Capacities for Peace: South Asia

The European Union funded Capacities for Peace project, implemented by Conciliation Resources, Saferworld and their partners, supported local actors to enhance the effectiveness of early warning and early action in conflict-affected contexts. In South Asia, in the wake of a devastating earthquake which hit Kashmir in 2005 and floods which beset the region in 2014, the project activities supported a process of joint reflection and analysis of the ways that communities and governments can better prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

The project also supported a holistic analysis of regional conflict dynamics following the withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan, carried out by civil society representatives from both sides of Kashmir and Saferworld's partners from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Conciliation Resources' on-going work with partners in Kashmir builds confidence and supports transformation of the conflict in and over Kashmir through the inclusion of voices and perspectives of the Kashmiri people in peacebuilding processes.

Achievements

- The focus on early warning and response gave a practical and relevant focus to joint conflict analysis; it helped participants to think through and identify opportunities and threats for peace resulting from natural disasters, and ways to prevent violence.

- Concrete actions to improve disaster response were discussed and decided upon, including, for instance, capacity building for youth, training in first aid, and working with the meteorological offices so disaster warnings can better reach communities.

- The success and strengths of civil society roles in preventing violence and advocating for change were captured, and inspired participants to think how to further strengthen the effectiveness of these approaches.

- Lessons and ideas from civil society responses to natural disasters and advocacy approaches in other Asian countries contributed to equipping participants with the knowledge of ways to respond to crises. These included mobile applications that transmit coordinates to aid rescue efforts and traditional mud ovens that can be transported and used anywhere.

Insights

The concepts of early warning and response can be empowering for local civil society actors. It can enable more forward-thinking analysis, pre-empting tensions and threats and helping civil society to explore its own agency in such situations.

Conflict prevention processes must be relevant to context and built on local ownership. This means participants must produce their own understandings and perspectives of peacebuilding processes. One example of successful impact through local ownership analysed during the project involved religious leaders in Afghanistan redefining their discourse on jihad in order to prevent extremism. The fact that any subsequent messaging came from religious leaders themselves, articulated in a form that was understood locally, was central to their legitimacy and local acceptance.

Projects should be adaptable and responsive to concerns on the ground. The project's initial focus for analysis was Afghanistan. However, following the floods in Kashmir, the more immediate concerns of those on the ground quickly came to the fore. Allowing the project focus to shift enabled immediate needs to be addressed and analysis of the interrelation between natural disasters and conflict to be carried out.

Above: A view of Dal Lake, Srinagar, India administered Kashmir. © Conciliation Resources/Charlotte Melly

Front page: Participants discuss potential responses to natural disasters in a workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan. © Conciliation Resources/Charlotte Melly

Confidence building measures

The Capacities for Peace project explored ways in which disaster response could be more effective and have greater impact if cross-Line of Control (LoC) collaborative management mechanisms for responding to disasters were supported and implemented.

The project created opportunities for participants to develop their analysis of confidence building measures (CBMs), which aim to create the conditions for political negotiations to take place, secure greater participation of Kashmiris in the broader peace process and alleviate the impact of the conflict for those living in Kashmir. The humanitarian dimension of disaster management encourages the governments to accept a greater role for civil society, and the legitimacy of that role, in a context where public participation is limited.

The project brought together civil society representatives, academics and government representatives on both sides of Kashmir to analyse the relative success of different responses to the floods; what had worked well and what had exacerbated existing tensions and conflict dynamics.

"This workshop has begun to develop a constituency of people who can work on multiple layers of crisis response and has started to establish processes and explore mechanisms for how civil society can react to crises... We have a stronger analysis coming out of the workshop."

Waqas Ali, Conciliation Resources' partner from Pakistan-administered Kashmir

The following were identified as lessons learnt from previous experiences of supporting confidence building processes and the building blocks for developing a CBM in relation to disaster preparedness and response:

○ **Local ownership.** Confidence building measures involve sensitisation among a range of stakeholders so that the measures are locally grounded and can earn broad based support and appeal.
○ **Support structures.** In order for CBMs to make a difference on the ground they need to be supported by local institutions and infrastructure. For instance, in the case of cross-LoC trade, the Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industries supports the process and advocates for more effective trade policies.
○ **Wide range of stakeholders.** CBMs relating to disaster response should involve a wide range of stakeholders. This is a way of bringing a wider range and number of people into peacebuilding and developing greater support for the peace process.
○ **Strong communication channels.** Establishing channels of communication between different actors across conflict divides enhances coordination, confidence and efficiency of effort.
○ **On-going coordination.** Sustaining mutual trust in the implementation of joint responses requires the organisation of on-going coordination mechanisms and processes with key institutions and stakeholders.

Lessons from the Capacities for Peace project have been published by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld in, 'Effective local action: from early warning to peacebuilding', February 2016.