

The Changing Nature of Conflict: Priorities for UNDP Response

United Nations Development Programme



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

The upgrading of the United Nations (UN) mediation support capabilities through its Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and of its peacebuilding capacity through the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund has allowed it to better intervene in violent conflict and to support post-conflict recovery. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has worked closely with the rest of the system in these areas. However, violent conflict, and its prevention and management, has changed significantly over the past decade, and especially in ways where UNDP may be best placed to play a critical role:

1. **Increase in decentralized and recurring violence:** The average number of high-intensity conflicts per year—defined as conflicts that reach 1,000 or more battle deaths in a calendar year—has dropped by half between 1980 and 2000, and still continues declining. However, during the same period, violence due to criminal activity, local conflicts over land and natural resources, or organized inter-ethnic or communal violence, has grown significantly. According to the Global Burden of Armed Violence report of 2011, 526,000 people die violently every year, more than three-quarters of them in non-conflict settings. The 2011 World Development Report estimates the annual costs of this violence as approximately US\$ 100 billion.
2. **Increase in conflicts related to governance:** The past decade has seen a significant uptick in conflicts related to governance. In the past five-years alone, elections have prompted violence or potentially violent tensions and prolonged periods of deadlock, in at least fifteen countries. Ongoing violence and potentially violent tensions over allocation of wealth from oil or other precious minerals currently plague at least a dozen.
3. **Increase in mass upsurges and revolutions:** Citizens' groups and others have taken to the streets in mass upsurges or taken up arms against governments seen as being illegitimate, in at least ten countries over the past three years alone. While the majority of these have been in the Middle East and North Africa, governments in Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, and Kyrgyzstan that were seen as having over-stayed their allotted time were ousted from within their own countries. Organized citizenry played a crucial role in the transition to democracy in Guinea. In many of these countries, citizens still continue to take to the streets regularly in mass demonstrations against ineffective or exclusive governance, with the potential for violence remaining high.
4. **Continued fragility:** One-third of the world's population continues to live in fragile or conflict-affected countries and 30 percent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is spent in these countries. Few of these countries are expected to achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. 90 percent of onsets of violence have occurred in countries that have experienced conflict in the past.
5. **Negative peace:** Ongoing or potential violence is not the only detriment to development. Overloaded with rapid change, government machineries—especially in divided societies—become deadlocked, and unable to swiftly deliver new policies or reforms to deal with the change. A critical challenge for countries, as identified in the 2011 World Development Report, is therefore to build "inclusive enough coalitions" that can accelerate necessary reforms.

These changes have the following crucial implications:

Necessity of “Infrastructures for Peace”: Recurring conflicts and extended, turbulent, transitions cannot be addressed through discreet one-time mediation or a single peace process. They require standing and sustainable mechanisms for mediation and dialogue—“Infrastructures for Peace”—at local and national levels within the country itself.

Significance of “insider mediation”: Sudden shocks and crises can also provide opportunities for critical reform, provided lines of division can be overcome, and “inclusive enough coalitions” developed. This is not a task that can be carried out by external mediators, but requires “insider mediation,” and gentle accompaniment by a resident external partner able to play the role of a facilitator and convener.

Necessity of complementing national peace processes with local initiatives: Conflicts can continue at many levels and manifest themselves as lasting polarization that generates potentially violent tensions. A “national” dialogue or peace process, and a post-conflict recovery effort predicated on this process, therefore needs to be accompanied by corresponding initiatives at national and local levels.

Necessity of context-and-conflict sensitivity a, and analysis, and integrated strategies: Conflicts are characterized by complexity and variability, best understood by the actors themselves, and require multi-dimensional responses. In order to assist national and local initiatives to address these conflicts, external partners need to be equipped with thorough analyses of local actors and situations, and have credible, long-term in-country presences. UN system support, in particular, should be aligned and integrated to the extent possible.

Taking into account these changes in the nature of conflict, and their specific implications, the “**theory of change**” with regard to the prevention, management, and resolution of violent conflict on which UNDP’s emerging work is based can be stated as follows:

Crises are more likely to be transformed into opportunities, and recurring tensions and violence sustainably addressed in a manner that enhances inclusion and innovation, in countries and communities equipped with credible and lasting capacities for internal mediation, dialogue, and conflict management.

Based on this theory of change, UNDP has moved to develop new types of targeted interventions, and engage in different sets of partnerships, for addressing the implications of the changes in violent conflict:

1. **National and local early warning and response systems have been developed and applied with UNDP support to address recurring conflicts**, and to also ensure peace during moments of high stress such as elections.
2. **Conflict management capacities of key national institutions have been built** so that they can mediate consensus on contested issues, resolve specific conflicts, and conduct internal mediation.
3. **National and local mediators and facilitators have been empowered to serve as intermediaries** and confidence-builders to improve relationships, reduce mistrust, and facilitate collaboration and coordination among polarized groups and sectors.
4. **Formal and informal spaces and forums for dialogue have been convened with UNDP support to address specific conflicts**, and to build consensus around constitutional or governance reforms.
5. **Qualified staff, with capacities for analysis, facilitating difficult conversations, and accompanying national actors in developing and applying conflict management capacities**, has been deployed in UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Country Office in nearly 40 countries.

6. **The Conflict-Related Development Analysis (CDA) tool has been upgraded**, and an initiative launched to train relevant staff at UNDP headquarters and in the field, in its application.
7. **A dedicated team, the Conflict Prevention Group, has been established at UNDP headquarters as part of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery**, bears the bulk of the responsibility for the provision of technical, advisory, and facilitation support for these initiatives.

In addition, UNDP implements, and has recently strengthened, two critical partnerships through which collaboration with DPA and the wider UN system can also be mobilized in addressing the changing nature of conflict:

Since 2004, UNDP—through its Conflict Prevention Group—has implemented **the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention** through which Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) are deployed and catalytic prevention activities supported. PDAs provide strategic guidance to the design and implementation of conflict prevention programming. They are deployed jointly by UNDP and UN DPA. Under the supervision of UN Resident Coordinators, PDAs provide strategic analyses and guidance on issues relating to peace and development. Currently, there are around 30 PDAs, working in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia-Pacific and Europe. Resources from the Joint Programme are allocated by a joint Technical Committee based on requests from Resident Coordinators. Where DPA and UNDP desks and focal points agree on the necessity for such support, they may also approach field-based staff from headquarters. A senior Steering Committee also meets once a quarter to provide strategic direction to the Programme.

UNDP hosts the secretariat of the **Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action**, which is the UN's internal mechanism for coordination on preventive action. The Framework Team has 23 member agencies, and is co-chaired on a rotating basis. Its current chairs are DPA and UNDP. It assists UN Resident Coordinators to lead the development of integrated conflict prevention strategies, especially in situations of "early prevention," or prolonged, chronic fragility that is not addressed by time-bound external mediation or peacekeeping, and requires a longer-term multi-dimensional UN response. Over the past two years, the Framework Team has assisted Resident Coordinators in Guyana, Malawi, Belarus, and Lesotho in this regard. The Framework Team also manages the UN's community of practice on conflict prevention. Currently, the Framework Team is implementing an EU-UN partnership to strengthen both organizations' capacities to address conflicts related to land and natural resources. Similarly, the Framework Team is assisting its members to integrate conflict sensitivity into their programming through a new tool and its associated on-line training.

Both the Joint Programme and the Framework Team are indicative of the types of flexible, yet strategic, partnerships that are necessary in order to address issues related to recurring violence, prolonged and unpredictable transitions, and chronic fragility.

Fundamental transformation in partner countries that allows them to better deal with recurring pressures happens only on an iterative basis. Yet UNDP's work, together with its partners in the UN system, has achieved several initial results:

- In **Timor-Leste**, the fragile peace almost collapsed between 2007 and 2009 as the return of refugees and internally displaced persons caused a significant increase in conflicts over land. With UN assistance, a network of community mediators was trained and their conflict resolution efforts facilitated the return and resettlement of 13,000 families by 2010. To reinforce these efforts, the Government, with UNDP support, has established a new Department for Peace-building, providing the country its own system for internal mediation.
- In **Ghana**, UNDP has successfully assisted in establishing the independent National Peace Council, which played a vital role in the peaceful national elections in 2008, helped defuse immediate tensions in the aftermath of national elections in 2012, and mediated a ceasefire in the violent conflict in Bawku in 2010. The Council is now

formally mandated to mediate differences and conflict within and among government institutions, and among civil society. The success of the Peace Council's mediation activities contributed significantly to a growing perception of Ghana as a safe and stable society, in part contributing to the country's tremendous economic growth and development.

- In **Sierra Leone** a national multi-party body, the National Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee, was established with UNDP support prior to the crucial 2007 elections, with corresponding local committees, and worked under the auspices of the Political Parties Registration Committee, whose national and local conflict management capacities were also strengthened. This system was crucial to delivering Sierra Leone's first ever peaceful political transition in 2007, and was again utilized in 2012.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, following violence and escalating tension after the April 2010 political regime change, UNDP helped establish and then provided support to confidence-building efforts of Oblast Advisory Committees (OACs) at the provincial, and Local Authority Advisory Committees (LAACs) at the district, levels.
- Insider mediators played a crucial role in **Lesotho** when, in 2012, the country for the first time in its history managed a peaceful political transition with a civilian head of government willingly handing over power to his opponent. The violence prevention capacities developed with UNDP assistance were successfully applied to the national elections. The polls led to a parliament with no clear majority. As the ruling party and the opposition both maneuvered, tensions rose and a repeat of the civil conflict of 1998 appeared likely. But, with support from UNDP, the Christian Council of Lesotho successfully mediated the impasse, and Lesotho saw its first ever peaceful transition of government since independence.
- Similarly, the National Elders' Forum played a crucial role, with UNDP support, in ensuring a peaceful poll in **Uganda** in 2011.
- In the aftermath of the political transition in 2011 in **Tunisia**, UNDP was invited to assist with thinking through a national consultative process. Through the deployment of an "insider mediator", key Tunisian stakeholders within and outside the government were assisted to design a locally-specific-and-led model for a social dialogue to underpin the transition process. Tunisian stakeholders are now designing a mechanism for a nation-wide inclusive dialogue which unites different efforts, links local initiatives with the national, and fosters consultation among different sectors.
- **Lebanon** chose an innovative approach for fostering collaborative leadership. In 2009, the Common Space Initiative was created with UNDP support as a response to the national need for an inclusive and permanent space for dialogue and knowledge sharing in which contentious issues and challenges of common concern could be addressed. The Common Space has evolved into a support mechanism which directly assists national leaders and government institutions to deal with essential political reform, the implementation of past agreements, and political reconciliation.
- In **Nepal**, a platform for collaborative leadership among the country's deadlocked political parties has yielded the successful management of specific tensions at the local level since 2010; efforts are now being made to achieve greater results at the national level.
- In 2010 **Kenya** held a constitutional referendum without a single incident of violence. This followed the failed 2007 elections when 1,500 people were killed, and an additional 300,000 displaced. For the 2010 referendum, UNDP assisted government and civil society to implement an early warning and response system using mobile technology and online mapping. This prevention effort which identified and pre-empted nearly 150 incidents of violence, and helped political parties reach consensus on the draft constitution before the vote, cost only about US \$1 million. The approach has now been consolidated in a full-fledged conflict prevention and early response framework in Kenya. It will be further deployed during the general elections in March 2013.
- A similar effort in **Nigeria's** Plateau state during national elections in 2011 ensured that this crisis-ridden region was peaceful, even as some of the surrounding states saw violence in the aftermath of the poll. The effort, Operation Rainbow, was a partnership between security services, local government, and civil society.

These results raise an additional issue. **How does UNDP evaluate the results of its work? UNDP uses the “milestones” approach to measure its results.** In a tense situation that is characterized by polarization and mutual blame, an acceptance by protagonists of the importance of developing and applying their own prevention capacities is a crucial “entry point,” and constitutes the first milestone.

The second is the actual development of these capacities at the national or local level. The third is the application of these capacities (dialogue forums, insider mediation, institutions for conflict management) to settle actual disputes and areas of difference. The fourth is the undertaking of concrete steps by national actors to sustain these capacities (e.g. the conversion of the National Peace Council in Ghana to a permanent statutory commission by an act of parliament). Across these milestones, efforts are made to ensure greater empowerment of previously marginalized groups and communities through dialogue, and to transform relationships leading to exclusion. While the ideal is to achieve all four milestones, each one also constitutes a unique contribution on its own to advancing lasting peace and sustainable development.

This approach can be expressed through the pictographic:

T = EP + C (D, A, S) E, where T is the transformation of naturally occurring differences into peaceful change; EP is “entry points”; C (D, A, S) is “capacities developed, applied and sustained”; and E is the cross-cutting dimension of empowerment.

The capacities that are developed, applied, and sustained under this approach are similar to the indicators for inclusive political processes developed through the International Dialogue on State-building Peace-building, and also to the means for achieving “inclusive enough coalitions” for reform preliminarily identified in the World Development Report 2011. Given these initial results, where does UNDP wish to go over the next four year period:

First, given the novelty of the new trends in conflict, there are still very few resources allocated to innovative approaches to addressing them. Certain bilateral partners have made an initial investment in the deployment of “peace and development advisors,” for instance. While these deployments have helped achieve some good provisional results (and the catalytic work of the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme and the Framework Team in this regard should continue to be supported), this is not enough. **UNDP’s priority in countries where initial results have been achieved is to comprehensively assist actors to go beyond the development of capacities to their systematic application, and to their integration into governance.**

Second, and given the first priority, **UNDP intends to mobilize resources that will help achieve a critical mass of the relevant capacities, and their sustained application, in partner countries.**

Third, **UNDP intends to build its own capacity, at both headquarters and in the field, to provide the type of intelligent, analytical, and flexible support** required to address the new types of conflict. This includes ensuring that staff are trained not just in conflict analysis, but are also effective communicators and facilitators, and can leverage the organization’s own role in this regard.

Fourth, UNDP intends to play a more reliable role in serving as “knowledge network” for its partners in this new area. “Communities of practice” of “insider mediators” are being mobilized in sub-Saharan Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa region, and women “insider mediators” have been mobilized into a powerful network—N-Peace—in the Asia-Pacific region.

INVESTING IN CONFLICT PREVENTION PAYS OFF

CONFLICT IS COSTLY



USD **65 BILLION**

The average cost of **civil war**.¹



USD **300 BILLION**

The approximate cost of **armed conflicts** in Africa, 1990 to 2005.²

PREVENTION IS COST-EFFECTIVE

For example, in Kyrgyzstan

USD **6 MILLION**

was the cost of regional and UN efforts to **promote political and inter-ethnic dialogues**.³



VS



USD **71 MILLION**

The estimated recovery costs from **inter-ethnic violence** following a government overthrow in mid-2010 in Kyrgyzstan.³

PREVENTION SAVES

USD **1**



SAVES



USD **10**

\$1 in **preventive action** saves \$10 in recovery costs borne by the international community, the nation itself, and the neighbouring countries.⁴

¹ World Bank, World Development Report 2011 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf

² Oxfam/ IANSA/ Saferworld, Africa's mission billions: international arms flows and the cost of conflict <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/africas%20missing%20bils.pdf>

³ UNDP

⁴ Chalmers, Malcolm (2007), "Spending to Save? The cost-effectiveness of conflict prevention", Defence and Peace Economics, Volume 18, Number 1, pp. 1 – 23

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