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Effective local action: from early warning to peacebuilding

Introduction

Violent conflict is the result of the complex inter-relations of a range of social, economic, political and environmental factors. Specific events or changes in the context may result in an upsurge in violence, but this usually only happens if the underlying conditions are ripe for that violence to emerge. Addressing these factors is an inherently long-term endeavour, and one that must ultimately be driven by domestic actors. It is, however, likely to require sustained political and economic support, as well as ongoing analysis and a willingness to adapt strategies as the context changes and evolves. Such long-term conflict prevention processes can also generate further tension, since they involve challenging existing power structures and interests. The key challenge from a developmental and peacebuilding perspective is how to support the management and transformation of these complex social changes without recourse to violence.

'Early warning' systems designed and operated by international and national actors have been considered an important conflict prevention tool since the 1990s, when violence and mass atrocities were affecting the Great Lakes region of Africa, South Eastern Europe, Latin America and parts of Asia. They are intended to identify the potential for an imminent upsurge in violent conflict and catalyse effective responses by local, national and international actors. In practice, by-and-large, they are focused towards supplying information to national and international level decision makers in order to direct resources to 'conflict hotspots'. The responses such systems generate catalyse immediate actions that aim to prevent or limit the scale and impact of violence in the short-term, and as such do not address the underlying factors that contribute to instability and tension.

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Above: Participants take part in a mapping exercise as part of a Capacities for Peace workshop in Peru. © Forum Solidaridad

Some early warning systems[1] have long-recognised that local groups have access to the best and most nuanced information and understanding of local conflict dynamics. They have therefore sought to include local groups in the gathering and (to a degree) the analysis of conflict data. The continued focus on external action, however, has resulted in local people and groups being seen primarily as the source of data, rather than active responders and key drivers of social change. Engagement has tended to be extractive; it has essentially asked the question 'how can local groups help to make early warning systems (and consequent external intervention) more effective?'

To bring about lasting improvements in people's safety and security, it is important that internationally driven early warning and early response mechanisms are part of broader, longer-term conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts carried out by multiple actors. Systems operating in isolation from peacebuilding efforts led by those living with instability or conflict and with the relationships and agency to prevent or resolve conflict are unlikely to have their desired effect. Generating data for national or international actors who do not have the resources and capacities, or political will, to act on it is unlikely to be effective in preventing violent conflict over the longer-term.

With this in mind, Saferworld and Conciliation Resources supported local people, communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) to undertake and take part in early warning and peacebuilding processes through the European Union (EU) funded Capacities for Peace project.

The Capacities for Peace Project

The Capacities for Peace project was implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld in collaboration with local partner organisations between September 2013 and February 2016. It focused on supporting communities and grassroots-led action to identify threats and prevent and respond to violent conflict and insecurity across six regional hubs. It worked from the understanding that people living closest to insecurity and conflict are best-placed to identify, and are already active in detecting, sometimes highly localised heightened risks of conflict or instability. It recognised that local people stand to benefit most from developing existing or new relationships with local, national and international actors which can enable effective preventive action.

In nearly all cases, the activities under the project were carried out in contexts where Conciliation Resources and Saferworld have existing local relationships or on-going peacebuilding programmes with subnational peacebuilding actors. This was essential to the sustainability of activities and outcomes given the project's geographic spread.[2]

"The project opened doors for us in a political sense which would not have been possible otherwise."

Edgardo Mira, CEICOM, El Salvador

The range of activities varied and was tailored to community needs, but included joint analysis of the local context and identification of potential conflict issues and corresponding responses or solutions. Activities involved local civil society, community organisations, private sector representatives, media, faith-based groups as well as local and national authorities. Importantly, the project also enabled learning from a diverse array of locally driven peacebuilding initiatives, and helped to establish or strengthen networks and relationships both between local actors – for example, through peer-to-peer exchanges – or facilitating links between local-level civil society and both state and international actors.

The evolution and definitions of early warning

Since their initial development early warning systems have gone through several stages of evolution, becoming both more widespread and sophisticated.[3] Many international donors (including the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and the European Union), regional bodies (for example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe High Commissioner on National Minorities) and national governments have developed systems, tools and approaches that guide the strategic and operational focus of developmental, peacebuilding and security-related interventions. Today, early warning systems are seen as a key element of the international community's conflict prevention tool box.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines conflict early warning as "a process that a) alerts decision makers to the potential outbreak, escalation and resurgence of violent conflict; and b) promotes an understanding among decision makers of the nature and impacts of violent conflict". An early warning system is described as a process that involves the "regular and organised collection and analysis of information on violent conflict situations. They deliver a set of early warning products (based on qualitative and/or quantitative conflict analysis methods) that are linked to response instruments/mechanisms".[4]

Shifting the focus: Agency, process and relationships

"Identifying conflict threats has to be about more than systems and tools; it needs to be underpinned by relationships of trust that enable people directly affected by violence to raise their voice and to act."

Jonathan Cohen, Acting Executive Director, Conciliation Resources

This policy brief draws on experience from the implementation of the Capacities for Peace project to identify three related insights for international support to local peacebuilding efforts and the design and implementation of future early warning systems.

Together these insights suggest that, in order for international actors to contribute more effectively to locally driven conflict prevention initiatives and for those initiatives in turn to inform and strengthen national and internationally driven early warning mechanisms, a shift in thinking and resources is needed to focus more on local agency, process and relationships.

Above: Participants during a Capacities for Peace workshop in Bangui, Central African Republic. © Charlotte Melly/Conciliation Resources

Local agency:

- Internationally driven early warning systems are unlikely to become more effective at catalysing effective conflict prevention activities if they overlook the agency, knowledge and experience of people living in conflict-affected contexts. This briefing offers examples of effective locally driven peacebuilding initiatives from a range of contexts.

Process:

- The process for gathering and analysing data can be as important as the data itself. The inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders in participatory analysis processes not only contributes to richer analysis but also builds trust, confidence and the potential for mutually supportive action.

Relationships:

- International approaches to capacity building of local actors have been overly focused on institutional capabilities and skills development and have failed to adequately focus on the relational barriers that inhibit local peacebuilders from maximising their potential impact.

Key insight I
Local agency, local action: Effective early warning and peacebuilding starts and ends with local people

First responders

It is those living in closest proximity to insecurity who are the first to detect and respond to threats and manifestations of violence, not international missions or national security forces. In the contexts covered by the Capacities for Peace project, local people and civil society groups are actively understanding and addressing conflict and insecurity through innovative local level peacebuilding initiatives. In many cases they respond by necessity – for their own security, sometimes in the absence of, or because of, state responses, and also because they have the greatest long-term stake in the peaceful resolution of conflict. They may share a common identity, language, kinship and history with people engaged in violence. They are also likely to stay engaged in conflict prevention and peacebuilding work long after international attention has moved on. As such, they are often not only the most efficient and flexible 'responders' but also potentially the most effective.

In East and Central Africa, Conciliation Resources used the Capacities for Peace project to continue to support and strengthen local peace committees in the areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In the border regions of Central African Republic, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, the state is largely absent and it falls largely to local communities to respond to the threats and incidents of violence. Local peace committees bring together local community representatives and leaders to coordinate, work together and share information to strengthen their response to the LRA and other armed groups in the region. They monitor security incidents and communicate information among villages and, where possible, to local authorities and United Nations peacekeepers, as well as mediate local conflicts and prevent the outbreak of violence.

Workshops under the Capacities for Peace project involved facilitating joint actor mapping and conflict analysis exercises with communities in the south east of Central African Republic, and the exploration of mechanisms and processes to enhance civilian protection. The committees have been putting their ideas into practice. This has improved the communication of information and alerts between different communities, increased monitoring of security incidents, and helped local community members in places like Bambouti to circumvent routes used by the LRA and thus avoid attacks. Other early warning methods which have been taken up include registers of LRA movements, radio transmissions and linking up with other organisations to improve the work of local peace committees.

External actors as convenors

However, the emphasis on local agency should not romanticise the role local people and groups play in relation to conflict. Civil society and community structures can lack representativeness, perpetuate divisive or unjust social norms or have a vested interest in conflict-generating activities, such as local resource extraction or access to land. They are not impartial and may be more aligned to a particular party to the conflict with whom they share a common history, identity or interest. These challenges are not an argument to disregard their insights and peacebuilding capabilities, but a reason to further invest in them as key stakeholders in peace. They also offer an incentive to bring divided communities together to transform the attitudes which perpetuate conflict dynamics.

External actors, such as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), can play a valuable role as convenors in this regard. For example, the participatory analysis conducted in three districts of Bangladesh supported by Saferworld through the Capacities for Peace project highlighted that the main tensions faced by communities include a lack of fair access to basic services, corruption and 'land grabbing'. These issues are a product of poor governance and associations between unscrupulous politicians, businesses and local criminal groups. The process set out during the project aimed to create safe spaces for partners and participants to think critically and collectively about their current situation and to identify ways to support communities in addressing grievances and resentment.

Participants – including community representatives, CSOs working on legal aid and women's rights, and members of the media – set up committees in each district to continue the analysis and information exchange using the methodology and approach devised collectively under the project and to act as interlocutors with local and national authorities. Some

CSOs are developing their own awareness-raising initiatives and Saferworld is working with partners to identify effective and appropriate responses via community security programmes and 'business for peace' initiatives. However, tackling highly sensitive issues such as corruption, poor governance and links to criminality remains a long-term challenge.

In Plateau State, Nigeria, participants in a Capacities for Peace workshop facilitated by Conciliation Resources and local partners came from a variety of conflicting ethnic groups who had had minimal or no previous contact with one another. A roleplay exercise, in which their roles were reversed, enabled participants to reflect on the interests, needs and positions of the other ethnic groups. The exercise generated a level of mutual understanding and empathy amongst the participants and a set of commitments to work together (and with their communities) to overcome conflicting 'indigene' and 'settler' identities – a major driver of conflict in the Plateau State. As such it was a crucial step in preventing violence.

International NGOs and donors can thus be valuable in providing spaces for people to come together who would not otherwise meet, using their relative impartiality and relationships of trust with different actors to facilitate sensitive conversations, and to leverage higher level political access and resources for local actors, who may lack the necessary relationships or influence to do so.

Bridging the response gap

Experience from the Capacities for Peace project also shows that where possible, local peacebuilders are likely to act on early warning data. They are less prone to the widely acknowledged 'warning-response gap' that is evident in many external early warning systems.

The most effective early warning and response systems "operate[s] on a principle of subsidiarity; that is that responses are implemented at the lowest possible field level first and if ineffective, then escalated".[5] Internationally conceived early warning systems can suffer from a lack of political will to respond on the part of national and international bodies, as well as institutional barriers, and/or the lack of effective operational capacities on the ground.[6] Learning from the project and from analysis of other early warning initiatives indicates that the best way of linking warning and response is by bringing diverse stakeholders together and discussing long-term '*strategies* for response' rather than immediate '*options* for response'; that is, coordinated approaches that seek to address the underlying vulnerabilities that allow for the emergence of violent conflict, rather than maintaining a focus on immediate risks.[7]

In Colombia, a longer-term strategy is driving a peacebuilding initiative which involves civil society, local people and local authorities. Conciliation Resources' local partner organisation Acción Social y Económica (CIASE) has spearheaded an initiative which supports Colombian citizens to think ahead towards the implementation phase of the Colombia peace process and to analyse the 'capacities' necessary for society to transition towards peace. Through the project, participants developed indicators for measuring 'capacities for peace'. The process and significance of developing an index of capacities for peace, around themes such as the empowerment of civil society, transformation towards a state which is respectful of human rights and the environment, and the construction of active citizenship, were particularly valued by participants.

Above: Participants debating during Capacities for Peace workshop in Bogota, Colombia. © Charlotte Melly/Conciliation Resources

"I have been working on traditional indicators of violence. Why do I see the event as so important? Because we do not have a conversation with communities and we do not have indicators which allow us to get this information from communities. It allows us to have a much wider perspective which is not just about security but also about peace, and to start to look at what capacities are required and how to build them."

Marta Cecilia Gualteros, participant in the Colombia Capacities for Peace activities, Director of a Foundation 'Progresamos', Chamber of Commerce, Palmira

In Kyrgyzstan, Saferworld accompanied a group of CSOs to analyse the dynamics around radicalisation and violent extremism. The process enabled them to engage with a topic which has been left largely unexplored and which is subject to various (mis) interpretations, leading to ill-defined and counter-productive 'strategies' to prevent violent extremism. Members of the group were able to link this process with their local engagement through long-term mechanisms such as 'community security' programming.

The concept of community security builds on community-based policing principles, development approaches to community empowerment, as well as peacebuilding strategies focusing on tackling root drivers of conflict. As such, community security is both a long-term process promoting a community-driven approach to understanding and providing security, and an end state whereby people feel protected and valued as members of a social entity.[8] In the context of Kyrgyzstan, community security has been a key mechanism to strengthen relations between communities and authorities (including security services), as well as relations between different ethnic groups. It has also provided the space for these different actors to start tackling risks of radicalisation through activities focused on youth and inter-ethnic relations.

In Nepal, a civil society-led early warning database – the NepalMonitor.org – constitutes the only open source early warning tool with country-wide coverage, a unique and unprecedented resource in Nepal. The Monitor originally tracked violent incidents against human rights defenders and journalists but was limited in its focus and did not analyse longer-term trends in violence. In order to maximise the potential of the initiative, Saferworld used the Capacities for Peace project to bring together organisations operating in all regions of Nepal to identify key issues that lead to tension and expand the focus of the Monitor to include governance, political violence, social cohesion and identity-based conflict, resource-based competition, transitional justice, youth, and post-earthquake aid and resource distribution.

Above: Opening ceremony of a Local Crime Prevention Centre (LCPC), a key element of local peacebuilding capacities in Osh region, Kyrgyzstan. © Saferworld

Right: An elder addresses members of the community during a meeting on land conflict issues in Northern Uganda. © Saferworld/Capson Sausi

Joint analysis under the project contributed to the development of early warning analysis disseminated in the form of quarterly reports accessible via an online portal. In response to early warning information concerning political conflict in Western Nepal relating to ethnicity and federalisation, Saferworld partner, Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC), identified and supported the mobilisation of a local peace committee to mediate the dispute. Nepali partners are continuing the production of the quarterly reports via NepalMonitor.org with financial support from an international partner.

Re-orienting the focus

The clear implication for donors, INGOs and other international actors is that directing attention and resources towards supporting local people to design and implement locally appropriate conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities would enhance the detection and prevention of violent conflict and insecurity. Rather than seeking to fit local actors into externally driven early warning systems, these mechanisms should be reconfigured to better support the actions of those people, groups and institutions with the greatest potential to effect lasting change in conflict-affected contexts. This would however require a significant shift in emphasis on the part of those responsible for the design and implementation of such systems. It also implies the introduction of a fundamentally different measure of success in the effectiveness of prevention efforts: whether conflict can be averted without the need for external intervention at all.

Enhancing CEWARN's effectiveness through local peacebuilding

In the Horn of Africa, the project focused on the geographic area that straddles the border between Western Kenya and Eastern Uganda known as the sub-Karamoja Cluster. In this location, the Conflict Early Warning Mechanism (CEWARN) of the regional IGAD consists of six national Conflict Early Warning Early Response Units (CEWERUs) in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. In 2012 a new strategy was adopted to revise the mandate and protocols guiding data collection, analysis and response to conflict in the region. This included a larger role for civil society at each of these stages.

In order to inform the practical implementation of the strategy, Saferworld worked with the CEWARN secretariat, civil society partners from the region and national level CEWERUs to discuss challenges and best practice in early warning and early response including local peace committees, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and cross-border information exchange and coordination mechanisms. The process highlighted how CSOs play a critical role through capacity building of local to national stakeholders, funding or facilitation of specific peacebuilding activities or initiatives, research, monitoring and accountability, and to mobilise communities. However, in order to maximise these promising developments, external support to CEWARN needs to be evenly shared between actors involved at the regional, national and subnational level.

Key insight II
The process of generating and analysing data can be as important as the data itself

The project found that inclusion of a wide range of stakeholders in participatory analysis processes helps build constructive relationships and promote mutual understanding between groups from across conflict lines. These outcomes were as important to the sustainability and effectiveness of preventive action as the actual analysis produced.

In El Salvador, local partners were supported to engage with representatives of the army for the first time, and in Peru local partners' engagement with the Ombudsman's Office in the course of the project has helped improve the relationship between remote communities in the Amazon and the state.

Cross border tensions between Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia have afflicted the security and livelihoods of communities in border areas of both countries over several years, a situation exacerbated more recently by the outbreak of the Ebola virus. The Capacities for Peace activity brought together government officials, local NGO representatives and community members from border regions in both countries. It was the first occasion where such a group came together to conduct joint analysis in a non-adversarial setting.

"When we create space, people work together to identify solutions to their conflicts. We only encourage and accompany them in the discussions, they own the processes and the results. The Accra Declaration is an achievement for the Liberian and Ivorian governments, civil society, and the border community actors."

Janet Adama Mohammed, West Africa Programme Director, Conciliation Resources

The collaboration and increased trust generated unprecedented collective and individual commitments which were subsequently included in a landmark agreement, the Accra Declaration, signed in November 2015. All parties pledged to work to improve social cohesion and cross-border relations, for greater socio-economic development in the region. The Declaration also aims to strengthen relationships between actors at different levels, which enable local people to have greater involvement in and ownership over initiatives for peace. It demonstrates the commitment by all parties to improving security and promoting peace along the Ivorian-Liberian border and is recognised as a possible basis for future work in other West Africa border regions facing similar issues.

Building trust in the analysis

One of the obstacles to appropriate responses to early warning data or conflict analysis can be a lack of trust in the source of the analysis. Therefore, the inclusion of different stakeholders in the generation of conflict analysis helped to improve the credibility of the analysis in the eyes of 'responders' at national level, such as government or military actors, many of whom had previously been highly sceptical of recommendations put forward by civil society.[9]

"This training programme is an eye-opener for all of us. As a journalist, it has provided me with critical understanding to better assess news and stories about development challenges and local conflicts."

Shiker Khalid, Journalist, Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, where peace and security are considered the sole prerogative of the state, the Capacities for Peace project helped to strengthen the credibility of civil society representatives in the eyes of local authorities. The participatory conflict analysis methodologies and tools that were used were considered useful in generating an understanding of the drivers of tensions and conflict in a way they had not experienced before.

In Yemen, Saferworld brought together CSOs and community leaders from Taiz, authorities from the local, governorate and national levels, and international donors to discuss the security situation, the challenges that communities and security providers are facing, and ways to strengthen local to national level cooperation. Prior to the escalation of the conflict, local communities showed a willingness to play a positive role in generating a more secure environment by engaging and working in collaboration with authorities, and trust had increased between communities and security providers. Much of this work has been jeopardised by the escalation of hostilities in Yemen but youth groups and other partners continue to be active across conflict lines despite the severe limitations on movement, power cuts and food and fuel shortages.

Above: A participant makes a point during a Capacities for Peace conference in Manila, Philippines. © Charlotte Melly/Conciliation Resources

In the Philippines, a conflict analysis process brought together military and civil society actors in regions affected by conflict. As well as producing analysis which was seen as credible and potentially useful by both sets of actors, it facilitated a dialogue among

"I have participated in many workshops but found this one particularly beneficial in bringing together a diverse group of actors. I came back with a clear set of recommendations to improve cooperation with stakeholders working at the sub-national level."

Ministry of Interior representative, Yemen

them, which helped dispel some of the persistent mutual prejudices and improve relationships. Civil society representatives from the Province of Sorsogon in Bicol subsequently observed fewer reports of abuses by the army against the civilian population. The improved relationship also led to the establishment of a monitoring mechanism between the Armed Forces and the community to investigate any incidents of abuse.

In another area of the Philippines, Ifugao in the Cordillera region, the Capacities for Peace project was used to strengthen a community-based needs assessment process introduced by a local organisation. The Psychosocial Investigation and Community Analysis is an assessment carried out by and for the community, who thus feel ownership over the process and the results. The results are then shared with local authorities, enabling vulnerable individuals or groups to be identified and their needs addressed. People have testified that this process has prevented violence, reduced recruitment into armed groups and improved accountability. One indicator of its success is that while the number of reported movements of New Peoples' Army in the province is vastly higher than in all other provinces, the number of violent incidents has been lower. The project enhanced conflict analysis skills and gave the process more rigour. Those involved in the 'Ifagao paradigm', as it has become known, subsequently used the assessment to inform campaigning for the upcoming elections, by highlighting community needs to political parties.

"The people say the assessment has helped prevent violence – both in the smaller community structure and with Armed Forces of the Philippines and the New People's Army."

Joyce, civil society representative, the Philippines

New perspectives: to analysis and to participants

The use of participatory processes can broaden the range and type of early warning data and analysis available. For example, the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in an analysis exercise, including conflict-affected communities, often with divergent perceptions of what is driving conflict, who is responsible and how it should be addressed, can better capture the diversity of local perspectives and experiences that are common to conflict-affected contexts. This can be true even when the process does not reach consensus. It is also important since grievances can be as much the result of perceptions of marginalisation, exclusion or discrimination as any 'objective' measure.[10] Such perceptions are difficult to capture through the use of more quantitative, non-participatory processes and can often be better understood through sustained personal contact and exposure to the lived reality of people in conflict-affected communities, including marginalised groups and those suffering discrimination.

The workshops organised under the Capacities for Peace project in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey brought

together a range of actors to analyse dynamics around relations and tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities. Although a pressing issue in each of the three contexts, participants all highlighted how little shared analysis there has been since the beginning of the war in Syria and how little they understand the perspectives of others involved. The project provided a space for discussion between a wide range of different people including refugees, civil society, local, municipal and national authorities, INGOs, and donors, many of whom had never engaged with each other before. It led some participants, notably municipal and national authorities, to revise their assumptions about what was happening in each context and to take a more proactive approach to dealing with the situation and with each other.

Local peace pact

The Capacities for Peace activity in Davao del Norte in the Philippines in June 2014 brought together a range of local individuals from across the political spectrum to jointly analyse conflict issues in the region. Following the workshop, and as a result of the connections it facilitated, a peace pact was made by some individuals, including leaders (Datus) of the Dibabawon tribe, local government and others who participated. The pact, which is based on the indigenous peoples' traditional customary laws, sets out rules on the armed group's respect for the indigenous peoples' ancestral domain, including not carrying out any military operations on the land and respect for free prior and informed consent. The parties to the pact include the tribal leaders of the Dibabawon tribe, the Local Government Unit, the New People's Army (NPA), and legal organisations identified with the left movement. The pact led to a local de facto ceasefire between the indigenous peoples and the NPA which began in August 2014 and which has held until the time of writing.

In Kenya, participants from CSOs who took part in the capacity building workshops produced incident reports that contained analysis and recommendations for action relating to the conflicts that they are working on. For example, a network of community-based organisations, SIKOM, and the Agency for Pastoral Development engaged with the police and the respective county commissions in West Pokot and Turkana, Kenya, to analyse the conflicts that have occurred at the county boundaries as a result of cattle rustling and revenge attacks. The report contained a detailed account of the events and a number of recommendations that were directed to the national police, the Conflict Early Warning Early Response Units (CEWERU), the county government and civil society working in the two counties. These recommendations included increasing police presence in the area and encouraging them to engage with the community to identify appropriate interventions, advising the CEWERU and county governments to set aside funds for peace initiatives and link them to development programmes, among others. They are currently working together to organise and implement appropriate interventions.

It is important to note that participatory analysis is not in itself likely to be sufficient to build the political will, trust and accountability necessary to significantly improve the responsiveness of state actors. Building relations between civil society and state actors in the context of high levels of mutual mistrust requires long-term and strategic engagement. In cases where the state represents a predatory or disruptive influence this may not be desirable or possible in the immediate term. Sustained advocacy efforts are therefore also important to influence international and national policy and practice in order to establish and maintain productive and mutually beneficial relationships.

Above right: A group of participants at a Capacities for Peace workshop in Beirut, Lebanon, map out conflict dynamics. © Charlotte Melly/Conciliation Resources

Below: The youth action committee in Moghia ward 1, Bangladesh, meets at dusk. © Saferworld/Tom Martin

Key insight III

Capacity building is as much about building relations, networks and synergies as it is about strengthening skills and understanding

"The collaboration with organisations from the different countries has been new and very useful, both in terms of giving us the assurance that we are on the right track and also because we have something meaningful to share and learn."

Regional workshop participant, Afghanistan

In many contexts, one of the biggest barriers to more effective local-level peacebuilding is a lack of collaboration between local, national and international actors. Relations between the state and civil society in conflict-affected contexts can be characterised by high levels of mistrust and mutual suspicion, often driven as much by perceptions and lack of contact as by malicious intent. It can be difficult for local organisations operating in one part of a country to share lessons with and learn from others focused on similar issues elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, in many contexts local actors rarely engage with national or international actors, such as donors or regional bodies, who in turn face cultural, institutional and security constraints and rarely prioritise engagement with local civil society. Local communities can also be viewed with a degree of suspicion due to their proximity to the context and armed groups operating in their locality.

Supporting the capacity development of local actors to prevent conflict and contribute to peacebuilding therefore needs to go beyond training and building skillsets or simply providing additional financial resources to include relationship building. Indeed, an excessive focus on skills development, or a significant influx of funds to small, local organisations, with all the associated financial reporting requirements, can risk overwhelming the capacities of such organisations. It also risks fundamentally altering the nature and effectiveness of indigenous civil society organisations, as they are obliged to adopt a more standardised, donor-driven and 'projectised' approach to peacebuilding.[11]

Saferworld and Conciliation Resources' experience through the Capacities for Peace project and wider programming is that helping to improve mutual understanding and trust between those with the agency and willingness to respond to crises and conflict is a highly effective form of capacity building. As noted above, in Lebanon, even though a wide range of initiatives has been supported to improve the livelihoods of and relationships among Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities, talking to many different organisations through the project it became apparent that little space had been created for lessons to be shared among these different actors and that interactions between civil society and government municipalities were rare. The project provided a space for increased understanding of the needs and approaches of both groups and the benefits of engaging with each other to develop.

"Turkana and Pokot communities have nursed cultural hatred for ages. This and future forums should strive to demystify this negative culture. Women and youth should be prime targets for bringing about this change."

Women's consultative workshop participant, Kenya

Peer-to-peer learning between women's groups in Kenya and Uganda

Women's groups from the Turkana and Pokot communities in Kenya shared experiences with their counterparts from Moroto in Uganda where women's groups are more established and active. As a result of this peer learning and capacity building around conflict analysis, women's groups from Kenya have started to analyse the conflict corridors along the Turkana and West Pokot county borders. They then identify women along these corridors to act as focal persons for sending early warning information and mobilising action at the community level and by relevant institutions and organisations.

Principles for capacity building

The Capacities for Peace project identified a number of general principles that can help guide capacity building initiatives aimed at improving the effectiveness of local level peacebuilding efforts (and consequently improve the effectiveness of both early warning and early response systems):

Preparation and timing

Any capacity building activity should start from a thorough understanding of the context, the key actors and relationships that are instrumental to affecting change and influencing the situation. Working with local partner organisations with this local understanding and these relationships can be essential to this exercise. It will allow the process to build on the existing knowledge and skills of participants, involve the right people in the process, take into account ongoing conflict resolution, transformation and peacebuilding initiatives and ensure that capacity building is appropriately targeted and focused on the most strategic needs for peace.

The timing of such processes should also be informed by potential upcoming changes in the context (such as an election or anticipated increase in tensions). Where they do not already exist, capacity building and relationship building investments should then be made early enough to ensure that international and national level responses are informed by local actors and that in turn effective local level responses are supported more systematically.

Capacity building should be empowering

Effective local partners will not be passive recipients of external support and expertise. Local people have agency and should not be considered as the 'subjects' of external interventions. The most effective capacity building strategies listen to communities and partners and embrace a two-way approach that is mutually beneficial and builds on existing capacities and resources with due recognition of local expertise and experience. The relationships that are built through participatory capacity building need to endure beyond the initial engagement, so treating people and organisations as equal partners is crucial. In Myanmar, the project supported participants to generate their own analysis and 'vision of peace', and in the process strengthened their confidence to affirm and share this analysis with international actors for the first time including humanitarian agencies, development banks and donors.

Left: A women writes down her thoughts at an advocacy training. © Anil Poudel/Saferworld

Above right: Participants share a joke during a Capacities for Peace conference in Manila, Philippines. © Charlotte Melly/Conciliation Resources

"For me the workshop was wonderful. The systems approach has enabled me to see the vertical, horizontal and cross-sectional relationships of conflict causes and effects. It has broadened my knowledge spectrum for a more robust conflict analysis."

Conflict analysis workshop participant, Pakistan

Consider who is best placed to 'build capacity' in the particular context

Local people, with their relevant contextual knowledge and networks are often better-placed to lead capacity building processes than outsiders. In Central African Republic, for example, the project participants worked with partner organisation Solidarity and Integral Assistance to Destitute People (SAIPED) from North Eastern DRC with experience creating local protection committees in DRC, as well as training local communities on conflict prevention. Having knowledge of the conflict dynamics in the region and experience of establishing and maintaining local protection committees meant they were far better-placed than other 'international experts' would have been to carry out such training and to support the establishment of 'local peace cells' which aim to prevent outbreaks of communal violence.

Relationships and exchange are as important as 'skills'

Effective capacity building is often more about linking up different local stakeholders with diverse views and experience than didactic teaching or training. It is about fostering a collective awareness of a particular context or issue. For example, in Pakistan the project brought a range of civil society actors together to develop a common understanding of the inter-related drivers of conflict in the country, using a systems mapping methodology. Likewise, peer-to-peer learning events have allowed for local partners from different contexts (both within countries as well as regionally and internationally) to share lessons and experiences.

Building advocacy capacities

Evidence- and experience-based advocacy is critical to engaging national and international level actors. Without an understanding of the mandates, constraints and dynamics of the institutions and agencies that can support peacebuilding, and without clear strategies for communication, engagement and influence, CSOs and others may struggle to make their voices heard effectively. Capacity building should therefore seek to cultivate these skills alongside developing relationships and networks.

Plan for sustainability

It is important that external support for capacity development should be part of a longer-term engagement; one-off events are unlikely to catalyse long-term changes or lead to the development of new sustainable relationships and may raise expectations of action or resources, which are then disappointed. Where possible, accompaniment, political and technical support, financial backing and other endorsement should continue beyond the initial activity. Funding needs should be anticipated in advance and partners supported in accessing additional sources of funding.

"At this workshop I learned how to evaluate and develop policy recommendations and conclusions, and how to target appropriate audiences if we want our messages to be heard".

Conflict analysis workshop participant, Kyrgyzstan

"This Capacities for Peace workshop has begun to develop a constituency of people who can work on multiple layers of crisis response. [It] 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, workshop participant, Pakistan-administered Kashmir

"I have seen how perceptions change with regards to the conflict and relations between different actors ... commitment is strengthening and more and more people are looking towards processes of cross Line of Control cooperation."

Zafar Choudhary, India-adminstered Kashmir

Disaster preparedness in conflict contexts: early action as confidence building

In Kashmir, Conciliation Resources works with diverse communities across the Line of Control. The Capacities for Peace work took place following devastating floods there in September 2014. The focus on early warning and response proved helpful in terms of using workshops to think through the opportunities and threats for peace resulting from such a natural disaster, and to go beyond a discussion of on-going conflict issues and think through ways to prevent violence.

The project brought together civil society representatives, academics and government representatives to analyse the relative success of different responses to the floods; what had worked well and what had exacerbated existing tensions and conflict dynamics. Workshops gave participants the opportunity to think through ways to better prepare for outbreaks of violence or natural disasters. Many found the focus on what they could do in advance to mitigate the impact of crises to be empowering. They agreed ways to improve the coordination of response efforts and communication channels. The initiative brought home how collaborative responses across the Line of Control can not only vastly improve the effectiveness of responses to disasters and save lives but also contribute to confidence building within the broader peace process over Kashmir.

Above: A view of Dal Lake in Srinagar, Jammu. © Charlotte Melly/Conciliation Resources

Above right: Capacities for Peace, conflict analysis workshop, Islamabad, September 2015. © Asia Programme

Conclusion

Effective early warning and peacebuilding rely on people and institutions with the capacity and willingness to engage in prevention or response to conflict at multiple levels. Local civil society organisations and groups and individuals at community level play a key role in addressing conflict and violence through their own initiatives and in contributing to the effectiveness of the early warning and peacebuilding efforts of others. The importance and centrality of their roles are increasingly recognised by national governments, INGOs, regional and multilateral organisations and donor governments. However, recognition has yet to translate into priorities in conflict prevention, development and peacebuilding practice and interventions.

The Capacities for Peace project built on the experience and findings from an earlier EU-funded partnership between Conciliation Resources and Saferworld – the People's Peacemaking Perspectives project – from 2010 to 2012. This project, which produced participatory conflict analyses across a wide range of contexts affected by conflict or insecurity, highlighted the importance of local ownership and agency, demonstrated the importance of process, and reinforced the need to invest in and support capacities for peace at civil society and community level, in order to avoid extractive engagement and to respect and build on local agency.

Both projects required a high degree of creativity and adaptability to use limited resources across a broad range of contexts strategically, in order to implement activities which could catalyse ongoing processes or support the establishment of new ones. As a result of the Capacities for Peace project, those involved in project activities have used new and shared analysis to develop more strategic preventive responses. In some contexts people have developed new partnerships, learned new approaches and opened new spaces for dialogue and action. In others, existing peacebuilding and early warning processes have been enhanced and made more effective through the injection of new ideas and fresh perspectives.

As the world faces ever more interlinked and urgent development, humanitarian, security and migration crises, the argument for prioritising and resourcing a preventive peacebuilding approach to conflict and instability is stronger than ever. And yet there are limitations and dangers in responses reliant primarily on external intervention. As acknowledged in recent international policy processes such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,[12] the UN High Level Panel's report on Peacekeeping Operations,[13] and at the EU level since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty,[14] communities and civil society play central roles in the prevention of violent conflict and building peace and these roles need both recognition and support. The approach advocated in this report, and practised by others in the field, is also a way to strengthen long-term, local-level resilience against emerging security threats, including violent extremism and natural disasters, as well as tackle underlying and unaddressed grievances and root drivers of conflict through non-violent channels.

Notes

1 Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention, 2011: *"Early warning needs to be further strengthened within the EU, by better integrating existing early warning capacities and outputs from all sources, including from Member States, and drawing more extensively upon field based information from EU Delegations and civil society actors, in order to provide a more solid foundation for conflict risk analysis."*

2 The Capacities for Peace project engaged civil society from the following contexts: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Jordan, Kashmir, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uganda, Yemen.

3 For a comprehensive review of recent history and evolution of early warning systems, see Nyheim, D. (2015) *Early warning and response to violent conflict: Time for a rethink?*, London, Saferworld

4 OECD (2009) *Preventing Violence, War and State Collapse: The Future of Conflict Early Warning and Response*, Paris: OECD/DAC

5 Op cit Nyheim, D. (2015)

6 OECD (2009); Initiative for Peacebuilding/Saferworld (2012) *Early warning and conflict prevention by the EU: learning lessons from the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya*; Initiative for Peacebuilding/Saferworld (2011) *Early warning, early response? Learning lessons from the 2010 crisis in Kyrgyzstan*

7 Op cit Nyheim, D. (2015)

8 See Saferworld (2014) *Community Security Handbook*. www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/806-community-security-handbook

9 Garret et al (2015) *Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts: Local perspectives on large-scale conflict*, Washington DC, World Vision. See also Saferworld and Conciliation Resources (2012) *People's Peacemaking Perspectives: From conflict analysis to peacebuilding impact*. www.c-r.org/resources/conflict-analysis-peacebuilding-impact-lessons-peoples-peacemaking-perspectives-project

10 For example, see Garred et al (2015)

11 Choudry A, Kapoor D (2013) *NGOization: complicity, contradictions and prospects* London, Zed Books

12 A/RES/70/1 – Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

13 A/70/95–S/2015/446 – Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

14 At the EU level, external action-related policies adopted since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty have highlighted the importance of liaising with and including civil society organisations into EU and partner countries decision-making processes, and supporting civil society organisations in the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding: from the *Agenda for Change* (2011) and the *Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention* (2011) to the Communication on *EU support to sustainable change in transition societies* (2012) and the Communication on *Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations* (2012), and more recently the *Comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises* (2013).

For more information on Capacities for Peace, and other briefings produced in the framework of the project, please visit the respective Saferworld and Conciliation Resources websites.

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We're there for as long as we're needed to provide advice, support and practical resources. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve policies and practice worldwide.

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