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About the Authors –

Paige Arthur is Deputy Director and Céline Monnier is a Program Officer at the Center on International Cooperation.

Nationally Led Prevention: Practical Examples of Approaches to Risk and Resilience

The United Nations acknowledges that prevention is first and foremost a national priority. Indeed, governments routinely undertake efforts to reduce the risks of violent conflict, even when such actions are not formally called “prevention.” Bringing attention to nationally led efforts to reduce risks and build resilience can provide opportunities to create a positive narrative around prevention and to improve effectiveness through an accompaniment and capacity-building approach. Such efforts also show how nationally led prevention can strengthen sovereignty, particularly as it both enhances protective factors against violence and addresses risks.

The twin resolutions on sustaining peace reaffirm in their preamble paragraphs “the primary responsibility of national Governments and authorities in identifying, driving and directing priorities, strategies and activities for sustaining peace”—and hence for prevention.¹ This is not a new approach: to a certain extent, all member states undertake efforts at national level to address risks and build resilience to violence, whether they call these efforts “prevention” or not.

The resolutions provide an opportunity to acknowledge national efforts and to identify concrete ways that international actors can support them to increase their effectiveness. The objective of this policy brief is to illustrate the upstream prevention actions that countries are already doing themselves in practice, as well as to discuss the role of international actors to support nationally driven prevention strategies through partnerships and capacity building.

In this briefing, we describe nationally led approaches to building resilience and reducing risk, based on field research in Timor-Leste and Tunisia, as well as examples from a number of other countries, including the Gambia and Norway. The focus is on “targeted” prevention, in which countries identify their key risks and protective factors, and then build a strategy around them. We then identify

¹ General Assembly, “Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture,” UN Doc. A/RES/70/262, May 12, 2016.

UNODC and WHO approaches to prevention

Multilateral institutions have acknowledged that violent conflicts cannot be prevented or solved if their underlying dimensions are not understood and addressed—as highlighted in the 2011 *World Development Report on Conflict, Security and Development* (World Bank) and the *Pathways for Peace* report (UN–World Bank).

UNODC has operated on this model for years, supporting governments to address root causes of crime. The World Health Organization has adopted a health approach to violence prevention by identifying risk factors. Preventing internal, violent conflict is not so different, as reflected in the UN Development Programme’s approach. They have developed a conflict and development analysis tool, which looks into the drivers of unrest and conflict and the national capacities for peace. This analysis enables targeted support to national efforts to increase resilience to external and internal shocks.

concrete opportunities for international accompaniment and support to these processes.

Identifying and addressing risks

Upstream prevention is based on the idea that no society is completely immune to the risk of conflicts turning violent; prevention efforts of some kind should therefore be undertaken in every country at any time. Prevention, in this sense, is a constant national effort to strengthen the social contract. At the most basic level, prevention entails broad, universal actions to build a healthy society.

Universal prevention addresses the whole of society through political and economic inclusion, respect for human rights, fostering healthy interpersonal and community relationships, and building processes to manage conflicts peacefully, among others. These measures act as a prophylaxis against violence and build countries’ resilience to shocks.

More specifically, **upstream prevention also includes targeted measures** in which a national government identifies potential drivers for violence (risk factors), as well as what makes a society resilient to violence (protective factors).² This kind of approach is common—and uncontroversial—in other fields, such as the crime prevention and public health fields (see box).

Conflicts are present in every society and are often even healthy. Identifying risk factors is the equivalent of asking why (what are the underlying reasons) conflicts in a society may become violent.

The first step in implementing a targeted prevention approach is to **understand why violence may emerge**. Research shows that specific risk factors create the conditions for violence. Examples include lack of trust in the state, grievances over violations of socio-economic rights, lack of clarity on land ownership, violations of civil and political human rights, dehumanization, and the presence of facilitators of violence (e.g., guns, armed groups).³ The prevalence of risk factors and their interlinkages is context specific, and their identification requires a deep analysis of national and subnational dynamics.

Most governments identify risk factors and address them, even when they do not call it prevention. For instance, the **government of Norway** has identified the relationship between hate speech and eruptions of violence in its

² Based on the health model, this approach is called targeted prevention. It is a national undertaking where a government identifies rising tensions and risk factors and addresses them through targeted measures, including developmental, political, security or human rights efforts.

³ See, e.g., World Bank and United Nations, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (The World Bank, 2018); Oskar N.T. Thoms and James Ron, “Do Human Rights Violations Cause Internal Conflict,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2007): 674–705; Gail B. Murrow and Richard Murrow, “A Hypothetical Neurological Association between Dehumanization and Human Rights Abuses,” *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* 2, no. 2 (July 13, 2015): 336–64; Manuel Eisner, “How to Reduce Homicide by 50% in the Next 30 Years,” *Homicide Dispatch* (Rio de Janeiro: Igarapé Institute, August 2015).

Timor-Leste's national early warning system

Starting in 2004, the Center for International Conflict Resolution at Columbia University collaborated with a civil society organization, NGO Belun, to create a national early warning, early response structure that works closely with government institutions. The system consists of 66 indicators—corresponding to security incidents—that are regularly monitored. When these indicators show signs of tensions, relevant ministries, municipalities, or other actors have the opportunity to address them before they transform into full-blown violence. NGO Belun also carries out more in-depth analysis of recurrent incidents—for instance, violence committed by martial arts groups—to understand and address risk factors underlying these incidents.

society. To address this risk factor, the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality has adopted a four-year strategy against hate speech.⁴

Timor-Leste

A particularly positive example of a nationally driven approach to prevention is in Timor-Leste. In the 20 years since its referendum for independence in 1999, Timor-Leste has been at the forefront of developing nationally driven conflict prevention mechanisms and strategies.

Before the referendum, Timor-Leste had been repeatedly affected by high levels of violence, particularly during the Indonesian occupation. Following the restoration of independence and after a period of relative calm, a new wave of violence struck the country in 2006. The conflict started between elements of the military over discrimination and evolved into military and police clashes, peaceful protests that turned violent, and gangs burning down houses in the capital city, resulting in casualties and forced displacement.

After the crisis, the government acknowledged the importance of preventing a crisis rather than being purely reactive and adopted targeted prevention measures. These included enhancing political inclusion and reforming the army and police. After the 2006 crisis, a comprehensive security sector reform was undertaken. The police reform strategy includes a particular focus at the local level to ensure local ownership, including the introduction of village (Suku) officers and community policing approaches.⁵ Outreach to veterans has been a key strategy, with a Veterans Commission being created to recognize service to the nation through pensions and medals.⁶ The government has also taken steps to address conflict around land, which is an important and long-standing risk factor in Timor-Leste.

As a model worth highlighting, the government created the National Directorate for Community Conflict Prevention under the Secretariat of State for Security (now called Ministry of the Interior) to avert future crises. Through the Conflict Prevention and Response Network—an innovative partnership with other Ministries, local Government, and civil society and particularly NGO Belun—the National Directorate has been able to identify risks of conflict across the country early on. Each month, NGO Belun runs an early warning, early

⁴ Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, “The Government’s Strategy against Hate Speech 2016–2020” (Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, November 2016).

⁵ Yuji Uesugi, “Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Timor-Leste: The Challenges of Respecting Local Ownership,” Asia Peacebuilding Initiatives, January 9, 2014, <http://peacebuilding.asia/1057/>; Sarah Dewhurst and Lindsey Greising, “The Gradual Emergence of Second Generation Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste” (Kitchener: Centre for Security Governance, 2017), <http://secgovcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Second-Generation-SSR-in-Timor-Leste-January-2017.pdf>; and Todd Wassel, “Reforming Security in Timor-Leste: Can a Plural Justice System Work?” The Asia Foundation, April 13, 2016, <https://asiafoundation.org/2016/04/13/reforming-security-timor-leste-can-plural-justice-system-work/>.

⁶ Simon Robins, “A Victim-Centered Evaluation of Timor-Leste’s Transitional Justice Process” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6 (2012): p. 99.

An effective national strategy will be based on a diagnosis that combines an evidence-based analysis of drivers of violence with a thorough understanding of national and subnational contexts

response system that provides data to the Network on 66 different economic, external, political and social indicators of conflict potential. For instance, in September 2018, the early warning system documented a significant increase in acts of violence against women and girls.⁷ Once rising tensions are identified—which are commonly related to land disputes, conflicts between young people, domestic violence, and interactions between communities and the police and the military—NGO Belun engages with local communities to better understand the dynamic and to establish a participatory action plan to address the underlying issues creating tension. The Directorate also circulates the information to the Council of Ministers, which determines which Ministry is in better position to address the issue. Joint initiatives are often implemented, and while addressing the root causes for conflict, the mechanism also enables the use of mediation to diffuse tensions.

Timor-Leste has also been proactive in preventing violence around elections. The National Directorate runs a forum every five years for all political parties to dialogue before the elections and prevent violence. In addition, in several municipalities, party leaders have signed a pact to promote peaceful elections. Extensive efforts to promote transparency in the election process have also been undertaken. The positive outcome reported is that there has been an important decline in violence in each parliamentary election since 2007 (2007, 2012, 2017).⁸

The Gambia

The Gambian government averted a crisis after the former president, who had been defeated in elections in December 2016, agreed under national and international pressure to hand power over to the president-elect. To foster the peaceful transfer of power, the government identified risk factors that may provoke renewed crisis if they remain unaddressed. The government decided to establish immediate priority institutions under its transitional justice process, including security sector reform, constitutional reform, a National Human Rights Commission, and a Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). The TRRC's role has been to identify and tackle the root causes that led the country toward the military takeover in 1994, including the sources of a

⁷ See NGO Belun, "Timor-Leste Annual Conflict Potential Analysis October 2013 to September 2014" (Dili: NGO Belun, 2014); and NGO Belun, "Alert: Significant Increase in Acts of Violence Against Women and Girls in Timor-Leste" (Dili: NGO Belun, September 10, 2018).

⁸ See European Union, "Timor-Leste Shows Organises Well-Run and Peaceful Elections," EEAS - European Commission, March 22, 2017, eeas.europa.eu/election-observation-missions/eom-timor-lest-2017/23206/timor-lest-shows-organises-well-run-and-peaceful-elections_pt; and NGO Belun, "Report on Electoral Violence Monitoring During the 2017 Parliamentary Election: Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) System" (Dili: NGO Belun, August 18, 2017), <http://www.belun.tl/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ELPAR-2017-Report-English-Final.pdf>.

Tunisia's Nobel prize-winning approach

Tunisia's proactive efforts to address the escalation of tensions was recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize. Both the willingness of political parties to persuade their constituencies of the need for compromise, as well as strong civil society action, played a role. In 2013, while a new constitution was being drafted, protests took place all over the country. Secularist groups had concerns about the intentions of the Islamic party, Ennahdha; for Ennahdha's supporters, there were fears produced by the fall of the Islamists in Egypt and subsequent violence. Political party leadership, trade unions, and legal and human rights groups stepped in to facilitate a National Dialogue. Ennahdha's leadership compromised with Nidaa Tounes and other parties on key constitutional clauses and the formation of a technocratic government. These compromises acted as "signaling and commitments" devices to reassure secular Tunisians, and it required strong internal leadership within the political parties. While Tunisia still faces many challenges, it has the most progressive constitution in the region on civil, political, economic, and social rights.

variety of grievances, particularly past human rights violations and exclusion of certain groups from political and economic processes.

The ongoing TRRC process has identified the security sector as a vehicle used by the former president to perpetrate crimes against citizens, since recruitment into the security forces favored the former president's tribe to the exclusion of others. Hence, the government has initiated reforms to the security sector to promote inclusive selection processes for all groups based on merits and to appropriately deal with perpetrators in the security sector. This calls for the government to develop appropriate measures to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of crimes or to justly dismiss and dishonor some officers.

The government has also identified high youth unemployment as a risk, since it creates opportunities for young people to be exploited by violent actors. In an effort to curb extremist recruitment, authorities have adopted development programs to empower the youth and create employment opportunities.

Ghana

Ghana's National Peace Council (NPC) is an independent national institution for peace established under the Ministry of Interior, which aims to prevent and respond to conflicts and build sustainable peace in the country. Throughout multiple election cycles, the NPC facilitated political dialogue to ensure peaceful voting processes and defuse political tensions. The Regional Peace Councils are established to advise regional entities in the country's hottest "conflict" spots to assist in preventing local and communal conflicts.

These examples from Timor-Leste, Tunisia, the Gambia, and Ghana demonstrate an important point in the targeted prevention approach: not all grievances or social injustices are triggers for violence. For instance, many studies have shown that there is no causal link between poverty and violence, while there is good evidence for violence being linked to a combination of political and economic inequalities, as described in the UN-World Bank report, *Pathways for Peace*. As a result, an effective national strategy will be based on a diagnosis which combines an evidence-based analysis of drivers of violence, with a thorough understanding of national and subnational contexts.

Strengthening protective factors

Protective factors are the counterpart of risk factors: they are "conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports, or coping strategies)" that make societies resilient to violence.⁹ These depend on each context and can include traditional mechanisms to resolve conflict, social capital such as strong

⁹ Siriwardhana et al. (2014) in Joanne N. Corbin and J. Camille Hall, "Resettlement Post Conflict: Risk and Protective Factors and Resilience among Women in Northern Uganda," *International Social Work* 62, no. 2 (March 2019): 918–32, p. 921.

community ties, and trustworthy and effective institutions (such as security forces, constitutions, independent judiciaries), among others.

Like risk factors, resilience factors are context-specific. Anchoring prevention approaches in preexisting protective factors that a society already possesses will increase their effectiveness.

The Gambia

In the Gambia, several factors have contributed to encouraging restraint in committing violent acts when the crisis was looming in 2017. Youth groups' commitment to peaceful protest has been a source of resilience; their #Gambiahasdecided movement during the 2017 crisis is recognized as playing a key role in creating the pressure that resulted in the transfer of power, while remaining peaceful.¹⁰

Gambians' resilience to violence has roots in a culture of peace and, particularly, dispute mediation—be it at family level (for instance through elders) or at community levels (encouraged by the community leaders). In addition, religious leaders have taken a stand against violence, encouraging individuals and communities to resolve their disputes peacefully. Several features of the country also strengthen social capital and community ties. For instance, the government provides access to communal lands for a community to use and administer it together. This practice fosters cooperation among neighbors towards a common goal and encourages constant dialogue. Finally, strong family ties have been a particularly important protective factor. For example, the family system permits extended family to easily adopt children who lack a parental supervision and raise them as their own.

Indonesia

Indonesia's 1945 constitution includes a shared set of values known as "Pancasila," which emphasizes belief in one God, a just and civilized humanity, a unified Indonesia, democracy, and social justice for all (principles, incidentally, that stress both redistribution and recognition). Initially, it seemed unclear whether Pancasila would survive the end of the Suharto era in 1998. Yet, two decades later, Pancasila continues to remain important to Indonesian identity and politics under President Widodo, who has found that Pancasila is an important narrative tool with which to build common ground and combat religious divides among Indonesians.

Indonesia's constitutional process was also crucial to its successful navigation of the democratic transition from 1998 onwards. More than 50 nascent parties contested the 1999 election. The subsequent election cycle in 2004 was still as

¹⁰ Center on International Cooperation, International Peace Institute, and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, "Sustaining Peace and Prevention: Comparing Responses to Crises in Burundi and the Gambia" (New York, 2017), p. 4.

Pancasila is an important narrative tool with which to build common ground and combat religious divides among Indonesians

volatile, with parties emerging and dissolving by the dozen between the polls. Early constitutional reforms included a fully elected People's Consultative Assembly, a directly elected President, and ten new articles concerning human rights, including social and economic rights. Channeling popular frustration and the need for change toward a debate about the constitution helped defuse the tension and transform it into a forward-looking national debate. It also ended up strengthening the legitimacy of the constitution as the unifying political platform and a symbol of national continuity. Finally, the new clauses on economic and social rights helped spur further pressure for pro-equity reform.

Strengthening these institutions has had important protective effects. Progress on the constitution has continued through the President's Work Unit for the Development of Pancasila Ideology in 2017 and the establishment of Pancasila Ideology Development Institution in 2018. This institution, which is expected to continue across changes in Indonesia's government, is directly responsible (under the President) for formulating Pancasila ideology and providing recommendations on conflicting policies or regulations towards Pancasila through a comprehensive and sustainable approach.

Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste has, as one example of protective factors, well-established traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which have been deployed to address conflicts around elections and land, among others. These existing structures were drawn upon during the country's transitional justice process, which included a Commission for Reception, Truth, and Reconciliation (2001–2005). As part of the commission, the country created a Community Reconciliation Process (CRP). In these grassroots initiatives, victims and perpetrators met one another with the wider community present, in order to find "acts of reconciliation" that perpetrators could undertake in order to be re-admitted into the community. (The CRP focused only on lower level crimes that were not prosecuted through the courts.) Overall, 1,371 perpetrators were addressed through the CRP process, with 90 percent being completed.¹¹

Additionally, *Chefes de Suco* (village chiefs) benefit from a large degree of influence and trust within the communities in terms of security in the villages. These *Suco* chiefs have played an important role in mediating land disputes and in organizing activities to collect weapons in the community before elections.¹²

¹¹ See details on the commission's web page, "Reconciliation," at <http://www.cavr-timorleste.org/en/reconciliation.htm>.

¹² Daniel Fitzpatrick, "Mediating Land Conflict in East Timor," in *Making Land Work: Case Studies on Customary Land and Development in the Pacific*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Canberra: AusAID, 2008), 175-197.

About the table

If the World Bank’s *World Development Report 2011* table on the fastest institutional transformations worldwide was to be re-run today, Tunisia would be on track to qualify as the fastest transformation in voice and accountability since World War II. This measurement, taken from the World Governance Indicators, covers a wide number of measures on freedom of expression and association, conduct of elections, and transparency of state operations. The World Governance Indicators also show Tunisia as on track to equal the fastest transition in rule of law since World War II if the progress made since 2014 is continued.

Tunisia

In Tunisia, important sources of resilience after the 2011 Jasmine Revolution came from positive reforms to enhance Tunisians’ voice and to strengthen accountability of the state, as well as the strong and diverse civil society that could take advantage of these reforms. The government moved quickly to reform restrictive laws immediately after the revolution and initiated greater transparency in state functions. As a result, if Tunisia maintains similar progress in the coming period, it is on track to be the fastest transition in history in improving those aspects of its institutions in comparison to other transitions since World War II (see Table below).

Indicator	Threshold	Fastest 20 transitions	Fastest over the threshold	Tunisia (if progress continues at average pace since the revolution)
Voice and accountability	0.5	3 ¹	37	14 years after the revolution (2024)
Rule of law	0.5	4 ¹	17	17 years after the revolution (2027)

A strong and vibrant civil society was a central protective factor during this transition and played a constructive role in taking advantage of this openness. This included Tunisia’s main trade union, the UGTT, as well as justice and human rights actors and business interests. While civil society had been repressed under the pre-revolutionary regime, it had nonetheless found ways to generate cohesion among its constituencies (the UGTT in particular), thereby strengthening its position to act as an important force post-revolution. These actors were needed in the fragile 2013–14 period, as the positive gains of the revolution became more fragile.

Indeed, as a political impasse emerged in 2013 between the three main political parties on issues relating to the constitution and elections, civil society came together in an act of solidarity to create an inclusive national dialogue that ultimately broke the deadlock. The main trade union (UGTT), the main employer’s organization in Tunisia (UTICA), the Tunisian Human Rights League, and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers called for a negotiation between the parties in power and the opposition. The multipolarity of Tunisia’s civil society created a set of counterweights that ended up in a negotiated agreement to hold elections—and a peaceful transfer of power after the elections.¹³ The four civil society groups, known as “the quartet,” won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015.

Norway

In Norway, resilience factors include public trust in institutions and a very active civil society that holds government accountable for respecting its international commitments. This resilience has helped to raise issues to the government early, in order to address risks before situations can degenerate. For instance, civil society has been advocating successfully to the government for a better protection of indigenous Norwegians—the Sami population—who have been subject to discrimination and exclusion.

Partnerships to meet the challenges of prevention

Upstream prevention is a nationally driven process; it stems from an understanding of the fault lines and protective factors in a society, and the setting of national priorities to address the risks that they transform into violent conflict. Multilateral cooperation and international actors can help to support, strengthen, and coordinate prevention efforts to increase their impact. Fundamentally, international organizations, such as the UN, can provide a normative underpinning to preventive efforts, as has been done with the UN’s twin resolutions on sustaining peace, which lays an accent on nationally owned approaches and the need to identify risks and resilience before, during, and after conflict in order to achieve sustainable peace. Norway, as one example, has identified international norms as an important touchstone for its own approaches to prevention.

For instance, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council is a good opportunity to look into a country’s current human rights situation, analyze it and set objectives to foster compliance with international standards. This is in line with the twin resolutions, which encourage member states to consider the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding in the UPR process. As a number of UPR recommendations implicitly address root causes of violent conflicts, human rights and peace actors can better integrate their efforts to strengthen the role of the UPR as a prevention tool.¹⁴

Technical and capacity building support—through a process of accompanying countries in achieving their own goals—is another area where international actors can play a positive role in national efforts. Experts in prevention can nurture analysis of drivers of violence by supporting member states in identifying risk and protective factors and designing effective prevention strategies. In Ghana, UNDP and the UN Department of Political and

¹³ Monica Marks, “Tunisia’s Unwritten Story: The Complicated Lessons of a Peaceful Transition,” Arab Politics Beyond the Uprisings, March 14, 2017, <https://production-tcf.imgix.net/app/uploads/2017/03/14070257/tunisias-unwritten-story-2.pdf>.

¹⁴ See for instance: Quaker United Nations Office, “Integrating Human Rights and Sustaining Peace. Project Report: Exploring the Universal Periodic Review” (Geneva: Quaker United Nations Office, April 2018).

Peacebuilding Affairs have collaborated to support the national peace infrastructure. In the Gambia, the UN quickly deployed expertise—through the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law and the SSR Task Force—after the 2017 crisis to support a nationally led assessment for inclusive security sector reform, linked to transitional justice and the country’s other peacebuilding priorities.¹⁵

As another example, the nationally driven Timorese conflict prevention strategy benefited from international actors’ technical and capacity building support. At the very beginning, the Center for International Conflict Resolution of Columbia University sent an expert to Timor-Leste to collaborate with NGO Belun to carry out the first conflict assessment and develop the indicators for their early warning system. Later on, UN Women collaborated with NGO Belun to include new indicators on the basis of Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. They also supported the Secretariat of State for Security to develop a national action plan on Women, Peace and Security for 2016–2020, in coordination with the Secretariat of State for the Promotion of Equality.¹⁶ UNDP has recently been involved in supporting NGOs and the Public Defender’s Office to develop access to justice clinics, as lack of access to justice in rural areas has been identified as a conflict driver.

International fora also represent an opportunity for member states to discuss exogenous risk factors, such as arms trafficking, regional drought, and commodity prices influenced by the global markets and so on. These risk factors can be addressed thematically through agreements, such as the Arms Trade Treaty. Regional situations can also be brought to attention, for instance when the Gambia raised its particular interest in the Peacebuilding Commission in cooperation for regional peace and stability, in particular with Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

Finally, international actors can play a role in terms of coordinating assistance and drawing attention to the need for support. The UN country team, through the UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF)—the new UNDAF—will provide new opportunities to support national priorities through a risk-informed approach. The PBC is another vehicle to coordinate efforts. For instance, the Gambia used the PBC to address the crisis it was facing in 2017. The government identified national priorities and presented them in the PBC to raise international attention to these issues.

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¹⁵ Department of Peace Operations, “Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law (GFP),” February 2019, p. 2; available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/global-focal-point-fact-sheet-feb2019.pdf>.

¹⁶ Nelcia Guterres Belo et al., “Report on The Launch of Guiding Principles On The Timorese Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding” (Search for Common Ground, 2014).

There is thus also the potential to highlight gaps in financial support to national priorities. Alongside bilateral donors and other multilaterals (like the European Union), the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has a key role to play as catalytic funder that can support national capacity development on sensitive political issues, such as human rights or reforms of the security sector. These kinds of initiatives tend to be systemically underfunded because of the sensitivities around them; the PBF can act to de-risk some of these investments as an early entrant, and pull in subsequent funding.

Conclusion

Upstream, targeted prevention identifies the root causes that may lead to conflicts and tries to address them before violence breaks out. These potential conflict drivers exist in any society, to varying degrees, and most governments are addressing them, even when they are not labeling these efforts “prevention.” Having a more dedicated approach from national and international actors to upstream prevention would strengthen the efforts that are already in place and increase their effectiveness.

Upstream prevention is a fundamentally nationally driven process that aims at strengthening the social contract; it is therefore sovereignty supporting. By dealing with risk factors before they turn into conflict, governments strengthen their resilience and hence can better avert foreign interference in their national affairs. Upstream prevention is also sovereignty supporting as it is deeply anchored in the national context, and it aims to strengthen context-specific resilience factors. International actors can play a supportive role in terms of expertise, norm-setting, addressing regional and transboundary issues, and advocating for and coordinating resources.

Interestingly, ECOSOC has adopted guidelines for the effective prevention of crime that explains the basic components of prevention and how governments should include prevention as a permanent part of their structures. It also highlights evidence-based methods for prevention and encourages governments to address risk factors and to strengthen protective factors, among others.¹⁷ Developing a similar guideline could be a useful approach to upstream prevention.

Upstream prevention is also effective. The *Pathways for Peace* report shows that efforts invested in conflict prevention are cost effective. In addition, it enables governments to identify common threats and address them in a cooperative manner.

Upstream prevention is a fundamentally nationally driven process that aims at strengthening the social contract—it is therefore sovereignty supporting

¹⁷ ECOSOC, “ECOSOC Resolution 2002/13,” n.d.

Acknowledgments

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Many member states are calling on governments—including from middle- and high-income countries—to champion these approaches by implementing them themselves. By showing positive results that they will achieve in terms of prevention, more member states might be willing to undertake national efforts to understand potential drivers for conflict and address them early on. In addition, to improve the effectiveness of upstream prevention, multilateral actors should better understand and support these national efforts.

Center on International
Cooperation
726 Broadway, Suite 543
New York, NY 10003

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