

Paix sans frontières
**building peace
across borders**



Policy Brief

Accord
an international review of peace initiatives

War does not stop at borders – why should peace?

Armed conflict does not respect political or territorial boundaries, but forms part of wider, regional conflict systems through dynamics that cross borders: refugee flows, ‘nomadic’ armed groups like the Lord’s Resistance Army, criminal networks, illicit trade in blood diamonds or small arms, or cross-border political, economic and social ties.

Policy is well established – if not always well applied – between states (diplomacy) and within them (governance). But there is a policy gap across borders and in borderlands where governance and diplomacy can struggle to reach, as conflict response strategies focus on the nation state as the central unit of analysis and intervention.

“Conflict-affected and fragile states are experiencing repeated and interlinked violence that crosses borders ... excessive focus on assistance to the individual nation state is mismatched with the challenge of transnational and cyclical violence”

World Development Report 2011 (draft), World Bank

Examples from Asia, Europe and the Caucasus, to East, Central and West Africa, Central America and the Middle East show that country-based analysis risks limited or flawed conflict responses.

It is vital to strategise holistically, focusing on a conflict and its dynamics whether or not these cross borders. How we define the ‘problem’, what constitutes ‘success’ and the strategies we adopt to get from one to the other will be very different depending on whether analysis and response is based on an individual state or on a conflict system.

Thinking outside the state

Peacebuilding strategies and capability need to ‘think outside the state’: ‘beyond’ it through regional engagement, and ‘below’ it through cross-border community and trade networks.

States are important peacebuilders. But international policy has become dominated by statebuilding as a response to conflict. Statebuilding can be limited to creating state institutions and providing services. It is not necessarily synonymous with either peacebuilding or nationbuilding and can ignore or exacerbate cross-border conflict dynamics.

Legitimacy comes from people, not from institutions, and political legitimacy in borderlands is especially complex. Borderland communities can be politically marginalised and can associate more profoundly across borders than with state capitals. In weak or fragile states, state presence in borderlands can be limited to police or military, with few social or welfare services.

Borderland communities need to be comfortable with both their identity (nationality), and the legitimacy of the institutions and services of central government (statehood).

States can do a lot to minimise tensions in borderlands by investing in them to reduce the alienation of borderland communities. More effective border management can facilitate legitimate movement and trade, maintain accountable cross-border security and encourage cooperative management of resources and infrastructure.

Building peace beyond the state

Regional integration can help to ‘soften’ problematic borders. Shared membership of regional organisations can manage state sensitivity to sovereignty through collective purpose and goals.

Cross-border conflict dynamics

Conflicts over and across borders

Conflict can be about borders that are uncertain or unaccepted. Conflict can also be across borders, and between or over borderlands. Layers of conflict dynamics can flow across several states and quasi-states, as well as across multiple levels – international, regional, national and local/provincial.

Material cross-border conflict dynamics

Borders can be ignored or contested by itinerant conflict actors. Inter-connected civil wars and insecurity complexes can involve whole regions and armed groups can seek sanctuary or anonymity across sympathetic borders or in ungoverned borderlands.

Populations can be displaced across borders. Weak, corrupt or militarised borders can interrupt essential cross-border traffic and trade, and cause resentment or be a direct source of violence and exploitation, such as in the Mano River Union in West Africa.

Criminal or narcotic networks can exist across porous and badly managed borders, such as in the borderlands between Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador, or illicit trade in blood diamonds and small arms can sustain regional conflict systems, such as in West Africa.

Psychosocial and economic cross-border conflict dynamics

Borders and boundaries can cut across ethnic or cultural sources of societal cohesion. Inequalities of political capital between communities across borders can cause tension and grievance. Contrived or contested borders can epitomise much bigger political cleavages, such as in Kashmir.

Inter-community cross-border conflicts occur where different communities have claims of exclusive access to, or ownership of, a given territory, such as in the Middle East. Irredentist or secessionist aspirations inevitably challenge borders, such as in the Basque Country or south Caucasus. War economies can be regionalised through cross-border trade, such as in the African Great Lakes.

But regional organisations are not always best placed to resolve cross-border conflicts. Regional bodies have to navigate strong political currents and regional policy needs to be carefully tailored to local contexts, institutions and capabilities.

European integration facilitated problem solving in Northern Ireland, helping to balance disparity of power between London and Dublin and providing a more level playing field for talks. And the EU has also been supporting directly local regeneration and reconciliation across the Irish border.

But the EU has not been able to engage significantly with the Basque conflict, not least due to Spanish and French resistance to ‘internationalising’ the conflict. Rather, Madrid and Paris have responded to persistent violence by the Basque separatist group ETA exclusively with security actions within and across the border, inhibiting external EU engagement on the underlying issues.

In the Horn of Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has not been able to resolve the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as neither country has been prepared to relinquish sovereignty – territorial or political. But IGAD has had more impact in Sudan, where it was central in delivering the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

It is important to differentiate regional interventions by issue as well as geography. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is a more useful body for setting up trade corridors in the Horn of Africa than either IGAD or parallel negotiations with states. But it is not necessarily the right forum to tackle conflict and insecurity.

Hard power, soft borders

Some regional responses to conflict have prioritised ‘harder’ security policy – border security, military cooperation or peacekeeping coalitions. But cross-border conflict dynamics are varied and complex and demand soft as much as hard approaches.

Cross-border security is difficult to implement in practice, as agents of insecurity often have greater cross-border mobility than agents of security. Regional initiatives that focus exclusively on security only address the symptoms and not the causes of conflict. They can struggle to engage in conflict prevention or resolution, leaving in place many of the structural drivers that underpinned cross-border violence in the first place.

“Operation Lightning Thunder was like throwing stones at bees; the swarm of bees scattered and the Lord’s Resistance Army is now stinging people everywhere”

John Baptist Odama, Archbishop of Gulu, northern Uganda

In responding to cross-border insecurity in eastern Chad, the EU innovatively sought to deploy peacekeepers across the border with Central African Republic (CAR). But when it became operational, EUFOR Chad/CAR did not patrol the insecure Chadian-Sudanese border, in particular after a peacekeeper was shot by the Sudanese army when he crossed the border into Darfur. Ultimately EUFOR’s impact on security was minimal, and Brussels’ focus on EUFOR eclipsed other forms of engagement, such as political or developmental.

Building peace below the state

Without grassroots participation or buy-in, even the most constructive regional peace initiatives struggle to produce or sustain broadly legitimate peace agreements.

Cross-border conflict response strategies can draw on local perspectives and support local peacebuilding capability. Affected borderland communities have both the insight and the incentive to contribute essential analysis of cross-border conflict dynamics. They can identify local peacebuilding priorities, structures and resources.

Sub-state cross-border networks and connections exist through social and cultural ties between borderland communities. These can provide policy entry points for regional peacebuilding.

People can play peacebuilding roles across borders that governments and intergovernmental bodies cannot. Shared experiences, traditions, social structures and kinship provide powerful tools to foster social cohesion and cooperation when diplomatic channels are blocked.

Peace economies

Cross-border trade can contribute to building trust, or establishing interdependencies across borders that provide incentives for cooperation and collective action and increase the costs of war.

Business can react faster to cross-border conflict dynamics than diplomacy or civil society. The challenge is to harness its potential for peace rather than war.

It is important to understand how trade interacts with other conflict drivers and dynamics, and to distinguish corrupt or illicit cross-border trade and regional war economies from other cross-border economic activities that can contribute to peace and development.

In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), mineral extraction and trade is often portrayed as an exclusive driver of regional violence. But weak governance, not trade, underpins conflict in the African Great Lakes – and is key to resolving it. Efforts to simply suppress the mineral trade are not only impracticable, but ignore its developmental potential and exaggerate its significance.

Trading for peace in Kashmir

Trade across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir was resumed in 2008 to develop economic linkages and build confidence between conflicting parties. Cross-LoC trade has helped to soften the border and is helping Kashmiris to re-establish links between divided families, trading communities and civil societies.

A significant development has been the formation of the Federation of Jammu and Kashmir Joint Chamber of Commerce, the first official cross-LoC institution, which connects Kashmiri civil society and traders to governmental apparatuses on both sides of the line.

But the impact of the trade initiative has been limited, both as an economic and a reconciliation enterprise. Traders have to use a highly inefficient barter system to overcome currency barriers, and exchanging goods across the LoC takes place through intermediaries, leaving little people-to-people contact.

To realise the peacebuilding potential of intra-Kashmir trade, peacebuilding objectives need to be prioritised and clearly articulated. The Joint Chamber provides a mechanism to develop and cohere the economic and peacebuilding functions of the trade initiative: to build grassroots pressure for normalising relationships across the LoC; to support sustained economic interdependence; to develop collective Kashmiri strategies and capacity; and to mainstream peacebuilding objectives.

A better understanding of the role of the mineral trade in eastern DRC within the regional war economy, and in relation to other conflict drivers and dynamics, can inform more sophisticated and effective policy.

Better regulation within DRC and across the region could help to legitimise the mineral trade and channel profits and resources to address more significant conflict challenges relating to ethnicity, citizenship and land rights, borderland marginalisation and governance.

In West Africa, regulating the ‘blood diamond’ trade through the Kimberley certification scheme has helped to de-link it from a regional war economy.

“‘Cross-border partnerships for peace’ can be forged across the Line of Control in Kashmir to fundamentally alter the conflict dynamics by strengthening Kashmiris’ collective capacity for conflict resolution”

Ayesha Saeed, NUST Business School, Islamabad

Promoting ‘trickle-up’

Connecting supra- and sub-state peacebuilding provides a way to ‘humanise’ regional peace and security, to develop policy and response architecture that goes beyond conflict management to tackle cross-border conflict dynamics at their roots.

Civil society can provide bridges into borderlands, to help track one peacebuilding initiatives to listen to the communities who live there and tap into their capability.

Academics in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador linked up with borderland and other communities affected by the spread of violence from the war in Colombia. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, women’s organisations, humanitarian agencies, environmental associations, schools and local governments – all played a role in developing a citizens’ cross-border response to border tensions.

They engaged with the media and international civil society partners to help amplify their voice. Together they built up cross-border community solidarity and capacity and were able to mobilise at critical moments of diplomatic tension and, ultimately, to challenge populist nationalist discourse between Colombia and Ecuador. The support of the Carter Center helped to connect these efforts upwards, to engage with the Organisation of American States.

The potential of Achenese refugees to contribute to peacebuilding was supported by the *Universiti Sains Malaysia* in Penang. Its Aceh Peace Programme enabled Acehnese displaced by the conflict to work for its resolution through advocacy, capacity building, networking, institution building and local (Acehnese) ownership. Since the war, many former refugees have assumed influential positions back in Aceh and have continued to champion peace.

Linking regional civil society and business networks with track one regional diplomacy can help to fill the policy gap across borders and in borderlands, and to move from regional security cooperation to conflict prevention and resolution.

Cross-border analysis of the Lord's Resistance Army conflict system

The LRA conflict has spread from northern Uganda into southern Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). Joint, regional military offensives like Operation Lightning Thunder (2008-09) have dispersed the rebellion and exacerbated insecurity for civilians across the region. The LRA now operates across an area 20 times bigger than it did before Lightning Thunder.¹

The Ugandan perspective

The problem

- LRA rooted in north/south grievances
- War in the north now over; small risk of LRA return
- Ugandan government desire to end the conflict

The response

- Military pursuit in DRC and CAR
- Amnesty programme; outreach to northern Ugandans
- Recovery and development programme to address grievances

The southern Sudanese perspective

The problem

- Foreign rebel group terrorising communities in the southwest and creating displacement and instability; one problem among many in the south
- Fear of Khartoum providing proxy support to the LRA
- Weak state presence, especially in borderlands

The response

- Authorise the presence of UPDF soldiers
- Local militias and self-defence groups set up

A cross-border perspective

The problem

- LRA is nomadic, unpredictable and primarily in survival mode
- Links with Sudan's north-south conflict; risk of potential instrumentalisation of LRA following January 2011 referendum
- LRA and government forces pose security threats to civilians across the region
- Amnesty process and messaging are not working regionally; LRA fighters considering return fear hostile communities
- Regional military offensives have primarily served to disperse violence and provoke LRA reprisals against communities
- International Criminal Court arrest warrants for LRA commanders complicate peace negotiations
- Negative perceptions of northern Ugandan Acholi people regionally

The response

- Regional strategy to encourage LRA fighters to return
- Work with affected communities to promote reconciliation with ex-fighters
- Shared regional analysis between communities and governments
- Joined-up response from UN missions and teams in countries, focused on civilian protection
- Development of national security capacities and governance
- Deal with local Acholi grievances to undercut rebel support and move from conflict management to resolution

The DRC perspective

The problem

- Foreign rebel group terrorising communities in far northeast; one security problem among many
- Weak state presence, especially in borderlands

The response

- MONUC provides peacekeeping support
- UPDF and FARDC conduct military operations against LRA
- Local self-defence groups set up

The CAR perspective

The problem

- Foreign rebel group terrorising communities in remote southeast; one security problem among many
- Weak state presence, especially in borderlands

The response

- Authorise the presence of UPDF soldiers
- Sideline the problem

Ten action points for international policy

Thinking outside the state

Develop peacebuilding strategies and capacity that can ‘think outside the state’: beyond it, through regional engagement, and below it, through cross-border community or trade networks. To function effectively, peacebuilding initiatives *beyond* and *below* the state need to be strategically linked.

Align international peacebuilding responses to tackle whole conflict systems. Policy that refers to systems rather than states can shape more flexible and appropriate responses to cross-border conflicts. It can identify actors and dynamics that exist outside state borders, such as narcotic networks that support insurgent groups, and incorporate these into peacebuilding interventions.

Building peace beyond the state

Adjust regional policy according to local contexts, interests and institutions. Regional diplomacy or organisations can help sensitivities over sovereignty, reduce perceptions of unequal power and bring practical assistance in delivering peace dividends. But regional organisations can lack capacity, and member states can prioritise national interests over regional engagement. Policymakers should assess the different roles and capabilities of regional bodies when developing regional peacebuilding partnerships.

Prioritise regional conflict prevention and resolution. Regional peace initiatives tend towards limited security cooperation. Regional organisations should focus more on conflict prevention and sustainable resolution, working with governments and civil society networks to facilitate local participation and buy-in to peace processes. Regional organisations need internal political support from member states, and may need external capacity support from donors.

Building peace below the state

Invest in borderlands. Deepening state-society relations in conflict-prone borderland areas can strengthen governance and counter alienation of borderland communities. Governments should invest in legitimate cross-border movement and trade. Border management

should involve local populations and promote accountability for inclusive and transparent border security governance.

Prioritise peacebuilding in cross-border trade. Cross-border trade can act as an entry-point for peacebuilding. The peacebuilding community has recognised the potential of contact through trade to build trust, break down stereotypes and lay foundations for interdependency. Tensions between profit and reconciliation in cross-border trade initiatives can dilute their peacebuilding impact, and so peacebuilding needs to be mainstreamed as a strategic policy objective.

Promoting ‘trickle-up’ of sub-state peacebuilding

Support cross-border community networks. Cross-border community networks can develop local collective resilience as conflicts morph and spread into new forms and territories. Official and unofficial international support can help to revive traditional cross-border community structures that have been disrupted or destroyed by violence, carrying legitimacy and authority from the past.

Tap into local actors and opportunities. Local and international civil society partners can help to identify traditional leaders and other community ‘entry points’ for cross-border peacebuilding, as well as unexpected or neglected peacebuilders such as among displaced populations. Civil advocacy can open doors when regional diplomatic channels are blocked.

Draw on local knowledge. Borderland communities have the insight and incentive to contribute to cross-border peacebuilding. Policymakers should develop mechanisms to gather local perspectives on cross-border conflict dynamics and potential peacebuilding responses.

Amplify local voices. International partnership, with governments, intergovernmental bodies, NGOs or the media, can build collective community peacebuilding capacity. International policymakers need to develop programmes that link civil society networks to regional processes.

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References: ¹Joint NGO Briefing Paper, *Ghosts of Christmas Past: Protecting Civilians from the LRA*, 14 December 2010 www.oxfam.org.uk

Cover photo: Travellers crossing the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia at Gendema in Sierra Leone. © Aubrey Wade