Political Leadership to Prevent and End Conflict

Analytical Paper on WHS Self-Reporting on Core Responsibility 1 of the Agenda for Humanity

This paper was prepared by:[1]

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Executive Summary:

Core Responsibility 1 of the Agenda for Humanity on preventing and ending violent conflicts, and the four transformations it contains – transformation 1A on political leadership, 1B on acting early, 1C on staying and investing, and 1D on being inclusive in decision-making – is both farsighted and **in lock-step with broader efforts for conflict prevention, at the United Nations and beyond**.[2]

As of June 2017, forty-eight (48) stakeholders had reported under one or more of the four transformations. Non-governmental organizations (**NGOs) and Member States represented the overwhelming majority of these stakeholders**, with NGOs the single largest constituency reporting under Core Responsibility 1.

Many of the reported activities, tools and initiatives demonstrate a consistent effort by stakeholders to advance the conflict prevention agenda over a number of years. Recurrent themes in the self-reports included efforts to work in **cross-pillar or through whole-of-government approaches** to address the root causes – and not just the proximate causes or triggers – of violent conflict. Also featured prominently were efforts to build or strengthen **early warning systems**, conduct **joint conflict analysis**, and develop or support specialized **financing instruments** for high-risk, fluid contexts. Civil society stakeholders in particular highlighted their **advocacy work** to raise the profile of conflict prevention domestically and internationally.

Several stakeholders cited their work **in long-term partnerships** with national peacebuilding groups including traditionally **disempowered groups** such as women and youth.

The self-reports also revealed an over-reliance on a **small base of "traditional" donors** to fund prevention activities and that **measuring progress** was inherently difficult. Very few stakeholders reported under transformation 1A, on **leadership to end conflict**.

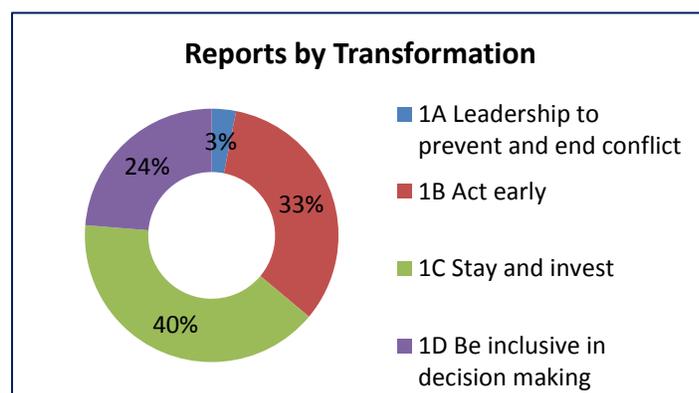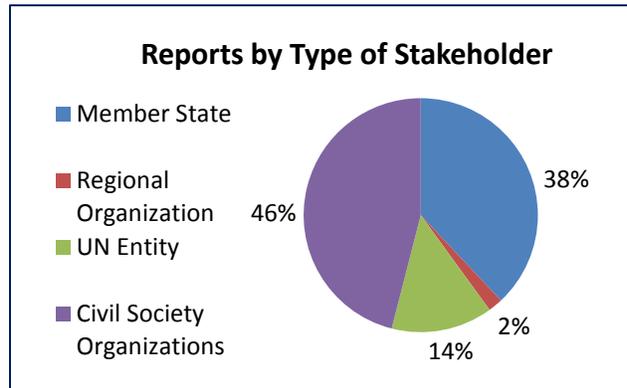[1] This paper was authored by the Policy and Mediation Division of the Department of Political Affairs.

[2] A series of global agreements reached in recent years demonstrate a shared commitment to preventing violent conflict and human suffering more broadly. These include the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the twin Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Sustaining Peace, and the Agenda for Humanity itself. Moreover, since before he took office, Secretary-General António Guterres has placed strong and consistent emphasis on the importance of preventing crises, including violent conflict. His efforts to reform the United Nations system are guided by the overarching goal of bringing the UN system together for prevention. Several important UN partners are also undertaking significant processes of reflection and reform with regard to conflict prevention: the World Bank and United Nations are conducting a flagship joint study that will set out ways in which development assistance can contribute to preventing violent conflict.

Most significant progress made across reporting on Core Responsibility 1 – Political leadership to prevent and end conflict

A range of activities, tools, and initiatives were reported on under Core Responsibility 1 – particularly under transformations 1B, 1C, and 1D. Many initiatives and tools under these three transformations demonstrate efforts to work in **multidisciplinary, "cross-pillar" or through "whole-of-government" approaches**. This has been an emerging good practice for well over a decade, but is nonetheless challenging to implement.

Reports by Type of Stakeholder

- Member State — 38%
- Regional Organization — 2%
- UN Entity — 14%
- Civil Society Organizations — 46%

Several stakeholders highlighted **early warning systems**. The European Union mentioned its Conflict Early Warning System (EWS). Spain reported its intention to establish an early warning network among its embassies and technical cooperation offices in the field, while Germany reported on its intentions to establish a new early warning unit in its Federal Foreign Office and to hold regular high-level inter-ministerial exchanges on early warning signs. UN early warning systems were also mentioned. The World Food Programme reported on its co-chairmanship of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness, and Switzerland mentioned its support to the Human Rights Up Front Initiative. Others reported a focus on building the capacity of national and regional partners for early warning.

Hand in glove with early warning systems is the ability to conduct **joint, shared analysis**. Stakeholders conveyed a strong sense that early warning systems will only be as good as the information that flows through them. World Vision, for example, discussed its conflict analysis tools, such as "Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts" and "Good Enough Context Analysis for Rapid Response", and promoting multi-stakeholder, inter-agency analyses to yield better data. The European Union explained that its early warning system used a "light-touch methodology for joint conflict analysis with international partners".

Reports by Transformation

- 1A Leadership to prevent and end conflict — 3%
- 1B Act early — 33%
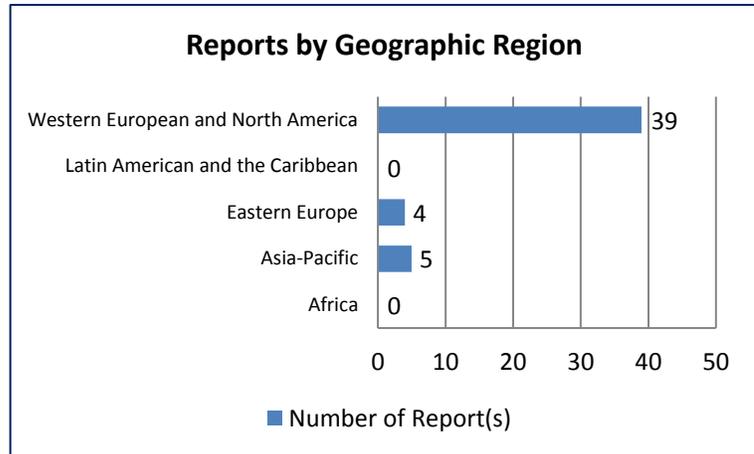- 1C Stay and invest — 40%
- 1D Be inclusive in decision making — 24%

The creation of and investment in specialized risk-tolerant and quick-disbursing **financing instruments**, such as the UN Peacebuiding Fund (PBF) can be used to incentivize joint analysis, but also to finance catalytic, rapid-response engagements, even in highly volatile contexts. The PBF business model is arguably an exemplary one for conflict prevention and resolution, and some of the PBF's main donors, including the United Kingdom, included their support for the PBF in their self-reports.[3] The UK also committed to increase funding for its "Conflict, Stability and Security Fund" and to invest at least 50% of the

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[3] A number of the PBF's other top donors, Sweden, Germany, Japan, did not include the PBF in their self-reports.

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Department for International Development's budget in fragile states and regions in every year from 2016 to 2020, making "a major investment in global stability".

Several **NGOs** mentioned their **advocacy** work on conflict prevention, which is aimed primarily at governments. Some of this work is focused on an NGO's national government: Trocaire, for example, reported on its advocacy engagement with the Irish

Reports by Geographic Region

Region	Number of Report(s)
Western European and North America	39
Latin American and the Caribbean	0
Eastern Europe	4
Asia-Pacific	5
Africa	0

government. Advocacy work can be closely targeted: InterAction's work in the US includes the publication of an annual "Foreign Assistance Briefing book, a resource to new political appointees." A lot of this work is conducted jointly in the context of networks which bring together organizations from the global North and South, though some is also regionally-driven. In the latter category is Humanitarian Aid International, a global Indian NGO, which works in the Asia Pacific with its partners to "take up discussion with respective governments and other stakeholders to advocate for seeking solutions to conflicts".

Several NGOs highlighted their **long-term partnerships with local peacebuilding organisations**. Peace Direct described its work with local organizations on areas from helping with fundraising, to monitoring and evaluation, to analyzing conflict drivers. Cordaid reported on its commitment to equip and empower local communities to become leaders in social transformation in seven fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Lastly, stakeholders reported on their work to **empower and include women and youth; promote inter-faith dialogues, and reach out to national civil society groups** more generally, as part of their efforts to promote **inclusive decision-making**. Several stakeholders had created special funds or earmarked monies for women and youth windows. The Peacebuilding Support Office reported that the PBF was the first fund to reach, and exceed, the 15 percent target of projects focused on gender equality and women's empowerment set by the Secretary-General in 2010. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) mentioned its commitment to the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, which was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit. World Vision reported that it is deeply committed to scaling up the engagement of faith actors in preventing, responding to, and resolving conflict; in 2017, it is partnering with other faith-based and secular NGOs to convene a forum to document local interventions by faith actors, and will publish a manual entitled "Do No Harm for Faith Groups: Muslim-Christian Edition".

The main barriers/challenges to progress

Within Core Responsibility 1, **very few stakeholders – three Member States altogether – reported under transformation 1A, on leadership to prevent and end conflict**. Of note, the five permanent members of the Security Council did not discuss their individual roles and responsibilities in that body, which is mandated to safeguard international peace and security – although the United Kingdom referenced the need to "persuade the UN Security Council" and the

"lack of political will" as a challenge to acting early to prevent conflict.[4]

One recent non-permanent member of the Security Council, did mention its championing of **monthly specialized briefings** on emerging crises to Security Council members, as well as its encouraging both a more strategic use of the Council's **"Any Other Business"** standing agenda item and **more timely and nimble Council missions**. Another Member State reporting under 1A, discussed its work as co-chair of the **Group of Friends of Mediation** in New York as one of the ways in which it demonstrates leadership on conflict prevention.[5] Another non-permanent member, reporting under 1B on "acting early", discussed conflict prevention as one of its foreign policy priorities and referenced its hosting of a **Security Council open debate on conflict prevention and sustaining peace** during its Presidency of the Council in January 2017. Switzerland mentioned its active support of the reform of the Security Council to enhance its accountability, transparency and coherence. Several self-reports mentioned their support of the **UN Charter's Article 99**, giving the Secretary-General the authority to bring any matter which in his opinion threatens the maintenance of international peace and security to the attention of the Council.

Nonetheless the fact that so few stakeholders elected to report against 1A is deeply troubling. In some cases, this may reflect a feeling of disempowerment -- that a particular country or organization is not able to prevent the "big" crises of the day. The UN Charter belies this however, placing the primary responsibility for conflict prevention with **each and every Member State**. And indeed, experience shows that the most successful conflict prevention efforts are nationally driven and nationally owned, with international actors in a supporting role.

In other cases, this may be evidence of a persistent but misguided sensitivity by Member States to conflict prevention efforts. This is most acute when a crisis has degenerated and violence looms on the horizon. Member States directly impacted may be unwilling to **"internationalize" the problem**, and see offers of assistance from external actors as threats to their sovereignty. This is where **regional and sub-regional organizations** can play a vital role, drawing on their networks of contacts, knowledge, and proximity. The European Union submitted a strong self-report for this cycle, and we would welcome more reporting from regional and sub-regional organizations in the future.

The tools, programmes, and initiatives mentioned under Transformations 1B, 1C, and 1D were disproportionately funded or implemented by **"traditional" donors or NGOs based in these same countries**. This pattern is no doubt exacerbated by the sample of self-reports available for this inaugural exercise. But there is no denying that it also reflects the reality of the pattern of broader ODA flows. There have been some modest breakthroughs through the years; Turkey for example became a new donor to the PBF, and included this commitment in its self-report. But the over-reliance for financing under Core Responsibility 1 on a fairly small group of countries represents several inherent risks, including the over-extension of these donors, especially in the current context of record breaking humanitarian needs.

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[4] France referenced a Security Resolution – 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security – but not its role on the Council. The US did not report under Core Responsibility 1. Russia and China did not submit self-reports.

[5] Interestingly Turkey, the other co-chair of this group alongside Finland, listed this work under 1B (act early) and 1C (remain engaged). This illustrates a broader trend in the self-reports where **one activity can contribute to several key transformations at once**.

Measuring progress

Many of the self-reports were silent or included vague language about **monitoring and evaluation of work** under Core Responsibility 1. Indeed, determining what works, when, and where, is not easy, and generalizable lessons learned can be elusive as each case will have its unique particularities. It will not always be possible, or wise, to give "credit" to one intervention or even to a series of interventions for having prevented or resolved a conflict. External actors seldom have this type of direct or exclusive impact; what they can aim for is effective support of nationally-owned and led prevention and resolution efforts. A weak evidence base is a common challenge shared by stakeholders reporting under Core Responsibility 1.

Despite these difficulties, a number of entities and organizations do undertake systematic knowledge management efforts, such as lessons learning exercises and after action reviews, although these efforts are not always very well-known, or packaged for public consumption. Germany's commitment to make **successful conflict prevention visible by capturing, consolidating and sharing good practices and lessons learned** in existing expert and dialogue networks is one helpful example. Sweden's hosting in May 2017 of the "Stockholm Forum on Sustaining Peace – What Works?" is another noteworthy endeavour.

Highlights of good practice

- The **International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding** (IDPS) forged new ground when it first agreed, in 2011, the **New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States** to address the root causes of conflict and fragility. Sweden, the co-chair of the IDPS, mentioned the New Deal as a key way to make its development cooperation more "preventive", as did Germany, France, Ireland, and others. Some of the issues included in the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals agreed in the New Deal were taken up in the 2030 Agenda. The underlying bargain that was struck between the g7+ group of self-described "fragile states" and their main development donors – namely more and better "quality" aid in exchange for closer cooperation on the most sensitive domestic issues – remains a work in progress. The New Deal offers a model that warrants being built on.

- Interlinked with efforts to better target root causes of violence through a new type of relationship between fragile states and their main development partners is a generalized push to improve coherence across the **"humanitarian-development-peace nexus"** and **work across silos in bilateral and multilateral settings**. Ireland highlighted its implementation of a "coherent, whole-of-government approach to conflict and fragility" in several contexts including Palestine, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Uganda. The United Kingdom discussed its 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, which acknowledges that "the achievement of development results alone is insufficient to reduce instability and violence", and reinforced the government's intention to take an integrated approach to tackling instability. At the United Nations, the ongoing reforms the Secretary-General is undertaking are principally aimed at bridging these bureaucratic silos to make the Organization more "fit for purpose". Though improvements have been made, this is unfinished work, and political and financial support to the Secretary-General's reform agenda will be essential.

Recommendations

- **Predictable, sustained, prioritized, coherent, and increased financing for conflict prevention**: The enormous imbalance between the resources spent on crisis management, be it humanitarian appeals or peacekeeping operations, versus those spent on prevention and peacebuilding, was an important theme throughout the World Humanitarian Summit. Though prevention is cheaper than cure, adequate financing is nonetheless required; this means both more sustainable and coherent financing, and increased financing overall. The twin General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on Sustaining Peace adopted in April 2016 identify funding for peacebuilding and prevention as a major challenge, and request the Secretary-General to deliver "options on increasing, restructuring and better prioritizing funding dedicated to United Nations peacebuilding activities".[6] The self-reports examined for this analysis also identify funding as a recurring challenge. Here too, support, both political and financial, for the Secretary-General's initiatives to reposition the UN development system and reform the peace and security pillar will be required from all stakeholders over the coming months and years.

- **Political will, and institutional backing for those who "go out on a limb"**: Arguably more important than everything else is the willingness of Member States, the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations, and indeed all stakeholders involved in prevention efforts, to have at times uncomfortable conversations, including or especially with close allies, when early warning signals are present. A political price may have to be paid in the short-term, and institutional backing will be required for those officials who do address highly sensitive topics such as good governance, human rights, and the rule of law. This is a lesson the United Nations has learned time and again, and continues to work to cement into its culture and practice. The membership's support in this regard remains invaluable.

[6] Resolutions A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282 (2016) are substantively identical and concluded the 2015 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture.

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