involvement of women and girls in preventing and solving conflicts by addressing structural root causes of conflict and violence. The NAP also includes specific commitments for preventing and responding to all forms of gender-based violence (GBV) and integrating gender equality into broader early warning and conflict prevention initiatives.

In its conflict prevention work, Sweden will also contribute towards the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and UN SCR 1612 on Children in Armed Conflict, including by ensuring protection from violence and participation in development and peacebuilding processes.

In 2016, the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council unanimously adopted twin resolutions UNSCR 2282 and A/RES/70/262, as a key foundation to a new peacebuilding architecture of the UN-system. The renewed commitment was further emphasised by the UN Secretary-General, stating that "prevention is not only a priority, but the priority".⁷ Conflict prevention is also integrated in the 2030 Agenda, which establishes that there can be no sustainable development without peace, and no peace without sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda and the prevention of violent conflict

The 2030 Agenda can serve as a global framework of cooperation to prevent violent conflict. Many common root causes of conflict are addressed through its goals and targets. For example, SDG 16 goes beyond preventing and addressing violence, to transforming structural issues such as inclusive and participatory decision-making and the protection of human rights. SDG 10 includes targets on promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, while SDG5 promotes gender equality.

The 15-year time horizon should enable donor programming to focus on issues that require patient, long-term attention. Moreover, the indicators that will monitor progress towards the SDGs will be disaggregated along identity group and social lines, allowing for *exclusion* and *horizontal inequalities* to be identified and acted upon. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda's call to 'leave no-one behind' from development progress provides a strong basis for action to promote political, economic and social inclusion – and thus development action that helps prevent conflict.

OPPORTUNITIES TO CONTRIBUTE TO CONFLICT PREVENTION

WHAT: Identifying and targeting context specific root causes of violence and conflict

Violent conflict is the result of a complex range of factors, and conflict prevention is a complex process, which requires a timely and tailored approach in each context. The combination of good knowledge of the actual circumstances on the ground and a good overview of available conflict prevention tools and approaches can help strengthening the conflict prevention potential of long-term international development cooperation. This means that, in any given place, conflict prevention activities and strategies must be based on conflict analysis that draws on a variety of sources and perspectives, not at least the knowledge, experience and perspectives of local actors. The conflict analysis should always include a gender perspective, to get the full picture of patterns of violence, grievances, risks and opportunities as experienced by women and men, girls and boys. The required depth of this analysis varies between contexts, and between various types of interventions. It is generally recommended to view the analysis as an ongoing and reflective process involving multiple stakeholders and views.

While recognising the context-specific nature of any situation of fragility, violence and conflict – two factors stand out as important causes of most conflicts of today: (i) Destructive power dynamics and (ii) Patterns of marginalisation and exclusion.⁸ Other root causes may include injustice, human rights violations, inequality, exclusion, poverty, poor management of natural resources, the absence of inclusive political settlements and capable and responsive institutions.⁹

The Stockholm Declaration: Addressing Fragility and Building Peace in a Changing World

Focusing on root causes of fragility, conflict and violence

“At the root of conflict and fragility lie injustice, human rights violations, inequality, exclusion, poverty, poor management of natural resources and the absence of inclusive political settlements and capable institutions. Supporting transitions out of fragility requires political and not just technical responses.

It is crucial for these processes to be grounded in indigenous contexts. They must be locally driven, locally owned and locally led. There can be no sustainable peace without the meaningful inclusion of civil society, and a particular focus is needed to ensure gender-sensitivity and women’s effective participation in peace processes and peacebuilding.”

WHO: The importance of stakeholder and power analyses

Careful partner and beneficiary selection is key to successful conflict prevention strategies and approaches, and careful balancing between working with formal and informal state structures, civil society and their constituencies, private actors as well as between various gender, age and identity groups in society. This selection needs to be based on an in-depth stakeholder and power analysis that identifies the needs, interests, positions, power and resources among potential connecting factors and actors as well as the key driving actors of violence.

HOW: Structural conflict prevention by supporting inclusive politics, economies and societies

Since patterns of marginalisation and exclusion are key futures in global violence and conflict trends, structural long-term conflict prevention initiatives can be thought of in terms of efforts to promote more inclusive politics, economies and societies. The sections below provide some further guidance. The examples presented below include both targeted conflict prevention initiatives, as well as initiatives having conflict prevention as sub-target as components and activities built into a variety of long term development cooperation initiatives.

a) Supporting inclusive politics

In countries at risk of conflict, politics is often exclusionary at both the level of elites, where some are excluded from power, and at the level of society, where the political participation of social groups may be limited based on their gender or identity. Studies on the recurrence of civil war have found political exclusion to be one of the most important factors.¹⁰ Countries with inclusive political

Case example

Sida supports women’s political participation and active role in peacebuilding in several contexts. In Mali, Sida supports various context-specific mechanisms for strengthened national and local capacity to prevent and resolve conflicts by peaceful means. Swedish support has for example contributed to progress in the implementation of the National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 (2015–2017). An institutional mechanism has been established within the ministry for the promotion of women, children and family rights. Through targeted support to the election process in Somalia, combined with political dialogue, support has contributed to increasing women’s political representation. It is Sida’s assessment that Swedish support to inclusive politics in Somalia can help strengthening the local conflict prevention and peacebuilding capacity in a long-term perspective.

institutions are also often more successful in achieving long-term economic development. Efficient institutions and good governance becomes central strategies for preventing that large parts of the population resort to armed violence because of unmet needs and perceptions.

b) Promoting inclusive economies

The risk of conflict is higher among countries with lower

Horizontal inequality is defined as inequality among culturally defined (or constructed) groups, in contrast to vertical inequality, which is inequality among households or individuals.

per capita incomes and economic growth. By 2030, most of the world's poor are expected to live in conflict affected areas. However, economic underdevelopment, low growth rates and poverty do not inevitably lead to conflict; not all poor countries are affected by violent conflict and middle-income countries are not immune, as illustrated by the outbreak of violent conflict in for example Syria and Iraq. Specifically, when economic inequalities – be it access to jobs, income or assets – fall along identity group lines (**'horizontal inequality'**) the risk of conflict increases.¹¹ Identifying differences in income and multidimensional forms of poverty between regions and gender etc., as

Case examples

In Afghanistan, Sida supports livelihood and employment initiatives for "Stimulating the Private Sector in Afghanistan" (SPEDA) and the ILO programme "Road 2 jobs". Both initiatives build on theories of change that are explicitly linked to human security and conflict prevention. The conflict perspective has been integrated in these initiatives, and it is Sida's assessment that the programmes provide increased opportunities for economic empowerment, trade, incomes and employment, which in turn contribute to decreased risk of violent conflict.

Through the Strategy for Sustaining Peace (2017–2022), Sida supports International Alert who works with economic development for peace in Colombia, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Myanmar, the Philippines and Uganda. It focuses on training and advising businesses of all sizes on conflict-sensitivity. This includes engagement with extractive industry multinationals to strengthen company mechanisms and practices in following the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights (VPSHR) and Conflict Sensitive Business Practice (CSBP). International Alert also works with community-based economic development and livelihoods, for example by supporting cross-border traders in the Great Lakes region, bringing together people from divided societies.

well as perceptions of exclusion, are important factors in assessing situations of rising tensions and developing an early warning system.

c) Supporting inclusive societies

Whilst it is often assumed that the provision of social services can strengthen state-society relations, recent research suggests that the perceived fairness of the delivery itself matters more.¹² The equitability of access to security and justice services appears to be a particularly important predictor for violent conflict. Cultural inequalities between groups can also drive conflict. For example, decisions on official languages, religion or cultural events that favour some groups over others can exacerbate social divisions, creating cleavages that can be mobilised for violence.¹³ Conversely, peaceful and conducive state-society relations, and within and between communities, can contribute to conflict prevention.

Case examples

In Ukraine, Sida supports the UNDP-implemented Reconciliation and Recovery Programme in Donetsk and Lugansk Oblasts. The aim is to improve governance in the conflict-affected territories through promoting dialog among local authorities, civil society organizations and local citizens. The programme provides support to the elaboration of inclusive regional development strategies, as well as strengthened capacities of regional administrations to efficiently implement those strategies.

Through the Strategy for Sustaining Peace (2017–2022), Sida provides core support to [Global Partnership on the Prevention of Armed Conflict](#), (GPPAC) – a network organisation initiated in 2002 in response to the UN Secretary-General's call to civil society in his *Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict* (2001) to organize an international conference on the role of NGOs and their interaction with the UN in prevention initiatives. It has led to the establishment of a [Civil Society-UN Dialogue Platform on Prevention](#), aiming to support the UN's prevention agenda through strengthening cooperation, coordination and information sharing between civil society organisations and the UN at all levels. GPPAC members have also formed a global multi-stakeholder platform on Peace Education. The working group on Peace Education has supported the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help people either to prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflicts peacefully, or create social conditions conducive to peace into the curriculum requirements in for example Serbia, Montenegro, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan.

Cultural norms that define gender roles, such as masculinities that are defined by participation in acts of violence, can also be a driver of conflict. In contexts of rising tension, support to strengthened gender equality is important, both in terms of inclusion of women in decision-making processes as well as preventing gender-based violence.

WHEN: Supporting conflict prevention in all phases of the conflict cycle

As illustrated by the case examples above, Sida currently supports a wide-range of initiatives broadly defined as structural prevention and peacebuilding. Nevertheless, most initiatives are implemented in contexts that already experience violent conflict, and in post-conflict situations, while theory and evidence suggest that structural prevention is most effective in the early (latent) stages of the conflict cycle.¹⁴ By systematically integrating conflict sensitivity in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance strategies and approaches, Sida and its partner organisations can identify additional opportunities to maximise the conflict prevention potential throughout all phases of the conflict cycle.

Case example

In Ethiopia, Sida co-finances a multi-donor civil society programme. In 2016, the programme targeted more than 1 000 local rural civil society organisations working for improved living conditions for marginalised populations through protection, economic empowerment, promotion of human rights for people with disabilities, protection against GBV and access to contraceptives as well as improved health care in the refugee camp of Gambella and surrounding villages. The programme takes a systematic approach to conflict sensitivity, and links humanitarian support with long-term development.

SOME KEY CHALLENGES

Increasingly complex patterns of violence and conflict

Conflict and its consequences are not limited to one country and its boundaries. National and local root causes of conflict are coupled with, and interacts with, transnational risks and conflict drivers such as illicit drug and arms trafficking, human trafficking, health epidemics and violent extremism. In addressing such transboundary risks and conflict drivers, the UN has introduced a third category of conflict prevention, ‘**systemic prevention**’. In this category of conflict prevention approaches it is increasingly recognised that early warning systems and analytical frameworks need to include regional factors to ensure a holistic approach. Cross-agency collaboration and sharing of data and experiences becomes an important

aspect of successful prevention initiatives. For Sida, this could also mean emphasising conflict sensitivity and conflict prevention in the information-sharing and coordination with partners and other stakeholders, also in contexts that are not immediately regarded as ‘conflict contexts’.

Understanding and dealing with armed non-state actors

Conflicts have become more complex and multifaceted, driven by numerous internal and external factors and actors. They often involve a myriad of actors with non-traditional conduct and low respect for international humanitarian law and are characterised by irregular warfare, terrorism and elite driven politics. The need to understand the perceptions of, and negotiate with non-state armed groups for securing humanitarian access, a peace agreement and implementing long-term development activities in conflict-affected areas is increasingly recognised.

Risk of doing harm

It is highly challenging for external actors to fully capture inter-dependent local, national and regional violence and conflict dynamics, which is key to effectively shape conflict sensitive strategies and responses. Conflict prevention initiatives risk exacerbating tensions and conflict if not carefully planned and managed. Policies or programmes that for example seek to address inequalities, especially those that target economically or politically disadvantaged groups, with the objective of redistributing power or assets, promoting employment or boosting income can themselves fuel tensions if not carefully managed. They can for example contribute to perceptions of bias or favouritism of one group over others, and highlight or reinforce the salience of identity issues as a conflict faultline, thereby inadvertently deepening social divisions.

For further guidance on designing conflict-sensitive strategies and approaches, please refer to the Tools provided in Sida’s Peace and Conflict Tool Box.

Measuring the results and impact of conflict prevention

Measuring the effectiveness of conflict prevention is a key challenge, as averted conflicts are simply invisible. However, through clear theories of change it is still possible to make a qualified analysis of an intervention’s contribution to conflict prevention in a wider system of interrelated factors. Such theories of change favourably include a detailed understanding of key sources and drivers of tension in the specific context; proposed methods and activities for addressing those tensions as well as an explicit intended contribution of the initiative in terms of e.g. improved relationships and strengthened capacities to manage tensions peacefully.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Michael S. Lund (2009): [Conflict Prevention: Theory in Pursuit of Policy and Practice](#), the Sage Handbook on Conflict Resolution.
- Haider, H. (2014). *Conflict: Topic Guide: Chapter 3: Preventing and Managing Violent Conflict*, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre.
- International Alert (2015) [Building prosperity and peace: Integrating peacebuilding into economic development](#), London: International Alert.
- Saferworld (2012) [Issue Paper 2: What are the key challenges? What works in addressing them?](#), London: Saferworld, 23 November 2013.
- World Bank and United Nations (2017); [Pathways for peace: Inclusive approaches to preventing violent conflict](#), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank.
- [UN Global Study on the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325: "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace"](#) (2015).
- CPPAC; Conflict Prevention Tools: [Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: A Manual](#), November 2015.

ENDNOTES

- 1 United Nations and World Bank Flagship Study; *Sustaining Peace: making Development Work for Prevention of Violent Conflicts*, Concept Note, October 13, 2016, p. 12.
- 2 Remarks by Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström at ministerial debate in the Security Council on conflict prevention and sustaining peace, 10 January 2017.
- 3 OECD: [States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence](#), p. 7.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 See: Sida Peace and Conflict Tool Box: [Defining Key Concepts, Tools and Operational Response](#)
- 6 Government of Sweden: [Policy Framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance](#), Comm. 2016/17:60, Stockholm 14 December 2016.
- 7 Ministerial-level open debate of the UN Security Council on conflict prevention and sustaining peace 2017-01-10, see [SDG Knowledge Hub](#).
- 8 See for example OECD: [States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence](#).
- 9 International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding: [The Stockholm Declaration: Addressing Fragility and Building Peace in a Changing World](#), Fifth Global Meeting, 5 April 2016, Stockholm, Sweden.
- 10 Call, C. (2012); [Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence](#), Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.
- 11 See for Brown, K & Frances, S. (2015); [Economic and Political Causes of Conflict: An Overview and Some Policy Implications](#), CRISE, University of Oxford, Working Paper No. 81, February 2015
- 12 See Denney, L Mallett, R & Mazurana, D (2015); [Peacebuilding and Service Delivery](#), United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, February 2015.
- 13 Ibid, p. 8.
- 14 Lund, M. S. (2009); 'Conflict Prevention: Theory in Pursuit of Policy and Practice', in *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, eds., J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk, and I. W. Zartman, SAGE, London, pp. 287-308.