

LOCAL APPROACHES TO CONFLICT PREVENTION IN THE ARAB STATES REGION

Are international frameworks sensitive to local approaches to conflict prevention?



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS) and TrustWorks Global (TrustWorks) joined forces in 2021 - under the banner of their shared commitment to conflict prevention – to mark ten years since the Arab Uprisings of 2011.

Since the Arab Uprisings that spread across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, international efforts to prevent an escalation of violence and/or respond to instability and conflict have focused predominantly on national-level dynamics. Despite these efforts, in 2021, the Arab States region accounted for 23 percent of the battle-related deaths¹, 36 percent of the world's internally displaced persons and 16 percent of refugees.² Indeed, the dynamics of the region have tested the efficacy of the international community's peace and security 'toolbox' and its effectiveness in preventing the outbreak of conflicts and addressing protracted instability - leading to reflection and refinement of the ways in which the international community approaches multi-dimensional crises.

Much has been written about the various successes and failures of these national-level initiatives, the obstacles they faced, and the challenges that remain to be surmounted. Significantly less is known and/or has been written about sub-national and local level dynamics of conflict and conflict prevention efforts during and since the Arab uprisings. And yet, such efforts have been extensive. Whether in support of the democratic transition in Tunisia, social cohesion measures adopted in the wake of the Beirut blast of 2020; initiatives to bolster the permanent ceasefire in Libya; or local agreements in Northern Syria; it is evident that local approaches to preventing conflict, fostering peace and strengthening social cohesion are playing an ever more present role within the region's peace and conflict dynamics.

What did we learn from these efforts? How successful have they been, and using which approaches? Do we have a good understanding of 'what works' in local level conflict prevention efforts? And, are these insights sufficiently reflected in the policy frameworks and strategies guiding the work of international actors in the region to ensure alignment and synergies? To what extent do international actors give 'space' to local actors and local approaches to conflict prevention and peace?

To address these questions a five-pronged methodological approach was used:

- First, the study is based on an extensive literature review.
- Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with conflict prevention experts working on the Arab States region, including both international and local actors with extensive experience working at the local level.
- Third, online surveys were conducted in Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, targeting conflict prevention and peacebuilding professionals working on local-level initiatives.
- Fourth, four focus groups were held in Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia and Syria with a diversity of stakeholders from non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and associations, youth, women, religious leaders and local municipalities, where relevant.
- And, lastly, the key findings were then analysed through 20 international and regional policy frameworks to understand the extent to which and *how* such lessons are reflected therein.

¹ Armed Conflict Events Database, <https://acleddata.com/about-acledd/>

² UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=4WmwZQ>

As a result, a total of over 100 stakeholders working on and in the region were engaged to respond to the key questions underpinning this study.

What did we learn from local level conflict prevention efforts in the Arab States region?

This study identified eight relatively ‘high level’ insights concerning the type of approaches that stakeholders working at the local level have found to be effective in the design, implementation and monitoring of their conflict prevention efforts. These insights form relatively high-level ‘guidelines’ which can be applied irrespective of the Arab states context in question, but with the evident need for tailoring and contextualisation in line with local power dynamics and social-economic realities.

- 1. Ensure locally-grounded and locally-led conflict analysis:** Analysis of the context must rely on “local resources first.”³ The starting point is to engage with what exists locally, whether that is knowledge, resources or insights. The approach must be to engage upon the basis of an innate assumption that every community has its own pre-existing structure and logic⁴ that cannot be assumed from the outside. The role of international actors is to serve as *enablers*, i.e., to support the process, play a convening role to shine a spotlight on power dynamics, human rights and gender-related issues in a conflict-sensitive manner with humility and deference to local understandings of the conflict and its dynamics.
- 2. Go beyond the ‘usual suspects’:** The current approach of international actors makes it challenging to engage meaningfully with many critical stakeholders. There is a strong bias towards formal entities, that are English-speaking, which are good at report-writing and speak the “language” of international programming - but this may mean missing out on those actors best placed to address the conflict. The approach of engaging with the *non-usual suspects* also opens up a space for local actors to own themselves and, where necessary, re-define concepts and practices.
- 3. Foster shared meaning and purpose:** Due to the dynamics of fragmentation and isolation, interaction between different sectarian or religious communities is often low. Overcoming these dynamics involves processes of creating spaces – or “bubbles of peace” - where shared meaning and purpose can be fostered. ‘Shared meaning’ does not mean ‘papering over’ difference, it means creating a shared purpose that cuts across and goes beyond the sectarian and/or religious divides. The creation of shared meaning and purpose must be based on the core principle of *inclusivity*.
- 4. Link local, national, regional and international dynamics/processes where relevant:** Local communities and local-level ‘issues’ cannot be addressed in isolation without considering the effects that local issues have vertically and horizontally on conflict dynamics, and vice versa, to the increased possibility of ‘doing harm’. Making these linkages is based on the concept of *networks*, i.e., creating networks of individuals, groups and communities that can learn from one another and be advocates for peace. Importantly, the local level is not immune to national level dynamics; on the contrary, it is often very much shaped by them. That said, not all processes should be linked and the extent to which they are linked should be informed by conflict-sensitive analysis.
- 5. Mainstream dialogue into humanitarian and development initiatives:** Conflict prevention efforts focused on dialogue are often difficult to sustain when insufficiently combined with efforts to improve people’s immediate livelihoods. There are vast opportunities to ensure that both humanitarian and development initiatives integrate dialogue into the ‘fabric’ of their design and implementation which provide opportunities to foster dialogue that might not otherwise exist. The challenge here becomes managing the expectations of donors

³ Interview 17

⁴ *Ibid.*

who have short timeframes and want quick results, whereas building ownership in a conflict-sensitive way takes time.

- 6. Integrate gender and youth-related dimensions in a context/conflict-sensitive manner:** Stakeholders underscore the imperative and challenges of integrating gender and youth-related dimensions into conflict prevention initiatives due to the social and cultural obstacles involved. Ensuring gender diversity when selecting local partners at the local level is a good first step but, in some contexts, such an approach could be dangerous and could even jeopardise the lives of the local partners – particularly if there is a perception that conflict prevention initiatives are pushing a “Western agenda.” Part of the challenge involves overcoming the bias of the ‘type’ of women/youth international actors seek to include, or preconceptions on how certain roles should be played.
- 7. Foster long-term engagements focused on building trust:** Resistance to short-term donor-imposed timeframes have been explored extensively in the literature and yet too often timeframes and expectations for transformative change remain unrealistic. Approaches that prevent conflict at the local level take time, patience and humility. Trust-building does not occur on pre-defined timelines. Working with diverse actors and attempting to bring them together in a constructive manner requires iterative efforts and a high level of acceptance that such efforts may indeed fail. Trust is at the heart of these long-term transformational processes.
- 8. Measure success/effectiveness based on the perceptions of key stakeholders:** Conflict prevention engagements are notoriously difficult to assess when it comes to the issue of ‘success.’ A successful initiative can be defined as one that has been transformative and, in transformative projects, the actors have changed their perceptions of one another and are more susceptible to the idea of peace. Measuring these aspects means moving from measuring success based on the achievement of formalistic indicators contained in results frameworks that are pre-defined – often by international actors – towards an understanding of impact that can only be achieved by engaging directly with local people themselves.⁵

To what extent are these insights reflected in international policies and strategies?

Although many of these insights may seem quite ‘obvious’, the policies and frameworks of international actors tend not to reflect them in a consistent, meaningful or nuanced way. Moreover, it is important to note that ‘the local’ itself is not considered central in the majority of the frameworks reviewed. This means that a consideration of the importance of local approaches, and the tailoring of international support to be in harmony with such local approaches is not prioritised (only eight out of twenty frameworks surveyed emphasise explicitly the importance of local-international alignment). Moreover, Member States have very different approaches to peacebuilding and stabilization, which is further echoed in their diverse approach to local actors and local approaches.

This suggests an evident gap – or even a clash - in the way in which international actors are engaging in fragile and conflict-affected settings and, moreover, underscores the implicit focus of the international community on national-level conflict prevention efforts. While important nuances are missing, there are several areas where important building-blocks are in place that would allow international actors to be better aligned with local approaches to conflict prevention:

⁵ Other methods such as outcome harvesting and process tracing may also be relevant.

- For example, international frameworks focus largely on integrating *the importance of ensuring gender and youth considerations* into conflict prevention efforts. This can also be attributed – at least in part – to the normative frameworks established as part of UN Security Council Resolutions on 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. That said, the conflict-sensitivity angle is often lacking from these frameworks.
- The notion that *dialogue and other peacebuilding approaches should be mainstreamed into development and humanitarian initiatives* has also gained significant traction in recent years and was, to some extent, ushered in by the 2011 ‘New Deal on Statebuilding and Peacebuilding’, which put dialogue at the heart of development endeavours. The alignment between international and local actors on these issues can also be linked with broader efforts to bridge the peace-humanitarian-development siloes, as encapsulated by the increasing focus on the ‘triple nexus’.
- The notion that *local, national, regional and international dynamics/processes should be ‘linked’* is explored in several frameworks, but few provide specifics on *how* to connect these levels for the purposes of conflict prevention. ‘The Pathways for Peace’ report, for example, emphasises the need for peacebuilding objectives to be “prioritised in national, regional and local peace and development plans”⁶ without drawing any particular attention to the need to connect them. While providing relevant directions for a new global social contract anchored in human rights, the recent Secretary-General’s report, ‘Our common agenda’ does not explicitly address the issue of ‘linkages’ at all.
- The importance of *fostering long-term engagements focused on building trust* is only partially addressed by several frameworks. While many allude to the importance of long-term engagements, and others focus on the need to build trust, very few emphasise both and the fact that they are mutually-reinforcing. The New Deal, for example, focuses on the need to build mutual trust by providing aid and managing resources more effectively, but does not underscore the importance of long-term engagements. Bilateral actors seem to be more cognisant about the need for long-term commitments, without necessarily – or explicitly - mentioning the need to build trust.

A more significant gap remains, however, in relation to the following key lessons:

- *Ensuring locally-grounded and locally-led conflict analysis* is rarely the focus of the frameworks’ review. While several frameworks underscore the need for: actions to be “led by national actors and supported by the international community” (‘Pathways for Peace’)⁷; “locally-determined paths out of conflict” (UK Government)⁸; and the need to understand “local conditions, local actors and their incentives” (World Bank)⁹, there is little focus on what this looks like in practice. None of the international frameworks outline a clear role for local actors in conflict analysis.
- The concept of *going ‘beyond the usual suspects’* receives little attention amongst international actors. The Secretary-General’s ‘Common Agenda’ is one of the few frameworks that speaks to the need for “more inclusive multilateralism”¹⁰. Unlike most frameworks, the ‘Common Agenda’ is also quite clear about the range of actors this should include. The other frameworks remain vague on this point, and none of the

⁶ Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (2018), page 39.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The UK Government’s approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners (2018)

⁹ World Bank Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence (2020-2025)

¹⁰ Our Common Agenda - Report of the Secretary-General (2021), page 68.

frameworks explore the ways in which international bias is contributing to an implicit focus on the ‘usual suspects.’

- The issue of **fostering shared meaning and purpose** is alluded to in a minority of policy frameworks and generally in a relatively ‘high-level’ manner. The ‘New Deal’, for example, underscores the importance of supporting “one national vision and one plan” which must be “country owned and -led”¹¹. The World Bank’s Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Strategy goes one step further and emphasises the notion that addressing the drivers of conflict requires a vision that “spell[s] out the past landscape of actors and their incentives,”¹² going onto describe in detail the type of participatory process required. Most of the other frameworks do not address this issue in a meaningful way.
- **Measuring success/effectiveness based on the perceptions of stakeholders** is one of the least considered aspects in the analysis. This is an interesting finding given that the ‘New Deal’ was emphatic about the need for indicators to be developed between fragile states *and* international partners, based on a combination of objective measures and the insights of people on the ground concerning the results achieved/needed to be achieved. While the 2030 Agenda discusses the need for country-led evaluations, it does not go into detail and other frameworks also do not discuss the need for perceptions-based reviews and evaluations.

Conclusion

This study suggests that ‘What works?’ in local approaches to conflict prevention in the Arab States region can be summarised in the above eight key lessons.

However, while these lessons and insights are not particularly ‘new’, the study suggests that they are not consistently reflected in the conflict prevention policies and frameworks of international actors. This points to an important international-local ‘gap’ when it comes to conflict prevention initiatives in the region and suggest an ongoing focus on national-level initiatives on the part of international actors to the detriment of local actors and local approaches. Moreover, this study suggests that international actors are more likely to align with local approaches in areas where an extensive normative framework already exists.

Currently, however, there is no internationally-recognised normative framework on local approaches to peace, nor are there meaningful attempts made to better harmonise local and international efforts to prevent and resolve conflict. There are no UN Resolutions on this topic, and guidance on what it means to work at the local level remains nascent, uneven and fragmented. Using this research, as well as the work of other actors working in this space, this study suggests that greater efforts are required to bridge that gap in conflict-sensitive and context-specific ways and this will lead to more effective and sustainable conflict prevention initiatives.

¹¹ A NEW DEAL for engagement in fragile states (2011), page 2.

¹² World Bank - Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA (2020), page 32.



Photo credit : Claire Thomas, UNDP Iraq

Introduction

About this report

The United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS) and TrustWorks Global (TrustWorks), a Swiss-based social enterprise, joined forces in 2021 - under the banner of their shared commitment to conflict prevention – to mark ten years since the Arab Uprisings of 2011.

The Arab Uprisings have accelerated two inter-linked dynamics. First, the international peace and security architecture has been forced to adapt to evolving geo-political realities and the changing nature of conflict, requiring a deeper level of reflection and a greater capacity to learn from experience. Second, as national-level initiatives to prevent and resolve conflicts have become increasingly stalled or even frozen across the Arab States region, the efforts of local actors working at local levels have taken on an increasing degree of relevance and, indeed, urgency. Understanding how such actors can best be supported to prevent conflict, promote peace and foster social cohesion is thus imperative.

And yet, our knowledge and understanding of 'what works' when it comes to local level conflict prevention is limited and, it will be argued here, insufficiently reflected in international and regional policy frameworks. What we refer to as a the 'local-international gap' must be bridged if international actors are to effectively engage with and support local stakeholders to minimise negative unintended consequences and maximise positive contributions.

This report is designed to contribute to bridging that gap. The report is structured around four key questions:

- What do actors working in the region understand by the terms 'conflict prevention' and 'local'?
- What did we learn from local level conflict prevention efforts in the Arab States region?
- To what extent, and how, are these lessons and insights reflected in key international policy frameworks (or not)?
- What does this tell us about where and how to improve conflict prevention efforts in the Arab States region and how to bridge the 'local-international' gap in a conflict-sensitive manner?

The evolving approach to prevention in the UN System

Conflict prevention is at the heart of the UN Charter. However, how the organisation has chosen to grapple with what conflict prevention means in practice has evolved over the years. From its roots in the days of Dag Hammarskjöld and his coining of the term 'preventive diplomacy,' to the work of Boutros Boutros-Ghali on the 'Agenda for Peace', Kofi Annan's 2001 report to the UN Security Council (UNSC), 'Prevention of Armed Conflict', and more recent developments under the 'Sustaining Peace Resolutions', the UN-World Bank study on *Pathways for Peace* and Sustainable Development Goal 16 on "peace, justice and strong institutions," the tools the Organisation chooses to deploy to prevent conflict and sustain peace are highly dynamic.

Under Secretary-General António Guterres, who has made prevention the centrepiece of his mandate, the domain of prevention has shifted away from a focus on preventing conflict alone towards preventing 'multi-faceted risks'. Multi-faceted risks encapsulate all types of crisis that may contribute to human suffering, and thus recognizing that unaddressed drivers of such risks can also lead to instability and violent conflict. Addressing the UN Security Council (UNSC) debate on conflict prevention and sustaining peace in January 2017, Secretary-General Guterres insisted that prevention means "doing everything we can to help countries to avert the outbreak of crises that take a high toll on human lives and undermine the institutions and

capacities needed to achieve peace and development.”¹³ Prevention, he stated unequivocally, should “permeate everything we do”¹⁴ across all three pillars of the UN System.

Most recently, in November 2021, as part of the new UN Common Agenda, Member States agreed that the world’s challenges “are interconnected, across borders and all other divides”¹⁵ and can only be addressed by an equally interconnected response. The Common Agenda also underscores the need for investments in prevention, particularly through regional initiatives. The Common Agenda supports the ongoing reform agenda of the UN, which puts prevention in the context of a broader peace continuum, integrating it into the range of practices and tools used by the UN from mediation and diplomacy through to peacebuilding, protection and development.

Conflict prevention in the Arab States region

The Arab Uprisings that spread across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 drastically altered the political, socio-economic and cultural landscape of the region. Voices calling for dignity, respect of human rights, accountability, political and economic reforms, and inclusion – particularly on the part of the youth – underpinned the majority of protests. The region has suffered from endemically low levels of economic development, with poor employment opportunities, and the region continues to have the highest youth unemployment rate in the world.

Since the uprisings, the Arab region is also the only region in the world where people have become poorer, both in terms of the total numbers and as a proportion of the total population. Foreign military interventions and regional rivalries have compounded and worsened the challenges facing the region and fed into the ever-increasingly unstable geo-political dynamics. Despite the demands encapsulated in the Arab Uprisings, in many country contexts the political, social, economic and democratization reforms have since stalled and in some cases, may have even been reversed.

International efforts to prevent an escalation of violence and/or respond to instability and conflict have focused predominantly on national-level dynamics. Despite these efforts, in 2021, the Arab States region accounted for 23 percent of the battle-related deaths¹⁶, 36 percent of the world’s internally displaced persons and 16 percent of refugees.¹⁷

In this challenging context, peace agreements have become an increasing rarity. In the period from 2011 to 2019 (according research by PRIO) international efforts in the Middle East led to the signing of only one peace agreement (the agreement signed in Yemen 2014, between the government, the Southern movement and Ansarallah).¹⁸ The political agreement signed in Libya in 2015, paving the way for a unity Government, along with the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan of 2020, can also be considered essential milestones in the Arab States region. But given the extent of conflict combined with the scope of international efforts, the comparatively low rate of ‘success’ in reaching comprehensive political settlements is noteworthy.

Indeed, the conflicts of the region are testing the efficacy of the international community’s peace and security ‘tools’ to the limit. The complexity of these contexts – a complexity compounded by UN Security Council dynamics, geo-political tensions and COVID-19 – have

¹³ The Security Council ministerial-level open debate on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. 10 January 2017.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Our Common Agenda - Report of the Secretary-General (2021), page 3.

¹⁶ Armed Conflict Events Database, <https://acleddata.com/about-acledd/>

¹⁷ UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download?url=4WmwZQ>

¹⁸ Palik, Júlia; Siri Aas Rustad; Kristian Berg Harpviken & Fredrik Methi (2020) Conflict Trends in the Middle East, 1989–2019, *PRIO Paper*. Oslo: PRIO

led to reflection and refinement of the ways in which the international community approaches multidimensional crises.

Much has been written about the various successes and failures of national-level initiatives, the obstacles they faced, and the challenges that remain to be surmounted. Significantly less is known and/or has been written about sub-national and local level dynamics of conflict and conflict prevention efforts during and since the Arab uprisings; and yet, such efforts have been extensive.

Whether in support of the democratic transition in Tunisia, in the wake of the Beirut blast of 2020, initiatives to bolster the permanent ceasefire in Libya, or local agreements in Northern Syria, it is evident that local approaches to preventing conflict, fostering peace and strengthening social cohesion are becoming an ever more important part of the dynamics of the region. What did we learn from these efforts? How successful have they been, and using which approaches? Do we have a good understanding of ‘what works’ in local level conflict prevention efforts? Are these insights sufficiently reflected in the policy frameworks and strategies guiding the work of international actors in the region to ensure alignment and synergies? To what extent do international actors give ‘space’ to local actors and local approaches to conflict prevention and peace?

Methodology

To answer the questions guiding this study, a five-pronged approach was used.

- **Extensive literature review** of academic literature, policy papers and news-related sources on local approaches and the Arab Uprisings. Given that the timeframe of the study is post-2011, the literature review engaged with sources from 2010-2021, with a more intensive focus on literature published within the last three years.
- **Semi-structured interviews with conflict prevention experts** working in the Arab States region. These interviews were conducted with both international and local actors with extensive experience of working at the local level. Experts were selected on the basis of a diversity of sub-regional expertise, i.e., with experiences in different parts of the Arab States region.
- **Surveys conducted in Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.** These surveys targeted conflict prevention professionals working on local-level initiatives. The survey (in Arabic and English) focused predominantly on open-ended rather than closed and/or multiple-choice questions. The survey relied upon a ‘snow-ball methodology’ to access individuals not typically engaged in internationally-led studies of this nature. The selection of the countries to conduct the survey and the focus groups (see below) was carefully determined to include country contexts with different types of conflicts underway and/or where there were different levels of conflict-related risk present (high, medium, and low).
- **Four focus groups were held in Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia and Syria** with actors working on conflict prevention at the local level. Each focus group engaged stakeholders from non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and associations, youth, women, religious leaders, and local municipalities, where relevant, and were designed to ensure gender diversity and the inclusion of marginalised groups
- **Analysis of the key findings against international and regional policy frameworks.** The key insights concerning ‘what works’ in local level conflict prevention initiatives were then analysed against 20 international and regional policy frameworks to understand the extent to which and how such lessons are reflected therein. The

international and regional frameworks were jointly selected by UNDP and TrustWorks to reflect a diversity of key multilateral stakeholders in the region (and availability of their strategies), including for example: the New Deal for engagement in Fragile States; the UN Security Council Resolution on 'Sustaining Peace'; the UN-World Bank report on 'Pathways for Peace', the Secretary General's report 'Our Common Agenda,' and the EU Council's Conclusions on the Integrated approach. An analysis was also conducted on bilateral strategies and/or Arab States/MENA-specific strategies of a small selection of Member States.

As a result of these tools, a total of over 100 stakeholders working on and in the region were engaged to respond to the key questions underpinning this study.

It is important to note that the objective of the study was to focus on the insights and lessons learned of local actors and/or those working at the local level. The goal was not to ascertain the extent to which UNDP or other relevant stakeholders already take into consideration these findings, nor was the purpose to make recommendations to international actors. The objective was to listen and reflect upon the insights shared by local actors on local approaches to conflict prevention.

Challenges and limitations

While it is hoped that this study can make an important contribution to bridging the 'local-international' knowledge gap, it must be perceived as a *starting point* for further exploring the lessons explored here rather than a 'gold standard' of what-works-and-what-doesn't, for several key reasons:

- First, the research did not seek to link the practices used at the local level with a verifiable analysis of the impact such practices had on the escalation or de-escalation of conflict. Indeed, an impact-oriented approach of the *impact* of the strategies used was beyond the scope of this study. Instead, the purpose of the study was to ascertain a level understanding of 'what works' at the local level in the Arab states region based on the experiences and perceptions of both local actors and international practitioners working at the local level.
- Second, the study did not seek to ascertain a sector-based understanding of conflict prevention initiatives (e.g. governance, insider mediation, development, etc.) nor to correlate these sector-based initiatives with the type of approaches used and level of success attained. Rather, the goal of the study was to identify conflict prevention practices at the local level that are considered effective irrespective of the sector and/or which can be mainstreamed across different types of conflict prevention initiatives.
- Third, in line with the difficulty of assessing causation in conflict prevention projects, broadly speaking, 78 percent of survey respondents in their *self-assessment* indicated that their projects have only indirect impacts on levels of violence and/or the resolution of conflicts in their areas of operation. Even with adequate resources, therefore, would this make the task of assessing causal linkages between the strategies used and effectiveness of the outcomes a highly complex endeavour.
- Fourth, the policies and strategies against which the key lessons of this research were assessed reflected a relatively broad spectrum of actors. However, the availability of strategies (online/public) affected the selection. As such, it was only possible to assess these key findings against international organisations on the one hand, and against predominantly European and/or Western Member States on the other. During a second

phase of research, it would be useful to explore the extent to which these lessons are reflected in the policies and strategies of a broader set of actors.

- Fifth, challenges were encountered with obtaining a statistically significant number of survey responses, particularly from local actors. The survey was rolled out at the beginning of the pandemic, when many of those working at the local level were dealing with a high diversity of pressing challenges. To complement the survey as outlined above, focus groups were conducted in four different country contexts and additional experts were interviewed.

Therefore, the lessons learned during this study can provide a baseline upon which future academic and policy-oriented research efforts to respond more confidently and consistently to the question of ‘what works?’ with a view to informing future conflict prevention endeavours in the region. These insights form relatively high-level ‘guidelines’ to be applied irrespective of the Arab states context in question, but with the evident need for tailoring and contextualisation in line with local power dynamics and realities.



Photo credit : Dalla Khamissy, UNDP Lebanon

I. Understanding what ‘conflict prevention’ and ‘local’ mean in the Arab States region

Conflict prevention and the drivers of conflict:

While there is no widely agreed upon definition of conflict prevention, it is generally understood as efforts to hinder or prevent armed or violent conflict through means that encompass immediate, short-term and longer-term ‘structural’ actions.¹⁹ Stakeholders engaged with for the purposes of this study and through the lens of conflict prevention in the Arab States region in particular understood and engaged with the concept in two ways.

First, and aligned with mainstream conceptions of conflict prevention, is the understanding of conflict prevention as a set of actions designed to address the factors, challenges, risks and threats that give rise to violence - also understood as the *drivers of conflict*. The efforts of actors working in this space may be operational or structural in nature. While operational prevention may include early warning and early response, preventive diplomacy, economic measures and use of force,²⁰ structural prevention is focused on addressing the root causes of violence and conflict.

This predominantly ‘negative’ conceptualisation of conflict prevention is, according to stakeholders, compounded by language. The words for ‘conflict’ in Arabic – *‘nizae’*²¹ or *‘sira’a’* – do not have a neutral or constructive connotation that conflict has in some languages, i.e. as being associated also with *opportunity*. The word ‘conflict’ tends to be associated with suppression, oppression and violence.²² And, because conflict is viewed by many as inherently negative, some may even resist being associated with the term at all: “the first reaction may be to deny our conflicts, to resist being associated with it, because conflict is shameful.”²³

This understanding of conflict prevention leads to several associated practices. Practitioners in the region, for example, focus on *creating safe spaces for dialogue*, whether between individuals or through institutional means. Through this approach to conflict prevention, practitioners seek to disentangle conflict from violence: whilst the former is natural and encouraged, the latter is destructive and must be prevented. The focus on dialogue is designed to equip individuals with the ability to engage and understand those who are perceived as different or who hold different points of views on issues that ‘matter’, thereby allowing actors to engage in constructive conflict without engaging in violence.

The objective of dialogue-based work is – as discussed in the Focus Group in Lebanon - to equip individuals with the “tools to enable them to steer away from sectarian violence and support them to find a narrative that helps them find a sense of purpose and belonging.”²⁴ This form of prevention is a methodology that “helps communities to be aware of their responsibilities, roles and accountability for living together in peace.”²⁵ The ideals of constructive dialogue as a tool for addressing drivers of conflict and violence, however, must be institutionalised if a society is to prosper. After all, “institutions are fundamental for preventing and resolving conflict,”²⁶ and it is by building effective institutions that societies transition from a focus on negative to positive peace.²⁷

Other practices associated predominantly with this understanding of conflict prevention focus on *early warning and crisis response*. This approach is based on the need to be able to anticipate the drivers, triggers, and moments in which conflict may erupt in order to take

¹⁹ Ott, Lisa and Luhe, Ulrike, ‘Conflict prevention: Connecting policy and practice’, Working Paper, swisspeace, 2/2018, page 41.

²⁰ Ott, Lisa and Luhe, Ulrike (2018) page 12-13.

²¹ نزاع

²² Anonymous, phone interview, December 2020 (22)

²³ Hassan, Nabil, Partner at Beyond Group, phone interview, November, 2020.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2020 (12).

²⁶ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2020 (20).

²⁷ The concept of negative peace was defined by Johan Galtung as being the absence of violence; the concept of positive peace was defined by Johan Galtung as the absence of violence in all its forms (physical and structural) plus social justice i.e., where individuals, groups or states have collaborative and supportive relationships.

targeted actions that either reduce the likelihood or mitigate the impact of these dynamics. During the Focus Group in Somalia, for example, participants discussed the importance of traditional, clan-based efforts of ‘detecting a brewing conflict’ by identifying the early warning signs and intervening to prevent escalation.

Efforts may also focus on addressing the *root causes of conflict*. This approach entails identifying the issues that feed into - or have the potential to feed into - conflict, whether it be the distribution of power and resources, natural resources, identity, or other factors. The goal is to then build the capacities and, indeed culture, of preventing and resolving conflict. These efforts may involve: working with political groups or communities, women, and youth to capacitate them to reach their goals non-violently; enabling key stakeholders to engage in political dialogue; and supporting actors to understand how to foster compromise and/or take on leadership qualities. As one stakeholder noted, this is about learning “how to do politics using non-violent means.”²⁸

Conflict prevention and the drivers of peace:

The second conceptualisation of conflict prevention – understood here as working on the *drivers of peace* - received less attention in interviews, survey responses and focus groups. This second approach to conflict prevention rests on the idea that the factors that drive people to conflict fundamentally differ from those that drive people to work towards peace. This conceptualisation seeks to move away from the focus only on the elimination of violence (e.g., the factors that “reduce distrust, enmity, hostility and violence within and between communities”) because addressing these factors alone “will not promote trust, cooperation, common bonds, harmony, and peace.”²⁹

In the approach to conflict prevention that focuses on addressing the drivers of peace, conflicts are prevented by supporting the elements in society that foster peacefulness, which will be different in each context. These elements are understood as being significantly *more* than the absence of challenges and risk factors. This conceptualisation goes against the grain of mainstream thinking and the seemingly natural tendency to focus on what’s *not* working rather than what is. For example, as outlined in Peter Coleman’s work on this topic, the Positive Peace Index - designed to measure ‘peacefulness’ - still primarily measures the absence of ‘problems’. According to his analysis, 57 percent of the indices measure the absence of problems such as “discrimination, crime, intergroup disparities, civil disorder, and riots.”³⁰ The same can be said for SDG 16 which, according to Coleman, measures a ratio of problems to solutions on a scale of 3:1.³¹

The ‘drivers of peace’-based work of Youssef Mahmoud, Senior Advisor at the International Peace Institute and a former UN official is pioneering in this regard. Mahmoud insists that peace, rather than conflict must be the starting point when approaching the operationalisation of conflict prevention. Central to this approach, he argues, is “inclusiveness and equality in the way power is exercised and resources are shared.”³² One stakeholder questioned whether ‘conflict prevention’ as a term was even the right concept to use at all: “When your starting point is violent conflict, you will only build the absence of violence, or negative peace; it is misleading to believe that just because you have treated the disease that you are healthy.”³³ When peace is the starting point, our focus turns to what *is* working, and how what is working can be supported to further strengthen peace.

²⁸ Al-Maktary, Shوقي, Search for Common Ground, MENA Senior Conflict Sensitivity Advisor, Phone Interview, November 2020.

²⁹ Coleman, Peter, ‘Half the peace: the fear challenge and case for promoting peace’, IPI, March 19, 2018.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Coleman, Peter, (2018).

³² Mahmoud, Youssef, ‘Freeing prevention from conflict: Investing in sustaining peace’, IPI, April 21, 2016,

³³ Mahmoud, Youssef, Senior Advisor, International Peace Institute, Phone interview, July 2019.

To many, this is the essence of the UN Sustaining Peace Resolutions, but putting this into practice has proved challenging. The predominance of the drivers of conflict approach was reflected in the focus of responses from stakeholders – across interviews, questionnaire responses and focus groups – on practices that seek to minimise violent conflict rather than support peace and resilience. That said, the Peaceful Change initiative, for example, has developed what they call a ‘social peacebuilding model’, which *does* take peace as the starting point. Generally speaking, however, this more resilience-based approach is perceived (rightly or wrongly) as being more relevant in “quasi-stable societies like Morocco, where it is possible to preserve the peace and reinforce social cohesion”, but less relevant in countries experiencing violent conflict.³⁴

Interestingly, a small set of stakeholders emphasised endogenous approaches used in the Arab States region. They believe that many societies have “protected themselves through norms, codes of conduct and implicit and explicit agreements about how to live together peacefully, but these practices have sometimes been lost”³⁵ or, as others have argued, have not been effective at addressing the complexity of twenty-first century conflicts. A greater focus on what has worked, why, and where, would help to nuance the question of how modern-day protocols can be combined with endogenous knowledge and practices to be most effective. This requires new tools for understanding the effectiveness of conflict prevention from the perspective of social norms and practices that have maintained peace.

What ‘local’ approaches mean to practitioners in the Arab States region:

The ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding has been extensively covered in the literature. It is broadly understood as a move from state-centric to people-centric approaches in response to the failures of internationally-led, predominantly ‘top down’ efforts in fragile and conflict-affected states. While there has been a strong recognition of the benefits of more locally-informed or -led approaches, there have also been diverse challenges that prevented international actors from engaging meaningfully at the local level.

Rather than attempt to cover these extensive challenges here and moving away from internationally dominated paradigms, this study interrogates what the term ‘local’ means to those from and/or working predominantly on the Arab States region. It then explores the implications of that understanding for how they go about conflict prevention endeavours. Engagements through interviews, surveys and focus groups point to three main ways of understanding the ‘local’, but each comes with its own set of challenges from the perspective of conflict prevention.

The first and most common understanding is geographical in nature: ‘local’ as referring to the sub-national context or even a “community”. For example, one stakeholder referred to ‘local’ as being “a geographical area of relevance, with resources, a trade route, socio-political relations, such as an important economic capital or a religious center.”³⁶ Another stakeholder referred to ‘local’ as, “anything below the national level” is “rightly or wrongly referred to as being local, whether provincial or community level.”³⁷ To a certain extent, this understanding of the ‘local’ also has political connotations because often it means working with local authorities or municipalities.³⁸

The second way in which local is understood is as meaning “bottom up” and/or “endogenous” in nature, i.e., homegrown processes and solutions able to respond to local specificity.”³⁹ In this

³⁴ Oussama, Safa, Independent Peacebuilding Expert, Phone Interview, May 2019.

³⁵ Jadallah, Abdullhadi, Alma (dr.), President and Management Director, Kommon Denominator, Phone Interview, July 2019.

³⁶ Ahlberg, Joel, Specialist Dialogue and Peace Mediation. Folke Bernadotte Academy, Phone interview, May 2019.

³⁷ Abouaoun, Elie (Dr.), Director, MENA Programme, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Phone Interview, June 2019.

³⁸ Al-Maktary, Shoghi, Search for Common Ground, MENA Senior Conflict Sensitivity Advisor, Phone Interview, November 2020.

³⁹ Oussama, Safa, Independent Peacebuilding Expert, Phone Interview, May 2019.

spirit, local engagements are those that are responsive to local needs. One respondent in the Lebanon Focus Group indicated that local conflict prevention interventions are “inspired by listening to the grassroots and hearing from them what needs to happen for a semi-prosperous environment to emerge.”⁴⁰ What works in one environment may not necessarily work in another, and because ‘local’ efforts must respond to the “different factors of the country, politics and identities...what is local in Lebanon is very different to local in Libya or local in Tunisia.”⁴¹ Through this lens, ‘local’ is also tied to identity and can mean relating to a particular sectarian, religious or ethnic identity, so that a community – rather than being geographically located - is socially-grounded and likely to follow the lines of the conflict itself. Local conflict prevention efforts grounded in this understanding of the ‘local’ are likely to be focused on capacity building and empowerment activities.

The third way in which local is understood – albeit by a minority of stakeholders engaged with - is through the lens of resistance to outside interference. To some degree, therefore, ‘local approaches’ are not only those that are endogenous, but more importantly, are approaches that are ‘non-Western’. One stakeholder who works on Syria, for example, explained that local efforts are understood as those that are “Syrian-led and Syrian staffed.”⁴² Local approaches are unaffected by foreign influence and defined by local actors themselves; indeed, local approaches are “not imposed with ready-made moulds, they are not imposed from the outside.”⁴³

This third set of local approaches point to what the literature refers to as a “decolonisation of knowledge about peacemaking and peacebuilding” so that initiatives are informed by concerns of legitimacy, ownership and power, as well as the cultural, historical and linguistic context.⁴⁴ This approach to the local also seeks to counter fragmentation according to socio-geographical dimensions in contexts where, despite the evident large sub-national differences, the language of ‘local’ can contribute to perceptions of *difference and division*, and therefore feed into the dynamics of the conflict.

⁴⁰ Focus Group on Syria, online, November and December 2020.

⁴¹ Hassan, Nabil, Partner at Beyond Group, phone interview, November 2020.

⁴² Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (6)

⁴³ Focus Group on Syria, online, November and December 2020.

⁴⁴ Mac Ginty, Roger and Richmond, Oliver P, ‘The local turn in peace building: a critical agenda for peace’, *Third World Quarterly*, 34:5, 2013, page 756.



Photo credit : UNDP Egypt

II. What did we learn from local level conflict prevention efforts in the Arab States region?

Our knowledge of ‘what works’ in conflict prevention is limited. Indeed, our understanding of what effective national-level engagements look like is inconclusive and our understanding of what works at transnational, sub-national or local levels is limited by the paucity of studies on these dynamics.⁴⁵ More recently, in recognition of this data gap, Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) for peacebuilding interventions (a form of experimental impact evaluation) have been used to assess the effectiveness of such interventions at the local level. More efforts of this kind are required to generate a broader understanding of what conflict prevention efforts work in which contexts and under what conditions, and with what kind of tailoring.

This study seeks to provide relatively ‘high level’ insights of the type of approaches that stakeholders working at the local level have found to be effective in the design, implementation, and monitoring of their conflict prevention efforts. As previously noted, it was beyond the scope of this exercise to link the insights provided with the effectiveness of the interventions used. Rather, the study aims to extract *generalisable* lessons that may be of use to actors working at the local level or in support of actors working at the local level.

While the different sectors engaged in were not subject to a rigorous review as part of this study, the survey responses, interviews and focus group findings suggest that the main areas of engagement for conflict prevention-related projects at the local level in the Arab States region include:

- Community empowerment/local level public participation;
- Building social peace capacities and peace structures;
- Community level resilience-building;
- Community-level dialogue and trust-building;
- Awareness-raising and advocacy; and,
- Local level/track III mediation.

Although many of the below insights may seem quite ‘obvious’ or ‘common sense’, as part three of this study will reveal, the policies and frameworks of international actors in many of these domains have been found lacking, indicating an ‘international-local gap’ in terms of conflict prevention efforts at the local level.

1. *Ensure locally-grounded and locally-led conflict analysis*

Conflict/context analysis should form the basis of any engagement at the local level. This mantra has been repeated for decades and yet remains inconsistently practiced. In survey responses for this study, those that completed a conflict assessment tended to rate their engagements as more successful than those that did not undertake any assessment at all. Indeed, when asked what would improve the effectiveness of the initiative, the majority of those surveyed indicated that a rigorous conflict analysis is vital.

The majority of individuals working at the local level for international organisations used pre-defined tools, including the UN Conflict-related Development Analysis (CDA) and other formalised frameworks, such as needs assessments and systems conflict analysis. Local actors, however, were more likely to use tailored methodologies developed for specific engagements which were considered as relevant to the local context in question. Those that did not complete a conflict analysis tended to believe that it requires “technical knowledge” or a deep understanding of a “specific methodology” and/or specific type of “in-house capacity.”

⁴⁵ Cramer, C., Goodhand, J. and Morris, R. (2016) Evidence Synthesis: What interventions have been effective in preventing or mitigating armed violence in developing and middle-income countries? London: Department for International Development, summary.

Stakeholders working at the local level believe analysis of the context must rely on “local resources first.”⁴⁶ The starting point is to engage with what exists locally, whether that is knowledge, resources or insights. This approach thus functions upon the basis of an innate assumption that every community has its own pre-existing structure and logic,⁴⁷ that cannot be assumed from the outside. This means that even the formulation of the conflict- or context methodology should be informed by local actors. One stakeholder noted, “I have seen the limitations of arriving with pre-designed questionnaires, surveys or analyses”⁴⁸ which can, another stakeholder suggested, “be detached from realities.”⁴⁹ Given the vast differences in local conflict dynamics from one community to another, it is vital to avoid coming to the table with pre-developed methodologies that are insufficiently adapted to the local context.⁵⁰

The analysis should include mapping the key issues and their evolution, the key actors and their entry points, and should also be undertaken in a participatory manner. The historical dimensions of the conflict must also not be ignored: how identity and local affiliations have evolved, how they are shaped by and connected with and/or experienced as a contestation of the nation-state and its colonial past.⁵¹ In this spirit, center-periphery dynamics and perceptions and understanding legitimacy, trust, and belonging should also be considered and analysed.⁵² The identification of entry-points will be particularly important: “it is less likely to be about the ripeness of the conflict, and more likely to be about the readiness of the parties,”⁵³ and local actors are more likely to have an understanding of such dynamics than international ones and therefore, to be better positioned to contribute to the readiness of the parties to engage.

The role of international actors is to serve as *enablers*, i.e., to support the process, provide a sounding board, and to help think through certain challenges when requested. International actors may also be able to play a convening role, providing an impartial space to undertake the analysis and to support the process of identifying entry-points. While respecting local culture and gaining the trust of local actors, the role of international actors is to support processes that shine a spotlight on power dynamics, human rights, and gender-related issues in a conflict-sensitive manner (see section on gender and generational dynamics). Such efforts can be undertaken with local actors in the lead and international actors in a supporting role.⁵⁴ Indeed, effective analysis processes are those where international actors support with humility and deference to local understandings of the conflict and its dynamics.

2. Go beyond the ‘usual suspects’

Several stakeholders lamented the bias of international actors towards more formalised NGOs, associations and entities, i.e. those with a formal ‘track record’, an online presence and a bank account. These so-called ‘modern structures’ are important and allow for financial due diligence and solid accounting on the part of donors, but they are not necessarily used by those actors who are “keeping the social fabric together.”⁵⁵ Indeed, this way of working is “doing an injustice to more primary forms of support – from businessmen, tribal and ethnic leaders, women leaders etc. – who all play vital support roles in communities.”⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Oussama, Safa, Independent Peacebuilding Expert, Phone Interview, May 2019.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (20)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Anderson, Gunnar, Senior Iraq Analyst, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), July 2019.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Jadallah, Abdullhadi, Alma (dr.), President and Management Director, Kommon Denominator, Phone Interview, July 2019.

⁵⁴ Simpson, Ruth, Country Director, Lebanon & Programme Development and Learning Management, International Alert, July 2019. See also: International Alert & Amel Association, ‘Health and Protection: Vectors for social stability – Adapting and responding to emerging crises’, July 2020.

⁵⁵ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (6)

⁵⁶ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (6)

Part of the problem with the current approach is, according to stakeholders, that due to the ‘criteria’ imposed by international actors “sometimes we don’t have the right criteria or the patience to wait and discern who is more ‘worthy’ of our support, and who if empowered might play an essential role in conflict resolution. You arrive in a country where there are 200 civil society organisations and you go through your criteria to make sure they are gender-sensitive, speak English, know how to write good reports and – by doing this – you miss out on identifying those groups best placed to prevent and resolve conflicts.”⁵⁷ In Libya, for example, it is the tribal leaders who are best placed to diffuse conflicts and broker conflicts, but they do not necessarily ‘qualify’ for UN support.

A representative from an international organisation encountered similar challenges when attempting to implement projects at the local level, since this goes against the grain of typical modalities of working through national governments, and stated that “there is simply no infrastructure to give money to local communities.”⁵⁸ The challenge is then compounded by national governments who do not necessarily buy into the idea that communities should have a role in designing and implementing development projects in their communities. Member States – whether from the donor or ‘host’ government side – have an implicit bias towards state-based approaches. Countering these norms and finding alternative ways to support peace is challenging work but is more effective at preventing conflict at the local level, according to those engaged for this study.

The approach of engaging with the *non*-usual suspects also opens up a space for local actors themselves to own and, where necessary, re-define the concepts. What does peace mean today in Syria, for example? According to one stakeholder from Libya, it is possible to have a “more sincere discussion” when trainers, facilitators and other staff are local and when they are actors that already have high levels of legitimacy and influence in the communities where they engage (irrespective of whether they meet international ‘criteria’). The goal is to identify people who are ‘insiders’ who are qualified to do this kind of work, and who people trust⁵⁹ - alluding in many ways to the important work of ‘insider mediators’. The question becomes then how to engage meaningfully, but also creatively, with more marginalised and often less visible actors, and how to provide appropriate support to them in conflict-sensitive ways to play their conflict prevention roles.

3. Foster shared meaning and purpose

The dynamics of fragmentation and isolation were consistently referenced throughout stakeholder engagements. As a result of these dynamics, interaction between different sectarian or religious communities is often low, and negative stereotyping of the ‘other’ extremely high. Part of this dynamic is fuelled by the media, which tends to focus on divisive, dramatised themes, events or issues that feed into rather than overcome fragmentation. The media (traditional and new) often works - sometimes inadvertently - as part of the government ‘machine’, consolidating power through the dynamics of ‘divide and conquer’ and maintaining power through control and division.⁶⁰

At what is consistently referred to as engagements at the ‘hyper local’ level, overcoming these dynamics can involve bringing together individuals who may lack experience of interacting with someone of a different sect or religion, for example. The practice of learning to create shared rules for the group to adhere to, of selecting themes to work on and advocate for, and designing initiatives that can then be implemented – whether sub-nationally or even nationally – can create a powerful dynamic of both shared purposes and shared meaning.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (16)

⁵⁸ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (26)

⁵⁹ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (10)

⁶⁰ Hammoudeh, Dawood, Acting Country Coordinator in Jerusalem for the Quakers, Phone interview, July 2019.

This process of creating spaces where shared meaning and purpose can be fostered is also an active engagement with the broader conflict dynamics: it is a recognition that non-state entities - whether political parties, NGOs, or other associations and platforms - may not necessarily be inclusive or democratic. It is in part a strategy of ‘quiet diplomacy’ intent on protecting free spaces and the civic spirit, and resisting government attempts to clamp down on freedoms. These initiatives are particularly important when peacemaking efforts at the national level may be stalled or even frozen: “it is part of creating bubbles of peace or structures for the future – whether it affects 1000, 10,000 people or just a few lives, human change is human change.”⁶¹

At the community or sub-regional level, these dynamics – which often have their roots in national level drivers of conflict - must be addressed through the creation of shared meaning, which, however, does not mean ignoring or ‘papering over’ difference. It is instead “accepting The Other, and creating a new, shared meaning that can be endorsed by us both.”⁶² While this can allude to the creation of a shared identity, or shared principles that drive and underpin the social contract, it can also be understood as a more tangible shared purpose that cuts across and goes beyond the sectarian and/or religious divisions towards longer-term developmental questions that may help create a shift in the conflict dynamics. For example, if the question is not “who controls which resources”, but rather “how can resources be leveraged for developmental efforts in the country?”, addressing governance issues bubbling below sectarian dynamics, such as corruption, the absence of national strategies, and need for inclusive processes, becomes less politicised and, therefore, easier to address.⁶³

The creation of shared meaning and purpose – or what international actors often refer to as building social cohesion - must be underpinned by the core principle of *inclusivity*, i.e., engaging with everyone, provided they want to be engaged and/or can see the value of engaging. This lesson is informed by the failures of the international community since, too often, international actors take or are perceived as ‘taking sides’ and/or as playing an active role in the exclusion of certain actors. A shared meaning, and a shared purpose cannot be built with only some parties of the conflict. Engagement in this impartial manner becomes possible if the premise of such an inclusive approach is the notion that the greatest violation of human rights is war: stopping the violence and war, therefore, must remain the priority above and beyond demonisation of one party or another.⁶⁴

4. Link local, national, regional and international dynamics/processes where relevant

Local communities and local-level ‘issues’ cannot be addressed in isolation or without consideration to the effects that local issues vertically and horizontally have on conflict dynamics. Importantly also *vice versa, otherwise the risk of ‘doing harm’ would merely increase.*

At the local level ‘horizontal connections’ are not consistently made, i.e. connecting communities experiencing similar issues to other communities that may be geographically far but experiencing the similar conflict dynamics or grappling with similar local development challenges. Focus Group respondents from Iraq underscored the importance of connecting communities with their local governments, but also with other local initiatives that they may not be aware of, or exploring opportunities to make connections with the local private sector actors, for example.⁶⁵

At the heart of these efforts is the principle of *networks*: creating networks of individuals, groups and communities that can learn from one another and be advocates for peace, while

⁶¹ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (20)

⁶² Ahlberg, Joel, Specialist Dialogue and Peace Mediation . Folke Bernadotte Academy, Phone interview, May 2019.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Balian, Hrair, Independent writer currently focusing on a book about Syria, former director of the Carter Center’s conflict resolution program, Phone interview, May 2019.

⁶⁵ Focus Group Iraq, November and December 2020.

themselves embodying efforts to cross divides. These efforts can also be empowering since they are encouraging and supporting communities to be able to resolve their own problems, by connecting them with the indigenous resources that exist in any community.⁶⁶

The solution may come from the local government, or local business or religious leaders, or it may come from Parliament; but, in most instances, it will come from a combination of actors working in concert in a coherent and integrated manner. As one stakeholder stated, “the *disconnected* nature of many communities - based on minorities, sub-groups and political affiliations - can be a powerful driver of conflict that must be overcome.”⁶⁷

It is also important to consider that the local level is not immune to national level dynamics; on the contrary, it is often very much shaped by them (and *vice versa*). Solving very localised problems - often to do with competition over resources - is vital, but the work of local conflict prevention actors must go beyond this. Indeed, all issues are political, and all issues are interconnected, so actors working at different levels must harmonise their work and engage collectively responding both to risks and to opportunities in conflict-sensitive ways if they are to be effective.

Several local actors provided insights into the consequences of not effectively linking local processes to those underway at the national level, and with the drivers at regional and/or global levels. Too often, for example, local initiatives can be insufficiently sensitive to the unintended consequences that such efforts may have either on other communities or on the national level as a whole. For example, successful local mediation can change the strategic dynamics of wider conflicts, and the benefits of such efforts for local peace may not always consistently outweigh the costs in these terms.⁶⁸

One stakeholder drew attention to inter-communal and inter-faith initiatives in northern Iraq to make this point. At the heart of many local-level tensions were issues related to inequality, which were not directly addressed through the dialogue. If it had been possible to link these local level processes with a broader Arab-Kurdish political process (stalled at the time) as well as to meaningful efforts towards economic recovery then these processes may have had a better chance of success.⁶⁹

When local level initiatives focus primarily on local dynamics and are insufficiently connected to national-level ones, such efforts, even when successful, may still leave local communities vulnerable to conflict drivers which may be driven from outside local communities. Such local initiatives are unlikely, then, to lead to sustainable peace. Indeed, when local level initiatives are insufficiently connected both to other local-level processes/initiatives as well as to national-level ones, such efforts can be considered more broadly as “de-escalation”, which is important, but will not necessarily address the dynamics of the conflict and, therefore, cannot be considered sustainable. “Local communities are often floating in a turbulent sea of national and global politics,”⁷⁰ stated one stakeholder. Local level initiatives must go beyond ‘contact theory’ and address the root causes of conflict (which are often national in nature with related global drivers) if they are to be sustainable.

That said, not all processes should be linked and the extent to which they are linked should be informed by conflict-sensitive analysis. However, all processes should consider the effects that working on one process will have on broader dynamics and *vice versa*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Al-Maktary, Shoqi, Search for Common Ground, MENA Senior Conflict Sensitivity Advisor, Phone Interview, November 2020.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

5. *Mainstream dialogue into humanitarian and development initiatives*

When conflict prevention efforts focused on dialogue are insufficiently combined with those that seek to improve people's immediate livelihoods (and access to their basic needs), they are challenging to sustain, particularly in high conflict environments. In environments of violent conflict where many may struggle to survive, it is questionable, according to stakeholders engaged, whether they have the "luxury or the mental capacity to engage in processes that can seem abstract or less urgent than their pressing day-to-day lives."⁷¹ According to Focus Group participants from Syria, for example, restoring livelihoods is essential for conflict prevention: peace is not the pre-requisite but the needs for services and economic resources are.⁷² However, well-meaning dialogue initiatives are not always sufficiently linked with well-resourced initiatives that address more urgent, and/or daily needs.

On the flip side, there are vast opportunities to ensure that both humanitarian and development initiatives integrate dialogue into the 'fabric' of their design and implementation. Humanitarian and development initiatives provide opportunities to foster dialogue that might not otherwise exist. By integrating conflict prevention and dialogue elements into such initiatives, they are contributing to broader dynamics of peace and stability, *and* they are more likely to be sustainable. As stated clearly in one of the Focus Groups in Syria, such efforts "work better when they are considered as cross-cutting rather than separate thematic areas."

This can be done effectively by applying a conflict-sensitive lens in order to understand how humanitarian or development initiatives fit into the broader conflict dynamics. Conflict prevention practitioners can work effectively with humanitarian and development professionals to ensure an analysis is undertaken to understand how a particular issue, such as water access for example, fits into the broader local and national dynamics of conflict and violence. In this instance, one element to consider will be ensuring water reaches vulnerable and/or marginalised farmers and individuals and/or that relevant benefit-sharing agreements can be fostered. Another element may involve creating a committee where diverse actors can come together with local authorities to be able to have a say in how the project is managed.⁷³

The challenge with this approach is managing the expectations of donors who have short timeframes and want quick results, and the fact that building ownership of projects in a conflict-sensitive way takes time. Several stakeholders advocated for an incremental and phased approach to integrating peace and developmental aspects of projects at the local level. The entry point must be working with local NGOs and partners who are "closer to the field and know better how to mitigate harm and maximise positive impact."⁷⁴ For example, both the 'social peace' approach of the House of Peace as well as the 'social peace and local development' efforts of the Peaceful Change initiative (PCi) work at the local level over a sustained period of time to ensure local ownership and conflict-sensitivity through all phases of these initiatives.

6. *Integrate gender and youth-related dimensions in a context/conflict-sensitive manner*

Most stakeholders engaged pointed to the imperative and challenges of integrating gender and youth-related dimensions into conflict prevention initiatives due to the social and cultural obstacles involved. For example, participants in the Focus Group in Syria underscored the vast barriers to women's inclusion in decision-making processes, both at the household level and at the community or national level, mainly due to the tribal in-country structures.⁷⁵ Similar concerns were raised in regards to how to integrate youth and other inter-generational related

⁷¹ Anonymous, phone interview, July 2020. (5)

⁷² Focus Group on Syria, November and December 2020.

⁷³ Hassan, Nabil, Partner at Beyond Group, phone interview, November, 2020.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2020 (22)

⁷⁵ Focus Group on Syria, November and December 2020.

issues. Different generations often have different world views, values, perceptions and experiences which can sometimes be difficult to bridge, but which also bring a richness of perspectives to any initiative. Different conflict-sensitive and incremental approaches have been used to address these challenges.

Stakeholders had different ways of addressing these challenges, but all insisted upon the strong need for contextualisation. Ensuring gender diversity when selecting local partners at the local level is a good first step. In Libya, actors working at the local level sought to demonstrate the value women brought to conflict prevention-related endeavours by supporting them to work on a conflict that male committees were not able to address.⁷⁶ In some contexts, such an approach could be dangerous, however, and could even jeopardise the lives of the local partners – particularly if there is a perception that conflict prevention initiatives are pushing a 'Western agenda'. In southern Iraq, for example, actors considered that it could create a huge backlash if initiatives are perceived to come with the objective of changing norms, and therefore, it was not possible to advocate for the inclusion of women, and certainly not at the early stages of the initiative.

In such circumstances, the most significant step that actors can take is to ensure that there is diversity in the international project management team. However, the goal is to be able to demonstrate slowly that the role of women in decision-making processes is not an externally-driven agenda but is for the good of the community. During the Focus Group on Somalia, stakeholders outlined the important role that women play in crossing the conflict lines to push for reconciliation, and using innovative means such as arts, culture and heritage to build shared meaning and purpose.

Other strategies can also be explored. In a local-level initiative in Libya, for example, separate groups were initiated with elders and youth respectively and when the time was right, suggestions were made to bring the two groups together to explore synergies with regards to the issues being addressed. In Iraq, youth were given a role in community development to enhance their sense of belonging, ownership and pride. Stakeholders noted that this greater sense of ownership and awareness of the amount of work that went into preserving local gardens or undertaking construction work also led to more 'responsible demonstrations' on the part of the youth, since they were more inclined to preserve the results.⁷⁷ Other efforts with youth across the region have focused on building their (political) leadership qualities with a view to "changing the political structures – comprised primarily of older people, old ideas and old approaches – in order to push new blood into those systems."⁷⁸

Some stakeholders cautioned against including women in a 'tokenistic' manner. In Iraq, for example, a local conflict prevention team had been put forward with women participants who had no background, experience or training in peace, and who appeared antagonistic to the goals of the endeavour.⁷⁹ These points underscore the need to ensure inclusion is sensitive to the needs of the individuals and to the context.

Part of the challenge involves overcoming the bias of the 'type' of women international actors seek to include, or preconceptions on how certain roles should be played (as outlined above in the insights concerning engaging 'usual suspects'). For example, in Yemen, influential women are not necessarily university-educated and will not necessarily speak English. Moreover, the influential roles they play may not be visible to the outsiders' eye as several stakeholders provided examples where women are 'negotiating' behind the scenes to lobby for a particular course of action or to seek agreement on a particular issue.

⁷⁶ Abouaoun, Elie (Dr.), Director, MENA Programme, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Phone Interview, June 2019.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Al-Maktary, Shoji, Search for Common Ground, MENA Senior Conflict Sensitivity Advisor, Phone Interview, November 2020.

⁷⁹ Focus Group on Iraq, November and December 2020.

Given the above, focusing on endogenous capacities; enhancing the skills of youth and women to expand participation meaningfully; and, investing in consolidating trust across and within groups and communities are critical to achieve results overtime. Moreover, not only is it important to note that women and youth are not homogenous groups, but that the factors that make them ‘influential’ in a given setting may not be those that international actors tend to look for when engaging with local partners.

7. Foster long-term engagements focused on building trust

Resistance to short-term donor-imposed timeframes have been explored extensively in the literature and yet - too often - timeframes and expectations for transformative change remain unrealistic. Approaches that prevent conflict at the local level take time, patience and humility. Trust-building does not occur on pre-defined timelines and working with diverse actors and attempting to bring them together in a constructive manner requires iterative efforts and a high level of acceptance that such efforts may indeed fail. Longer-term engagements must build in the realistic possibility that some efforts may not achieve their goals during the first or even the second attempt; they may require time to rebuild trust, and to ‘start again’.

Conflict prevention efforts, after all, must engage with everyone in each conflict context⁸⁰ and building relationships will take more time when trust has been broken or when trust is low. As stakeholders in the Focus Group on Lebanon underscored: “perseverance is vital because many of the challenges are structural: any change or improvement requires time and hard work.” In many contexts, the process of building trust may take significant time due to deeply embedded historical dynamics. For example, in some countries certain areas have been marginalised due to a combination of dictatorial regimes and colonialism. Working with local actors in a transparent, inclusive, participatory, and democratic way can take time – particularly if such processes are going to be fully ‘owned’ by local actors.⁸¹

Trust is at the heart of these long-term transformational processes. Johan Garde discusses two types of trust which are important.⁸² The first is ‘bonding trust,’ i.e. the type of trust that occurs in families or small communities, where identities are accepted and understood as being ‘alike’. The other form of trust is ‘bridging trust’, which involves reaching out to ‘the other’, and working with those who are different. Bridging trust brings together the rich and the poor, the victims and the perpetrators, different members of sects, governments with non-state groups.

These engagements take time as they “need people to believe in it and people who are really willing to commit to it; don’t rush – go slowly.”⁸³ This means designing processes in an iterative manner; creating space between engagements; and, building a timeline in collaboration with stakeholders that accounts for the emotional and psychological aspects of conflict prevention – as outlined in point 3 above, concerning the requirements for fostering shared meaning and purpose. Community buy-in will not happen automatically and can be undermined by short timeframes and promises that are not kept: “local communities are tired of external actors coming and saying they are going to make things better and then six months later the funding runs out.”⁸⁴ Conflict prevention at the local level must be long-term and sustainable.

8. Measure success/effectiveness based on the perceptions of key stakeholders

Conflict prevention engagements are notoriously difficult to assess when it comes to the issue of ‘success.’ Those engaged with for the purposes of this study believe that success will depend of course on the objective of the initiative. However, when designing the initiative, the

⁸⁰ Anderson, Gunnar, Senior Iraq Analyst, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), July 2019.

⁸¹ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (20)

⁸² Anonymous, phone interview, July 2019 (8)

⁸³ Hassan, Nabil, Partner at Beyond Group, phone interview, November 2020.

⁸⁴ Khatib, Lina, Head of MENA Programme, Chatham House, Phone Interview, July 2019.

goal should be at least in part *transformative* and, assessing or not whether the initiative reached its goals must be based on the perceptions and insights of the local stakeholders themselves.

But what is a transformative project? According to some stakeholders, a project is transformative if the actors engaged “have changed their perceptions towards one another, are more susceptible to the idea of peace and if they wish to continue their engagement.”⁸⁵ If the measure of a project’s success is ‘transformation’, then actors enter into projects with the long-term goal of fostering organic levels of cooperation: the desire to cooperate within the context of the initiative itself but also with one another in the broader conflict context. Indeed, as one stakeholder stated, “it is a question of changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviours.”⁸⁶

Another way to measure whether actors have changed their perceptions is to measure the extent to which a shared meaning has been created. This shared meaning can be evident in the stories or even the jokes shared between participants who would previously have not even dared to speak to one another. But is this measurable or tangible enough? As one stakeholder stated: “the way people reach an understanding, it is not always something that is spoken, it is something that grows in the tacit mind.”⁸⁷ We can only discover this by asking programme participants directly.

This is an approach which moves away from measuring success based on the achievement of formalistic indicators contained in results frameworks that are pre-defined – often by international actors – towards an understanding of impact that can only be achieved by engaging directly with local people themselves. As such, at the beginning of a conflict prevention initiative, stakeholders can be engaged in a process to understand what kind of change they expect or hope will be achieved as the result of the engagement in question. They can then be engaged to think through what kind of indicators would be appropriate for understanding whether or not these aspirations/goals have been achieved. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks can then be adapted and/or complemented accordingly.

In many instances, this type of stakeholder engagement can then also help fine-tune the design of the project since it will provide invaluable insights on what is needed to achieve change. Such a methodology does not necessarily need to replace more ‘traditional’ results frameworks, which have their own benefits in terms of understanding whether, for example, the theory of change or the assumptions and risks were the right ones. However, this participatory methodology helps ensure that conflict prevention initiatives are responding to the needs and aspirations of actors at the local level, thereby helping to guarantee more locally-grounded projects.

Engaging local actors in this type of process of ‘impact measurement’ is not simple and must be undertaken carefully and in a conflict-sensitive manner. The goal may not necessarily be to understand the material or physical changes but to understand whether a “space has opened up to discuss certain issues that could not previously be discussed.”⁸⁸ For example, whether or not the initiative has increased trust among citizens and between citizens and local municipalities.

⁸⁵ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (6)

⁸⁶ Simpson, Ruth, Country Director, Lebanon & Programme Development and Learning Management, International Alert, July 2019.

⁸⁷ Ahlberg, Joel, Specialist Dialogue and Peace Mediation . Folke Bernadotte Academy, Phone interview, May 2019

⁸⁸ Anonymous, phone interview, December 2019 (20)



Photo credit : UNDP Lebanon

III. To what extent are these insights reflected in international policies and strategies?

Overview:

This section of the paper interrogates the extent and nature of the international-local ‘gap’. Where policies and/or frameworks might recognise a particular ‘lesson’, it is beyond the scope of this analysis to detail or ascertain the extent to which that feature is then implemented in a meaningful manner. Although it is not the focus of this current report, it is necessary to be sensitive to this second potential ‘gap’ between policy frameworks and strategies on the one hand, and their effective implementation on the ground on the other.

Before exploring the extent to which the above eight lessons are reflected in international policy frameworks, it is important to note that ‘the local’ itself is not central to the majority of the frameworks reviewed. This means that a consideration of the importance of local approaches, and tailoring international support to be in harmony with and in support of such local approaches is not prioritised (only eight out of twenty frameworks emphasise explicitly the importance of local approaches/international-local alignment). Even if we consider that some frameworks may use terms such as ‘households’ or ‘communities’ to refer to sub-regional ‘levels’, this broadly suggests a gap in the way in which international actors are engaging in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and moreover, points to implicit focus on national-level conflict prevention efforts.

Interestingly, for example, while Resolution 2558 in 2020 on the Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding and sustaining peace mentions “local peacebuilding stakeholders”⁸⁹ in passing, the 2018 Sustaining Peace Resolutions⁹⁰ do not explicitly acknowledge ‘the local’. Indeed, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) and the General Assembly jointly define sustaining peace “as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account.”⁹¹ To some extent, this represents a new trend whereby the local is taken for granted, or merely viewed as important “background information”⁹² to be taken into consideration when engaging with the ‘lead actors’ at the national level.

Similarly, an *explicit* recognition of the need to link international efforts with local ones and to be mindful of the need to incorporate and/or be responsive to local approaches is missing from the ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’ (2011), which mentions ‘local’ four times, but focuses on *country*-led initiatives (without defining what is meant by that). The Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy (2016) mentions ‘local’ 21 times but with a view to ‘including the local’, without nuancing what it means to engage meaningfully at the local level through attention to local approaches. Additionally, the ‘Common Agenda’ (2021) mentions ‘local’ nine times, but beyond “putting people at the centre”⁹³ of its actions, does not acknowledge the important role of local actors and approaches or the need to bridge/align international and local efforts.

Several frameworks are noteworthy in their more nuanced and focused way of addressing issues related to local approaches and which, therefore, can serve as building blocks for other international actors:⁹⁴

⁸⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2558 (2020), page 2.

⁹⁰ “In the twin resolutions adopted in 2016 on the review of the peacebuilding architecture (Assembly Resolution 70/262 and Council Resolution 2282 (2016), Member States stressed that, while Governments have primary responsibility for peacebuilding and sustaining peace, the international community, including the United Nations system, can do more to build peaceful and resilient societies.” A/73/890–S/2019/448, 30 May 2019. The Sustaining Peace reconceptualised conflict prevention as an ongoing, long-term endeavour.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Tschudin, Alain and Trithart, Albert., ‘The role of local governance in sustaining peace’, IPI, February 2018, page 1.

⁹³ Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, page 7.

⁹⁴ More details can be found in Annex Two.

- The UK Government’s approach to Stabilisation ‘A guide for policy-makers and practitioners (2018)’ is one of the most ‘local-sensitive’ frameworks reviewed, mentioning ‘local’ 256 times, with a strong focus on local actors, local political structures, and understanding the local context to prevent conflict by grappling with local formal and informal power holders.
- The ‘Pathways for Peace’ report (2018) mentions ‘local’ almost 300 times and clearly prioritises local approaches, paying particular attention to mechanisms for local-level mediation and conflict resolution, and the need to effectively address local-level narratives that may be feeding into violence.
- The World Bank’s ‘Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence (2020-2025) mentions ‘local’ 91 times, with a strong focus on the vital role of the local private sector. Similarly, the World Bank’s ‘Reconstruction for Security, Equity and Sustainable Peace’ in MENA (2020) mentions ‘local’ 259 times, focusing on the grappling with a meaningful understanding of “local conditions, local actors, and their incentives.”⁹⁵
- Out of the bilateral strategies reviewed, the US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (2020) mentions ‘local’ 37 times and pays particular attention the imperative of identifying ‘locally-driven solutions’ just as the Danish-Arab programme (2017-2022) mentions the word ‘local’ 190 times with an exceptionally strong focus on local demand, local partnerships and understanding the local context through long-term dedication.

Towards international-local alignment

International policies and strategies that largely reflect **the importance of ensuring gender and youth considerations** tend to be integrated into conflict prevention efforts. This can also be attributed – at least in part – to the normative frameworks established as part of UN Security Council Resolutions in 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security* and 2250 on *Youth, Peace and Security*. This is reflected in the fact that fifteen out of the twenty strategies and frameworks reviewed reference gender and youth as vital considerations for conflict prevention initiatives.

The 2011 ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’, for example, recognises that the “empowerment of women, youth and marginalised groups...is at the heart of successful peacebuilding and statebuilding”⁹⁶ endeavours” The UN Sustaining Peace Resolutions outline the need to support the participation of women and youth in peacebuilding processes, “including through advocacy with national stakeholders, and support to women’s and youth organisations.”⁹⁷ Similarly, the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy (2016) underscores the need to promote the role of women in peace efforts. And, the 2018 ‘Pathways for Peace’ report recognises that the meaningful participation of women and youth in decision-making and long-term policies is “fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels in a very fast-changing world,” to provide only a few examples from the frameworks surveyed.

While important, the majority of these references lack the level of detail required to make them meaningfully adapted to the local level: they give few insights on the ‘how’ and the conflict-sensitive aspects of the findings above are missing. Stakeholders working at the local level underscore the importance of taking a ‘do no harm’ approach to inclusion. They suggest that failure to include youth and gender considerations in a manner that is sensitive to the context, to the specific nature and intensity of the barriers to inclusion can backfire and actually create rather than prevent conflict.

⁹⁵ World Bank, *Reconstruction for Security, Equity and Sustainable Peace* in MENA, 2020, page 29.

⁹⁶ *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* (2011), page 1.

⁹⁷ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 70/262 and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282 on ‘Sustaining Peace’ (2016), page 8.

The notion that *dialogue and other peacebuilding approaches should be mainstreamed into development and humanitarian initiatives* has gained significant ground amongst international actors in recent years and was, to some extent, ushered in by the 2011 ‘New Deal on Statebuilding and Peacebuilding’, which lay out a new approach to transitions out of fragility, with dialogue at the heart of development endeavours. This approach forms, moreover, part of the ‘Sustaining Peace’ resolutions which emphasised the importance of a comprehensive approach to preventing conflict focused on addressing its root causes, “including through inclusive dialogue and mediation”⁹⁸.

This approach is also embedded in the concept of SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions as an ‘integrator’ (i.e. an SDG which is intricately linked to other SDGs and has the capacity to accelerate the implementation of other SDGs). Furthermore, the 2018 UN-World Bank ‘Pathways for Peace’ report underscores the importance of departing from traditional socio-economic policies, when necessary, in order to seek “inclusive solutions through dialogue”⁹⁹ and tailored solutions. Moreover, the World Bank’s ‘Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence’ (2020-2025) insists upon the need for regular and open dialogue with civil society and community ‘as part of risk mitigation strategies’.

The alignment between international and local actors on these issues can be correlated with broader efforts to bridge the peace-humanitarian and development divides, as encapsulated in the increasing focus on the ‘triple nexus’. As such, there is a normative framework for these efforts already in place. At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, for example, the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon – with the support of eight UN Agencies, the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) signed and endorsed a commitment to implement ‘*New Ways of Working*’ (NWOW) that meet “people’s immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability.”¹⁰⁰ NWOW has been characterised as a “transformative commitment to transcend humanitarian and development divides focusing on what results are needed to be achieved on the ground collectively.”¹⁰¹

As a result, several MENA specific strategies also reflect the commitment to mainstream dialogue and peacebuilding approaches. By means of example, the Danish-Arab Partner Programme (DAPP, 2017-2022) places a significant emphasis on the value of dialogue as being an integral part of their engagement, “instrumental to reform, such as social dialogue for labour market reform, interreligious dialogue and Arab-Arab dialogue for experience exchange.”¹⁰²

The notion that *local, national, regional and international dynamics/processes should be ‘linked’* is explored in several international policies and frameworks. That said, few provide specifics on how to connect these levels for the purposes of conflict prevention, nor of the drawbacks of failing to do so in a meaningful way. For example, the 2011 ‘New Deal’ underscores the need to foster “confidence between people, communities, the state and international partners”¹⁰³, and the EU’s Foreign and Security policy (2016) emphasises the need for a “multi-level approach to conflicts”¹⁰⁴ acting at the local, national, regional and global levels.

One of the most sophisticated articulations is in the UK Government’s approach to Stabilisation (2019). The policy advocates for external actors to undertake a careful analysis of the underlying division of power and resources, and how any intervention may affect these dynamics, factoring in “local, national, regional and transnational actors and their interconnections.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Switzerland’s Foreign Policy Strategy (2020-2023) discusses the

⁹⁸ Ibid. Page 2.

⁹⁹ Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (2018), page 18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, page 26.

¹⁰¹ United Nations, ‘Multi-stakeholder Regional Workshop on the New Way of Working—Central and West Africa’, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Development Programme, June 2018.

¹⁰² Danish-Arab Partnership Program (DAPP) – 2017-2022, page 8.

¹⁰³ New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2011), page 3.

¹⁰⁴ Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security policy (2016), page 29.

¹⁰⁵ The UK Government’s approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners (2018), page 20.

need for horizontal coherence between government departments, federal offices, and Parliament and vertical coherence between the local, cantonal, national, bilateral, regional, multilateral, and global levels.

However, explicit references to the ‘local’ – as mentioned above – are missing from the Sustaining Peace Resolution 2282. Consequentially, the Sustaining Peace resolutions need to strengthen partnerships between “international, regional and sub-regional organisations, international financial institutions, and civil society organisations.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, emphasising formal institutions over informal ones and overlooking the vast array of relevant entities, groups and individuals at the local level. Similarly, the ‘Pathways for Peace’ report emphasises the need for peacebuilding objectives to be “prioritised in national, regional and local peace and development plans”¹⁰⁷ without drawing any particular attention to the need to connect them, particularly in a meaningful and conflict-sensitive manner. The recent Secretary-General’s report, ‘Our Common Agenda’, does not explicitly address the issue of ‘linkages’ at all.

The importance of *fostering long-term engagements focused on building trust* is addressed partially by the majority, but certainly not all, international and regional policy frameworks and strategies surveyed. Indeed, while many frameworks and strategies address the importance of long-term engagements, and others focus on the need to build trust, very few emphasise both and the fact that they are mutually-reinforcing. The ‘New Deal’, for example, focuses on the need to build mutual trust by providing aid and managing resources more effectively, but does not underscore in any particular detail the importance of long-term engagements. The ‘Sustaining Peace’ resolutions, on the other hand, focus on the need for “long-term engagement in conflict-affected countries”¹⁰⁸ for effective peacebuilding, without mentioning the fact that long-term commitment also helps to foster trust.

Interestingly, the World Bank ‘Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence’ explores the need for both long-term engagements and trust but focuses on building trust in institutions and not necessarily (also) trust between international actors and local counterparts. As a result, many of them have become weary of the promises of international actors. Indeed, several frameworks point to the need to put in place conflict prevention mechanisms and processes that will lead to benefits ‘over the long-term’ without necessarily alluding to the necessity for international actors themselves to commit for the ‘long-haul’. The ‘Common Agenda’ is a good case in point: “the proposals in this report” it suggests – alluding to the Secretary-General’s report on the Common Agenda – “would lead to approaches being put in place that will benefit future generations over the long-term”¹⁰⁹.

Bilateral actors surveyed seem to be more cognisant and explicit about the nature of the commitments required to see change, albeit without necessarily alluding to the importance of building trust. The UK’s ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review’ (2015), for example, outlines the fact that engagement in fragile and conflict-affected settings requires “patient, long-term work,”¹¹⁰ just as Germany’s Guidelines on ‘Preventing Crises, resolving conflicts, building peace’ (2017), underscores such work as being “time-consuming, complex and fraught with setbacks or new escalation of violence”¹¹¹ (the latter is one of the few that emphasises both the need for “long-term strategic approaches” as well as “trusting partnerships”).¹¹² Moreover, the Danish-Arab Partnership Program (2017-2022), in their lessons learnt exercise, found that “managing expectations of local partners carefully and nurturing long-term mutual trust in sensitive areas”¹¹³ is paramount.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016), page 8.

¹⁰⁷ Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (2018), page 39.

¹⁰⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016), page 5.

¹⁰⁹ Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary-General, United Nations, page 44.

¹¹⁰ National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (UK) (2015), page 64.

¹¹¹ Federal Government of Germany - Guidelines on Preventing Crises, resolving Conflicts, Building Peace (2017), page 70.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Danish-Arab Partnership Program (DAPP) – 2017-2022, page 5.

Selected conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks

Selected conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks	Is local a priority in the framework?	Lessons Learnt (Organised in order – from high level of integration to low level of integration in frameworks)							
		LESSON 6	LESSON 5	LESSON 4	LESSON 7	LESSON 1	LESSON 3	LESSON 2	LESSON 8
		Conflict-sensitive youth and gender lens	Mainstreaming dialogue and peacebuilding approaches	Linkages across levels	Long-term and focused on trust	Locally-led context analysis	Foster shared meaning and purpose	Go beyond the 'usual suspects'	Measure success & effectiveness based on perceptions
Key _____									
● Addressed ● Not addressed ● Partially addressed									
Multilateral conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks									
New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2011)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Twin resolutions: UNGA resolution 70/262 and UNSC Resolution 2282 on 'Sustaining Peace' (2016)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security policy (2016)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pathways for Peace (2018)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
EU Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach (2018)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Twin resolutions A/RES/75/201 and S/RES/2558 on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (2020)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
World Bank Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence (2020-2025)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary General (2021)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bilateral conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks									
National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (UK) (2015)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
The UK Government's approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners (2018)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Switzerland - Peace & Security, Prosperity, Sustainability, digitization (Foreign Policy 2020-2023)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Germany - Guidelines on Preventing Crises, resolving Conflicts, Building Peace (2017)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sweden – Strategy for Sustainable Peace 2017-2022	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
US - Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (2020)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MENA specific prevention and peacebuilding multilateral and bilateral frameworks									
Canada's Middle East Engagement Strategy 2016-2022	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation with MENA 2021-2025	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
World Bank - Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA (2020)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Switzerland Strategy MENA 2021-2024	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Danish-Arab Partnership Program (DAPP) – 2017-2022	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Total number of references (out of 21)	17 (of which 9 are partial)	15 (of which 12 are partial)	14 (of which 10 are partial)	11 (of which 7 are partial)	12 (of which 10 are partial)	8 (of which 7 are partial)	6 (of which 4 are partial)	5 (of which 4 are partial)	3 (of which 3 are partial)

The international-local 'gap'

While the above areas represent building blocks where the international community can make progress towards being better aligned with the best practices and insights of local actors and approaches, there are other areas where wide gaps have been identified between the insights advanced by local actors and the approaches of international actors. These areas will require significantly more work in order to bridge the international-local gap'.

While the New Deal emphasised the support required to build the capacity of government and civil society leaders and institutions to lead peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts, **ensuring locally-grounded and locally-led conflict analysis** is rarely the focus. While several actors point to the need for: actions to be “led by national actors and supported by the international community”¹¹⁴ ('Pathways for Peace'); “locally-determined paths out of conflict”¹¹⁵ (UK Government); and the need to understand “local conditions, local actors and their incentives”¹¹⁶ (World Bank, Reconstruction for Security, Equity and Sustainable Peace in MENA – 2020), there is little focus on what this looks like in practice. While Germany, for example, is one of the few to reiterate the common mantra that “actions must be guided by specific conflict and context analyses”¹¹⁷, none of the international policies or strategies outline a role for local actors in conflict analysis. There appears to be an implicit assumption that such analyses will and should be led by international actors.

Similarly, the concept of **going 'beyond the usual suspects'** receives little attention amongst international actors. The Secretary-General's 'Common Agenda' is one of the few frameworks that speaks to the need for “more inclusive multilateralism”; unlike most frameworks, the 'Common Agenda' is also quite clear about the diverse range of voices beyond the State that should be included, “such as: parliaments, subnational authorities (cities and local and regional governments), civil society, faith-based organizations, universities, researchers and experts, trade unions, the private sector and industry, and local and grass-roots movements, including those led by women and young people.” In a similar spirit, the UK Government 'Approach to Stabilisation' discusses the need for engagement with a wide range of stakeholders: “formal and informal power-holders but also as far as possible civil society, business, religious leaders and other non-state actors.”¹¹⁸

The Sustaining Peace Resolutions also make reference a long-list of stakeholders that need to be engaged (international, regional and sub-regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society organizations, women's groups, youth organisations, and the private sector) without making any reference to the needs, within these specific groups, to go 'beyond the usual suspects' and/or to make efforts to reach out to more marginalised groups. The other frameworks do not explore this issue at all. It should be noted that none of the frameworks explore the ways in which international bias and 'ways of doing things' may be contributing to an implicit focus on 'usual suspects'. Moreover, none of the frameworks make suggestions on 'how' to ensure a more inclusive approach in practice.

The issue of **fostering shared meaning and purpose** is alluded to in a minority of policy frameworks and generally in a relatively 'high-level' manner. There are three frameworks in particular that stand out. The 'New Deal', for example, underscores the importance of supporting “one national vision and one plan” which must be “country owned and -led;”¹¹⁹ the Sustaining Peace Resolutions make similar statements, indicating that the term 'sustaining

¹¹⁴ Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict (2018), page 37.

¹¹⁵ The UK Government's approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners (2018), page 14.

¹¹⁶ World Bank - Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA (2020), page 18.

¹¹⁷ Federal Government of Germany - Guidelines on Preventing Crises, resolving Conflicts, Building Peace (2017), page 52.

¹¹⁸ The UK Government's approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners (2018), page 36.

¹¹⁹ New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2011), page 2.

peace' itself must be understood "as a goal and a process to build a common vision of society."¹²⁰ The World Bank's MENA Strategy goes one step further and emphasises the notion that addressing the drivers of conflict requires a vision that "spell[s] out the past landscape of actors and their incentives,"¹²¹ going on to describe in detail the type of participatory process required.

The other policies and frameworks do not make meaningful reference to the need to foster shared meaning and purpose. While most international frameworks *do* reference the imperative of *inclusivity* - at the heart of how to foster shared meaning and purpose - none reference other vital aspects, including the need to protect civic space, to consider the critical(positive and negative) roles played by the media or the need to create new narratives with more inclusive identities.

Measuring success/effectiveness based on the perceptions of stakeholders is one of the least considered aspects in this analysis. This is an interesting finding given that the 'New Deal' was emphatic about the need for indicators to be developed between fragile states *and* international partners, based on a combination of objective measures and the view of people on the results achieved. While the 2030 Agenda discusses the need for country-led evaluations, it does not go into detail on the nature of those evaluations. The other frameworks do not discuss the need for perceptions-based reviews and evaluations.

¹²⁰ United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/262 (2016), page 2.

¹²¹ World Bank - Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA (2020), page 32.



Photo credit : Lindsay Mackenzie, UNDP Iraq

IV. Conclusion: Bridging the international-local ‘gap’

What works?

The study suggests that ‘What works?’ in local approaches to conflict prevention in the Arab States region can be summarised in eight key lessons:

- ensure locally-grounded and locally-led conflict analysis;
- go beyond the ‘usual suspects’;
- foster shared meaning and purpose;
- consider if, when and how to link local, national, regional and international dynamics/processes;
- mainstream dialogue into humanitarian and development initiatives;
- integrate gender and youth-related dimensions in a context/conflict-sensitive manner;
- foster long-term engagements focused on building trust;
- measure success/effectiveness based on the perceptions of key stakeholders.

These lessons, articulated by over 100 local and international actors with extensive experience of working at the local level and engaged with for the purposes of this study, are not specific to any particular realm of conflict prevention. As such, they can be integrated into all conflict prevention programmes and initiatives, provided they are then tailored to the context at hand and adapted as and where necessary. They point to the need for international actors to be more responsive to the local context, more coherent in the way they work across ‘levels’ of action, and more deferential to the knowledge of local actors and the effectiveness of local approaches.

Policy implications

While these lessons and insights are not particularly ‘new’, the study suggests that they are not consistently reflected in the conflict prevention policies and frameworks of international actors. This points to an important international-local gap when it comes to conflict prevention initiatives in the region and suggests an ongoing focus on national-level initiatives on the part of international actors and stakeholders. This international-local gap suggests that too often international efforts are dislocated from or in tension with local efforts. It further suggests that international actors could do significantly more to harmonise their efforts with those of local actors, and therefore with the local approaches that they use. In the absence of a greater closing of this ‘gap’, international efforts run the real risk of not only being suboptimal in their achievements, but of also ‘doing harm’.

Moreover, this study suggests that international actors are more likely to align with local approaches in areas where an extensive normative framework already exists. Consequently, international policies and frameworks were more aligned, for example, on the need to include women and youth in a meaningful way and to mainstream peacebuilding approaches into development and humanitarian efforts as a result of the UN Security Council Resolutions and the HDP nexus, respectively. While there are important elements within the local approaches that are not (yet) adequately reflected in the frameworks of international actors, a close alignment in practice is more likely if the efforts of international actors are anchored in a meaningful analysis of the context, and undertaken in a conflict-sensitive manner.

Currently, however, there is no normative framework on local approaches to peace or on the harmonisation of local and international efforts to prevent and resolve conflict. As such, there are no UN Resolutions on this topic, and guidance on what it means to work at the local level remains nascent, uneven and fragmented. And yet, this study suggests that some international policies and frameworks *are* more ‘locally’ sensitive than others, and these policy frameworks can provide important building blocks for a normative framework of this nature.

While there is not one framework that can be considered ‘local-sensitive’, many of the frameworks contain promising elements which, when combined, could help form the basis for more extensive work in this domain. In particular, the: UN-World Bank Pathways for Peace report (2018); the EU Conclusions on the Integrated Approach (2018); the World Bank ‘Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence’ (2020-2025); the UK Government’s approach to Stabilisation (2018); Germany’s ‘Guidelines on Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflict, Building Peace’ (2017); and, the US ‘Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability’ are broad frameworks with key elements that demonstrate a desire to harmonise better with local approaches. In the Arab States Region, the World Bank’s ‘Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA’ (2020) and the Danish-Arab Partnership Program (2017-2022) are also note-worthy in this regard.

Efforts to better align international and local efforts, and ensure that international efforts are cognizant of local approaches, are also well-reflected in initiatives that did not fall under this study. For example, Interpeace’s work on ‘*Principles for Peace*’¹²² is designed to better enable local, national and international actors to craft more inclusive approaches to result in long-term sustainable peace. Moreover, the Global Partnership for Prevention of Armed Conflict’s work on ‘*Strengthening the Implementation of Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*’¹²³ is likely to lead to important findings in this regard. And, the 2020 *United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*¹²⁴ also reflects a large number of the key insights described here. Taken together, these findings suggest that there is greater scope to move towards a more robust and comprehensive normative policy and programming framework on local approaches to peace.

Avenues for future research

There are two promising avenues for further research that arise as a result of this study.

First, given the three different understandings of what it means to work at the ‘local’ level, greater research could shed light on the type of practices that are most effective within each. These three understandings of the local – as ‘geographic’ (sub-national context, “community” or village level); ‘bottom-up or endogenous’ (homegrown processes and solutions); and ‘through the lens of resistance to outside interference’ – may have different implications for the type of conflict prevention tools and practices that are most likely to be effective. Given that ‘local’ is understood differently amongst stakeholders, therefore, what does this mean for *how* and in which type of contexts these eight lessons are implemented?

Second, given the focus amongst stakeholders on ‘negative’ conceptualisations of conflict prevention, i.e., focusing on addressing the drivers of conflict, it would be helpful to deepen an understanding of what it means in practice to work on the drivers of peace. Thus, using the eight lessons identified, a promising avenue for research includes identifying conflict prevention practices that can work on the drivers of conflict *and* the drivers of peace respectively - particularly since understanding how to work on peace drivers is less widely understood amongst policy-makers and practitioners alike. What are the tools and practices associated with each of the eight lessons that can best address and support (respectively) the drivers of conflict and the drivers of peace?

¹²² <https://www.interpeace.org/principles-for-peace/>

¹²³ <https://www.gppac.net/strengthening-implementation-peacebuilding-and-sustaining-peace>

¹²⁴ https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/un_community-engagement_guidelines.august_2020.pdf

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Annex One: List of stakeholders interviewed for this study

Name	Position	Organization
Abouaoun, Elie (Dr.)	Director of Middle East and North Africa Programmes	United States Institute of Peace (USIP)
Ahlberg, Joel	Specialist in Dialogue and Mediation	Folke Bernadotte Academy
Anderson, Gunnar	Consultant	International department for Swedish Association of Local authorities and regions
Balian, Hrair	Director	The Conflict Resolution Programme, The Carter Center
Bhari, Raj	Senior Peacebuilding Advisor	Peaceful Change Initiative
Eleiba, Ahmed	Senior Programme Officer - Syria portfolio	Swisspeace
Epple, Tim	Research Associate	Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh
Gärde, Johan (Dr.)	Associate Profession in Sociology of Religion (Uppsala University), a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences	Uppsala University and Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College
Hammoudeh, Dawood	Acting Country Coordinator in Jerusalem for the Quakers	Acting Country Coordinator in Jerusalem for the Quakers
Hamzeh, Manal	Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies/Gender & Sexuality Studies	New Mexico State University
Hassan, Nabil	Partner & Consultant	Beyond Group Consulting
Jadallah, Abdullhadi, Alma, Kommon (Dr.)	President and Managing Director	Kommon Denominator
Jarjour, Riad (Dr.)	President	The Forum for Dialogue and Culture
Khatib, Lina (Dr.)	Head of MENA Programme	Chatham House
Mahmoud, Youssef	Senior Advisor (former UN, Under Secretary-General)	International Peace Institute
Maktary, Shوقي A.	Senior Regional Conflict Sensitivity Advisor - MENA	Search for Common Ground
Megevand-Roggo, Beatrice	Regional Director for the Middle East	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue,
Mitri, Tarek (Dr.)	Director (former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya)	The Issam Fares Institute on Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB)
Molesworth, Tim	Senior Peacebuilding Advisor	Peaceful Change Initiative
Pattison, Corey	Social Development Specialist	World Bank
Safa, Oussama	Chief of Social Justice Section	UN-ESCWA
Simpson, Ruth	Acting Country Director, Lebanon & Programme Development and Learning Management, EMENA	International Alert
Veen, Van, Erwin	Senior Research Fellow	Clingendael
Weichselbaum, Geoffrey	Co-Founder	Democracy Reporting International

Annex Two: Analysis of multilateral and bilateral conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks

Policy Frameworks and Strategy	Is 'local' a priority in the framework?	Lessons Learnt							
		Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 6	Lesson 7	Lesson 8
		Locally-led context analysis	Go beyond the 'usual suspects'	Foster shared meaning and purpose	Linkages across levels	Mainstreaming dialogue and peacebuilding approaches	Conflict-sensitive youth and gender lens	Long-term and focused on trust	Measure success & effectiveness based on perceptions
Multilateral conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks									
New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2011)	While the framework mentions 'local' 4 times, local approaches are not a priority. The new deal is more focused on country-led not locally-led and will use more of a "broad range of views from multiple stakeholders and the public." (2)	More focused on the national level than on the local level.		We will develop and support one national vision and one plan to transition out of fragility. This vision and plan will be country-owned and -led, developed in consultation with civil society and based on inputs from the fragility assessment.	An essential pre-condition for progress in all of the New Deal's commitments is to foster confidence between people, communities, the state and international partners. (3)	a country-led one vision and one plan, a country compact to implement the plan, use the PSGs to monitor progress, and support inclusive and participatory political dialogue. We recognise that an engaged public and civil society, which constructively monitors decision-making, is important to ensure accountability. (2)	We also recognise that constructive state-society relations, and the empowerment of women, youth and marginalised groups, as key actors for peace, are at the heart of successful peacebuilding and statebuilding. They are essential to deliver the "New Deal". (1)	We commit to build mutual TRUST by providing aid and managing resources more effectively and aligning these resources for results. We will enhance transparency, risk management to use country systems, strengthen national capacities and timeliness of aid, improving the speed and predictability of funding to achieve better results. (1)	Recognising that building peaceful states requires long-term efforts and incremental approaches, we will implement the "New Deal" between 2012-15, as a trial period. (4) By September 2012, a set of indicators for each goal will have been developed by fragile states and international partners, which will allow us to track progress at the global and the country levels. These indicators will combine objective measures with measures to understand the views of people on results achieved. (1)
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Mentions 'local' 10 times, most being in relation to the involvement of local authorities, and local communities in regards to goal 6, local culture in regards to goal 8, and local materials in regards to goal 11. While the Agenda take into account these local actors there is not a local					While the Agenda mentions national reports and regional dialogue as tools for assessments of progress (77), there are no indication of engaging in local dialogue and the agenda is generally very state-centric with the focus primarily on the national, regional and global levels.	We must redouble our efforts to resolve or prevent conflict and to support post conflict countries, including through ensuring that women have a role in peacebuilding and State-building. (35)		Follow-up and review processes at all levels will be guided by the following principle(s): They will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, reliable and disaggregated. (74)

	priority as the 2030 agenda has a more broad focus.								(g)
Twin resolutions: UNGA resolution 70/262 and UNSC Resolution 2282 on 'Sustaining Peace' (2016)	No use of the word local in the resolution		Recognizing that the scale and nature of the challenge of sustaining peace calls for close strategic and operational partnerships between the United Nations, national governments and other key stakeholders, including international, regional and sub-regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society organizations, women's groups, youth organizations, and the private sector, taking into account national priorities and policies (3)			Emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace, particularly through the prevention of conflict and addressing its root causes, strengthening the rule of law at the international and national levels, and promoting sustained and sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, social development, sustainable development, national reconciliation and unity including through inclusive dialogue and mediation. (2)	To support the participation of women and youth in peacebuilding processes, including through advocacy with national stakeholders, and support to women's and youth organizations (8)	Recognizes that effective peacebuilding must involve the entire United Nations system, and in this regard, emphasizes the importance of joint analysis and effective strategic planning across the United Nations system in its long term engagement in conflict-affected countries (5)	
Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security policy (2016)	Mentions 'local' 21 times, but the policy is more centered around local inclusion, but not with a priority to local approaches. The policy is more of a blend of top-down and bottom-up efforts.						This also means promoting the role of women in peace efforts – from implementing the UNSC Resolution on Women, Peace and Security to improving the EU's internal gender balance. It entails having more systematic recourse to cultural, inter-faith, scientific and economic diplomacy in conflict settings. (31)	Our peace policy must also ensure a smoother transition from short-term crisis management to long-term peacebuilding to avoid gaps along the conflict cycle. (51)	-
Pathways for Peace (2018)	The word 'local' is mentioned almost 300 times, and the framework is written with a local priority to prevention. "Responses to risks need to be established that draw	The principles—targeted, inclusive, and sustained—mark a shift in thinking about prevention (see table 2); to have greatest impact they must be applied at all levels from the		Risk assessment should be based on a joint prioritization of risks, with national and local ownership, and include agreed-upon indicators that allow trends to be monitored over time.	Peacebuilding objectives need to be prioritized in national, regional and local peace and development plans. (39)	Preventing violence requires departing from traditional economic and social policies when risks are building up, or are high, and seeking inclusive solutions through dialogue,	Enhancing the meaningful participation of women and youth in decision making, as well as long-term policies to address the economic, social,	Prevention must be sustained over the time needed to address structural issues comprehensively, strengthen institutions, and adapt	

	on mechanisms for local-level mediation and conflict resolution, and address narratives that could be contributing to violence mobilization at the central and local levels." (38)	global, through the national, to the local. Action needs to be led by national actors and supported by the international community to be effective. (37)		(38)		adapted macroeconomic policies, institutional reform in core state functions, and redistributive policies. (3)	and political aspirations of women and young people are fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels in a very fast-changing world. (3)	incentives for actors to manage conflict without violence. It is easy, but wrong, to see prevention as a trade-off between the short and long term. (xxv)	
EU Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach (2018)	While the approach only mentions 'local' 6 times, the EU council describes the approach as having a local priority and the Council stresses the "importance of local ownership, inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability of supported actions, by engaging with national and local authorities, communities and civil society." (3)				The Integrated Approach respects and reaffirms the various mandates, roles, aims and legal frameworks of the stakeholders involved. It is applied at the local, national, regional and global levels (multilevel) as needed and throughout all phases of the conflict. (2)	It underlines the need to further build up the mediation capacities of the EEAS to assist in prevention and resolution of local and national conflicts and further work on the ability to rapidly deploy mediation expertise to EU delegations and in support of other international and regional organisations whenever appropriate, also with sufficient emphasis on its use in early action. It also encourages the EU to support local actors for peace, including insider mediators and continue to deepen cooperation on mediation with the UN and other international and regional organisations. (5)	The Council underlines the key role of women, in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, and youth in conflict prevention and peacebuilding and all relevant subsequent resolutions. (3)	A more coherent approach increases the effectiveness of the EU's efforts and thereby paves the way for long-term sustainable peace and development. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of effective humanitarian civil-military coordination, as appropriate, in order to facilitate dialogue and enhance interaction between civilian and military actors. (7)	
(Update) Twin resolutions A/RES/75/201 and S/RES/2558 on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (2020)	There is no local priority as both the GA and the SC resolutions mentions 'local' only one time in regard to local peacebuilding.	-		Reaffirming that "sustaining peace" should be broadly understood as a goal and a process to build a common vision of a society, ensuring that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account. (1)	Encourages Member States and the entire United Nations system, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, including regional and subregional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society				

					<p>organizations, local peacebuilding stakeholders and, where relevant, the private sector, to continue to take action to implement the resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and to advance efforts to bring greater coherence to peacebuilding efforts, in support of national peacebuilding priorities, and in particular in conflict-affected countries. (2)</p>				
<p>World Bank Strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence (2020-2025)</p>	<p>The framework mentions 'local' 91 times and is heavily focused on the local private sector. WBG also "recognizes the intractable challenges of FCV, and that the full commitment of local and national actors is imperative to achieve progress." (2)</p>	<p>In FCV contexts, this calls for donors and development partners to adopt a context-specific, conflict-sensitive approach based on adequate due diligence, diagnostics, and risk analysis and citizen engagement. Such an approach identifies factors that divide societies; provides a clearer understanding of local contexts to avoid aggravating social tensions, reinforcing power imbalances, or exacerbating conflict risks; and may also help promote accountability, sustainability and local ownership. In these contexts, it is important for the WBG to</p>	<p>It will focus on the most vulnerable and excluded groups. Inclusion is difficult to achieve because in polarized environments, the inclusion of some groups can be perceived as a threat, sometimes at the expense of other groups. This is a complex balancing act for policymakers and requires sound communication to avoid frustration with programs that are perceived as unfair or discriminatory. In these contexts, the WBG will engage more systematically in policy dialogue with governments and support various modalities for engagement with citizens, civil society,</p>		<p>The WBG's efforts are most effective when they are designed and implemented to foster synergies with local and national actors and international partners in the peace, security, development, and humanitarian arenas, based on the mandate and comparative advantage of each institution. (16)</p>	<p>Development programming should be careful to follow "do no harm" principles, without bias toward specific groups or entities. This entails active monitoring and engagement with partners and heightened attention to communication and transparency. Risk mitigation strategies are anchored in Regular and open dialogue with civil society and communities, including conducting short, regular perception surveys among project beneficiaries. (24)</p>	<p>Efforts should be scaled up, in partnership with international and local actors, to address these challenges as well as to help youth play an active role in addressing FCV drivers and building local resilience. WBG operations need to explore how best to provide opportunities for young men and women to play positive roles in their economy and society and for their voices to be heard in decision-making. (19)</p>	<p>The WBG is adopting a long-term focus on the capacity and integrity of core institutions. Strengthening institutions that provide a direct interface between the state and citizens is a priority of WBG engagement on a par with delivering core services, conflict resolution and grievance redress mechanisms, justice, and in some cases, security. Trust is related to an institution's effectiveness as well as to how fair and inclusive it is perceived to be. (19)</p>	

		engage with civil society organizations (CSOs) and local actors that continue to operate on the ground. (17)	and community-based organizations. (18)						
Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary General (2021)	However, 'local' is only mentioned 9 times and the framework does not focus on a local priority. "Building on good models from elsewhere in the system, the United Nations Secretariat will develop a policy that puts people at the centre of all its actions and takes into account the impact of intersecting personal characteristics, such as age, gender and diversity." (72)		More inclusive multilateralism is marked by a genuine possibility for States from all regions and of all sizes to engage in collective action, notably including a stronger voice for developing countries in global decision-making. It also means inclusion of a diverse range of voices beyond States. In addition to intergovernmental organizations, this can include parliaments, subnational authorities (cities and local and regional governments), civil society, faith-based organizations, universities, researchers and experts, trade unions, the private sector and industry, and local and grass roots movements, including those led by women and young people. (68)		The renewed social contract. Based on three foundations: Trust; inclusion, protection, and participation; measuring valuing what matters to people and the planet. Page 23 is a chart showing all the aspects of the social contract		Building on the existing women and peace and security agenda and its principles of prevention, demilitarization and equality, the new agenda for peace would place women and gender equality at the heart of peace and security (61)	The proposals in this report would lead to approaches being put in place that will benefit future generations over the long term. (44)	
Bilateral conflict prevention and peacebuilding frameworks									
National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (UK) (2015)	While 'local' is mentioned 25 times, a local priority is only in relation to domestic security efforts and not as a part of the project on global influence.				Success depends on strong local, national and regional partnerships. (64)	Our approach requires a consolidated, whole-of-government effort, using our diplomatic, development, defence and law enforcement capabilities, as well as drawing on external		This requires patient, long-term work. Success depends on strong local, national and regional partnerships, and on a rules-based international order. (64)	

						expertise (64)			
The UK Government's approach to Stabilisation: A guide for policy makers and practitioners (2018)	The framework mentions 'local' 256 times and has a strong local priority with a focus on local actors, local political structures and understanding the local context to prevent conflict. "If we do not understand who has power (formally and informally), who is in conflict with whom, cultural traditions, gender norms, historical sensitivities, local specificities, physical and geographic factors and much else." (34)	The UK puts engagement with the politics of conflict at the heart of its stabilisation activity. The UK seeks to help local partners restore security and create political opportunities and openings, such that a locally-determined path out of conflict can be found. (14)	We must commit to local ownership but think carefully about what that entails. Rather than blindly delivering local ownership, the emphasis should be on regular two-way dialogue and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, formal and informal power-holders but also as far as possible civil society, business, religious leaders and other non-state actors. (36)		External actors must undertake a careful analysis of the key conflict elites and the deals and bargains that exist between them, the underlying division of power and resources, as well as an understanding of how any intervention may affect these dynamics. These dynamics must be looked at in the broadest terms, factoring in local, national, regional and transnational actors and their interconnections. (20)	External actors, including the UK, may also decide to directly mediate, or support the development of confidence-building measures (CBMs) as they try to establish first steps towards an initial deal or bargain between elites. (95)	The need for good contextual analysis is not unique to stabilisation, but it is equally if not more important than in other contexts. We must understand the different stakeholders involved (including groups who may face additional barriers to participation, such as women, young people and people with disabilities) (116)	CBMs must engender trust between parties. (95)	
Switzerland - Peace & Security, Prosperity, Sustainability, digitization (Foreign Policy 2020-2023)	The strategy mentions 'local' 8 times, and while it is mentioned that improving economic development is with a local focus, there is no indications of a local priority in the strategy.					Core elements of its political culture, such as power sharing, dialogue facilitation and inclusion of all interests are becoming more important for foreign policy. Switzerland will continue to develop its capacities to contribute to peaceful conflict resolution as a mediator, and to facilitate processes in this respect, including in its role as host state. (9)		One of the primary objectives of this strategy is to ensure greater coherence across all foreign policy issues and between foreign and domestic policy. This requires a future-oriented understanding of coherence – one that is sought horizontally between government departments, federal offices and Parliament but also vertically at the local, cantonal, national, bilateral, regional, multilateral and global levels. (6)	
Germany - Guidelines on	The guidelines	"Political order				The Federal	The goals of	Peaceful	

<p>Preventing Crises, resolving Conflicts, Building Peace (2017)</p>	<p>mentions 'local' 67 times and are generally focused on adding local value and local ownership, and has a local priority. "We are guided by the fundamental concept of local ownership." (52)</p>	<p>requires acceptance by the respective population and needs to be based on the local concepts of legitimacy, with the local actors being prepared to assume responsibility for local developments. That is why all measures of crisis prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding require an individual strategy for every country and every region. There are no standard solutions. This is why all our actions must be guided by specific conflict and context analyses." (52)</p>				<p>Government is bolstering these institutions (like peace committees, peacebuilding ministries or reconciliation commissions) , e.g. by assisting with advice and equipment. In addition, civic capacities for peace are strengthened, e.g. by supporting local reconciliation initiatives and dialogue processes. (80)</p>	<p>Germany's involvement are: to reduce social inequality, with particular attention paid to marginalised sections of the population and youth. (96) The dignity of each individual, gender mainstreaming and gender equality, non-discrimination and human security are at the core of Germany's actions. (47)</p>	<p>transformation of societies in post-war situations is time-consuming, complex and fraught with setbacks or new escalations of violence. That is why long-term strategic approaches are needed, as are trusting partnerships and the concerted efforts of the various governmental and social actors. (70)</p>	
<p>Sweden – Strategy for Sustainable Peace 2017-2022</p>	<p>While the framework mentions 'local' 9 times, the strategy is described as abroad approach of prevention of armed conflict, peacebuilding and statebuilding, human security, and strengthened role for women and for young people in fragile and conflict affected situations. There is an emphasis on local, but it is not the priority.</p>					<p>Need for a close interplay between humanitarian aid, long-term development cooperation, political dialogue and mediation as well as coordinated and complementary measures at national, regional and global level. (4)</p>	<p>Strengthened participation of women and of young people and other key stakeholders during critical stages of national and local dialogue and peace processes and reconciliation. (3)</p>		
<p>US - Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (2020)</p>	<p>The strategy mentions 'local' 37 times and prioritizes understanding local dynamics. "This Strategy outlines a new framework for the United States response to global fragility. It elevates</p>	<p>This Strategy prioritizes learning, data-driven analysis, diplomacy, and information-sharing to understand local dynamics, target interventions, and hold actors</p>			<p>Embassies will target diplomatic efforts based on data-driven analytics, coordinate external messaging, and provide a platform for collaboration across United</p>	<p>Assist national and local actors, including, inter alia, civil society and women leaders, to broker and implement durable and inclusive peace agreements or ceasefires and related transitional</p>	<p>Strengthen local civil society and private sector networks, inclusive of women, youth and members of faith-based communities and marginalized groups, in order to</p>	<p>The United States will invest in both short-term efforts to mitigate escalating conflict risks and longer-term efforts to address underlying vulnerabilities of violent conflict and</p>	

	prevention, addresses the political drivers of fragility, and supports locally driven solutions." (6)	accountable. However, it is not using a locally-led context analysis.			States Government departments and agencies. This platform will help understand the complex, local, national, and regional political dynamics in fragile states and regions, including windows of opportunity and emerging risks. (16)	justice and accountability provisions. (8)	meaningfully participate in conflict prevention, governmental reform, and peace building efforts. (8)	other largescale violence. (7)	
MENA specific prevention and peacebuilding multilateral and bilateral frameworks									
Canada's Middle East Engagement Strategy 2016-2022	'While 'local' is mentioned 10 times, the strategy is more about humanitarian assistance and cooperation with other NGOs, the UN, and the RCRC. Their strategy is not with a local priority, but more on gender, governance, and economic growth						Canada's strategy focus on providing lifesaving gender-responsive assistance, and the response and support to participation and empowerment of women and girls. They also support activities that consider specific social, cultural, protection needs of women and girls.		
Strategy for Sweden's regional development cooperation with MENA 2021-2025	There is no local priority as 'local' is only mentioned one time						The importance of women's meaningful participation will also shape the strategy's implementation. (5) In addition, the participation of young people – particularly young women – will be highlighted.		
World Bank - Reconstruction for Security, Equity, and Sustainable Peace in MENA (2020)	The word 'local is mentioned 259 times and there is a strong local priority throughout. Chapter 1 argues for an updated approach focusing, though not exclusively, on local conditions, local actors, and their	An analysis of traditional reconstruction efforts showed the need in contexts of fragility, conflict, and violence to understand local conditions, local actors, and their incentives to	As part of the research for Building for Peace, the World Bank partnered with RIWI Corporation ¹ in March–July 2019 to assess the views of people in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen—on what the international community has	An analysis of traditional reconstruction efforts showed the need in contexts of fragility, conflict, and violence to understand local conditions, local actors, and their incentives to address long-term challenges	The approach suggests that engagement starts with a more comprehensive, integrated, and dynamic assessment of the actors and their incentives when planning	To address the MENA region's plight, this report is anchored on two of the areas of the broader World Bank FCV Strategy—remaining engaged during crisis situations and escaping the fragility trap. Remaining engaged	The RIWI survey in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen shows that the inclusion of all segments of society, as well as the inclusion of women and youth, is seen as an element that has been lacking in	The report stresses the importance of remaining engaged with the broadest group possible of state and nonstate actors—local, national, and international—to develop a long-term vision for	In the annex there is a description of an area-based approach. This method is the only approach that emphasises "the use of participatory tools and approaches for community-based

	incentives. (29)	address long-term challenges and pursue sustainable peace. (18)	managed to achieve in healing these conflict situations. In total, 4,455 Iraqis, 4,514 Libyans, and 5,195 Yemenis fully completed their surveys, with roughly the same questionnaire used in all three countries. (5)	and pursue sustainable peace. (18)	interventions. It emphasizes ways to gain greater understanding of all actors and how they relate to institutions and structural factors in order to better calibrate interventions that produce not just outputs but achieve intended results. (3)	means ongoing dialogue and potential involvement with a broad group of traditional and non-traditional actors—local, national, and international—to develop a long-term vision for sustainable peace in countries mired in high intensity crises. (2)	previous peacebuilding interventions. Any sustainable peace effort has to take into account the economic and institutional constraints present on the ground and to begin creating sustainable economic opportunities for these groups in the formal sector (35)	sustainable peace. (3)	assessment, mapping, action planning, settlement planning, coordination, implementation, and monitoring to help build trust, generate ownership, strengthen community cohesion, efficiently identify needs, manage expectations, and work with communities to solve complex problems." (104)
Switzerland Strategy MENA 2021-2024	While 'local' is mentioned 30 times in the strategy, there is no local priority as most mentions are in relations to other focus areas, or support for local authorities etc.	-							
Danish-Arab Partnership Program (DAPP) – 2017-2022	The word 'local' is mentioned 190 times and there is a strong 'local' priority. "The demand for DAPP engagement among many if not all local partners is strong. Local partners emphasize mutual respect, understanding of country contexts, professionalism and long-term dedication as characteristics of Danish partners." (7)	The program also uses context analysis that are locally-led to understand contextual risks in the MENA region. These analysis are included in the annex 4.		Ensuring alignment to national policies and development plans of focus countries is a DAPP priority to be pursued by strategic partners in dialogue with their local partners. (11)		DAPP is an instrument for building trust through dialogue and partnerships. "Dialogue has been used to describe (i) an inherent part of the approach applied by Danish partners when connecting with MENA partners and (ii) other types of dialogue instrumental to reform such as social dialogue for labour market reform, interreligious dialogue and Arab-Arab dialogue for experience exchange." (8)	The programme builds on successes and results of the previous phase. The partnership approach remains a key modality and is enhanced in this programme. There is a stronger emphasis on youth and gender equality as separate engagements and crosscutting priorities throughout DAPP. (1)	"Lessons learnt by strategic partners include more value for money by focusing on fewer but larger interventions, managing expectations of local partners carefully and nurturing long-term mutual trust in sensitive areas such as prevention of torture." (5)	
Total number of references (out of 20)	8/20	8/20	5/20	6/20	11/20	14/20	16/20	12/20	3/20



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