



**FIELD GUIDE FOR
DEMOCRACY,
HUMAN RIGHTS
AND GOVERNANCE
PROGRAMMING IN
CONFLICT-AFFECTED
CONTEXTS**

DECEMBER 2021

Field Guide for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Programming in Conflict-Affected Contexts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Field Guide for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Programming in Conflict-Affected Contexts* is intended to be used as a reference tool by policymakers, practitioners and partners designing, implementing and evaluating democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) projects in conflict-affected and fragile areas. The field guide is designed to be accessible to subject matter experts in the DRG field, area-studies experts, conflict analysts, as well as newcomers to these subjects. The goal of the resource is to provide evidence that can help increase the effectiveness of programs, ensure their resonance with the local context and emphasize do no harm and conflict sensitivity considerations. The field guide provides an outline of key concepts used in the DRG sector, provides evidence-based guidance on various types of DRG interventions and, finally, offers information on the principles of project management, implementation and evaluation of DRG projects in conflict-affected contexts.

Due to the inherently political nature of conflict, strengthening DRG is a critical component of preventing and stabilizing conflict. Designing and implementing impactful DRG interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts requires a unique set of approaches that draws from evidence-based strategies. In many of these contexts, it is not one but many factors operating within a complex conflict system that perpetuate cycles of instability, fragility and weak state-society relations. As our compendium of examples from around the globe demonstrates, without strong and inclusive governance institutions to mitigate and prevent conflict, patterns of instability can quickly escalate.

As such, DRG interventions in fragile and unstable contexts should take an inclusive and conflict-sensitive approach so that interventions targeting one DRG area do not exacerbate preexisting tensions in another. This field guide offers insights on both how to implement DRG programs in conflict settings, as well as how to use DRG programs to reduce violent conflict.

The field guide is organized into two sections. ***The first section contains technical guidance, including challenges and lessons learned, for designing, implementing and evaluating the following DRG intervention types in conflict-affected areas.***

- **Anti-corruption, transparency and accountability:** Corruption can contribute to inequality, exclusion and make governing actors less responsive to citizens' needs—all of which are factors that fuel instability and, in many cases, conflict. Because anti-corruption interventions may be destabilizing in transitional periods, programming should focus on generating buy-in for anti-corruption and transparency reforms, given that there is often a high level of resistance among political actors who are interested in maintaining the status quo. For example, a project funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) in Bangladesh focused on empowering citizens to demand government accountability at a community level—and was successful in generating civil society initiatives that increased public transparency and accountability measures for corruption. Additionally, such interventions should prioritize building trust, enforcing oversight over service delivery and generating ground-up support—and demand—for reform.
- **Civil society support:** In contexts where state legitimacy and capacity are weak, civil society is a key vehicle for providing services and addressing citizens' concerns. Implementers need to be sure programming is locally led and participatory throughout all stages, including design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, interventions should focus on harmonizing local, regional and national civil society efforts to increase the likelihood of policy change and enhanced citizen involvement. For example, a successful United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

program in Ghana increased the capacity of local civil society groups, which enhanced input in decision-making processes and likewise improved government transparency.¹

- **Supporting peaceful elections:** Electoral processes can present both opportunities for peaceful transitions of power, as well as serve as the basis for community tensions to escalate into violence. To help address violence, election observation missions (EOMs) should position themselves in communities long before an election starts in order to gain a sense of local power dynamics. For example, in April 2021, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized a virtual pre-election assessment delegation in Ethiopia to offer an analysis of the environment before implementing a longer-term observation mission. In addition, civic and election education interventions should use locally legitimate entities to present information so participants do not reject information based on a lack of trust.
- **Free and fair media:** The media plays a key role in promoting peaceful norms and narratives, but can also be utilized to widen tensions and incite violence through misinformation and hate speech. In such situations, it can be a useful strategy to leverage a political opening to enable legal reforms for fair and independent media, as well as utilize nontraditional influential voices. Additionally, it is critical to be cognizant of polarizing events or triggers of conflict when initiating media programming, as the free flow of information in particularly tense environments can fuel hate speech and violence when not timed correctly.
- **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI):** Programming should carefully assess spaces in which to engage in changing norms of inclusion; in some cases, these spaces are formal, and in others, informal. For example, in Afghanistan, informal women's groups, known as Community Development Committees, were identified as the most effective way for women to voice their opinions due to gender discrimination in formally elected government bodies. Thus, interventions should take into consideration that engaging marginalized populations involves changing gendered roles and norms. Additionally, interventions need to work around the burdens that women face to give them time to participate in programming, as well as work with those who hold power (often male leaders) to create allies for social inclusion.
- **Support for justice and the rule of law:** Fragile contexts are often characterized by an array of informal, nonstate justice providers, from elites, to customary and religious leaders, to armed actors. Justice interventions should account for the role of these informal justice authorities because they are often perceived as more consistent, fair or trusted. This can be done by analyzing and adapting to the existing justice and legal landscape, including devising programmatic approaches that leverage or coordinate with informal actors to resolve disputes. Further, these interventions should be linked with high-level policies that provide insight into the long-term strategy on the roles of informal actors dispute resolution. Programming can also focus on enforcing accountability and promoting respect for human rights among both state and nonstate actors to avoid the issue of lending legitimacy to informal structures with no interest in the rule of law.
- **Legislative strengthening:** Legislatures can devise and enforce measures that address the root causes of conflict and political exclusion; however, when such structures are corrupt and fail to effectively represent their constituents, they can sometimes exacerbate grievances that elites exploit to orchestrate violence. To address this risk, programming should build consensus among legislators to decrease internal divisions and enhance citizen engagement to help address political exclusion and make legislators more responsive to the needs of the population. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, IRI

¹ Owusu-Mensah, Isaac. "American Democratic Support to Ghana's Fourth Republic: Assistance or Encumbrance?" *Journal of African Elections*, vol. 14, no. 2, <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/JAE14.2Mensah.pdf>.

promotes cross-party caucuses and parliamentary initiatives which have been effective in overcoming identity barriers along party lines.

- **Political party support:** Effective and inclusive political parties can provide a means for diverse representation and avenues for political engagement. However, political parties are often shaped by deep divisions. Political party interventions must, therefore, acknowledge and account for the potential role that political party members play in the conflict. For example, in Nigeria, IRI has worked with political parties to enhance internal and external accountability procedures and mechanisms. As part of these efforts, IRI facilitated the development of codes of conduct and peace accords to set standards for ethical party behavior and encourage peaceful conduct during the elections. Critical to the success of these accountability measures is monitoring their implementation, domesticating the agreements at the communal level and in the media and having influential actors speak out when they are violated.
- **Subnational governance support:** In conflict-affected contexts, subnational governance support often entails working alongside both state and nonstate actors, such as customary authorities or civil society. Although it is important to increase citizen engagement with government institutions, practitioners should also engage with nonstate actors where state governance is weak and other groups have more legitimacy (as it can create more tension if they are sidelined from an intervention). At the same time, when partnering with nonstate governing actors it is integral that this does not undermine state legitimacy and create unaligned parallel structures. For example, in Mozambique, tribal chiefs were charged with collecting taxes and policing communities; however, their legitimacy decreased as a result because it complicated their position and perception in the community. In this case, it also disincentivized investments in state governance systems because such actors' image was weakened.
- **Social cohesion:** A high level of sensitivity is required to mitigate the risk of exacerbating tensions in contexts where societal divisions run deep. Because of this, programming should prioritize longer-term changes over short-term goals. Efforts to promote social cohesion should be paired with intentional initiatives to enhance state-citizen relations. In Tanzania, for example, IRI organized Unity Festivals to promote tolerance and create a platform for local police, government and religious officials to engage with boda boda drivers who are perceived to be highly marginalized in their community.
- **Youth engagement:** Youth are key agents of change that can help address the root causes of conflict and enhance community resilience to violence. A lesson learned from global interventions is to avoid narrow approaches to programming that only focuses on youth inclusion in national-level conflict mitigation and peacebuilding, instead of devising cross-sectoral solutions. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, IRI worked with young people to promote reconciliation which cut across multiple sectors, including media, peacebuilding and governance. This included grassroots civic engagement and a documentary demonstrating reconciliation among a multiethnic group of survivors, soldiers, religious leaders, elected officials and civil society members—showing the process of mutual understanding, appreciation and then collaboration.

The second section of the field guide outlines crosscutting management guidance for designing, implementing and evaluating DRG programs in conflict-affected contexts.

- **Project design:** Projects in fragile and conflict-affected settings should apply a conflict-sensitive lens and incorporate the following considerations of contextual and operational challenges that may have an impact on the project:
 - » **Guiding principles:** The key guiding principles of DRG programs in fragile and conflict-affected areas include conflict sensitivity and do no harm. Such considerations should be integrated throughout the project's life cycle so practitioners can understand and mitigate against adverse second-order effects. Inclusion, which requires an understanding of local social norms, is another key guiding principle. Practitioners should use an intersectional framework to ensure their interventions address

secondary patterns of violent conflict and marginalization. Further, practitioners should think and act politically so they are able to adapt to the political dynamics of the conflict.

- » **Defining the scope and theory of change:** DRG projects in conflict-affected contexts should be adapted to the specific context so they do not exacerbate fragility. Implementers should define the project's scope and develop a theory of change which explains the rationale for how the project will seek to achieve its objectives.
- » **Conflict assessment and stakeholder mapping:** Practitioners must first understand the nature of the conflict and identify legitimate actors before they pilot activities to address the problem. As such, it is important to conduct a preliminary analysis of the conflict to understand the stage of the conflict cycle a society is in and the underlying dynamics of the violence. This is the foundation on which activities can be implemented.
- » **Operational considerations:** The operational obstacles to DRG programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts are varied and context-specific, but can include bureaucratic hurdles; challenges associated with procurement, vetting and making payments, which require flexibility on the part of the implementer and donor; corruption, which is often acute in fragile contexts and requires strong anti-corruption controls on the part of the implementer; the safety of staff and beneficiaries, which should always be a paramount concern; the challenges associated with accessing remote communities; and the importance of ensuring project timelines allow for the investment in the long-term development needs to address conflict drivers.
- » **Adaptability:** To ensure that the project is addressing the objectives at every stage of the program life cycle, it is critical to ensure the intervention remains flexible and able to evaluate program goals and adjust as needed. This may require further conflict assessments and analyses at the mid-stage of project, or periods of reflection to ensure that the approach is appropriate for the long-term goals in an evolving conflict context. At times, practitioners may need to adjust the theories of change as well as the program's anticipated outcomes.
- **Project implementation:** Successful DRG programs in conflict-affected contexts should be grounded in the local context and incorporate locally legitimate actors, institutions and processes. They should also generate community buy-in and long-term sustainability through effective partnerships and local ownership.
 - » **Enhancing legitimacy:** When implementing DRG projects in fragile contexts, implementers must consider the legitimacy of all actors in the governance system. Programs in conflict-affected contexts should work with the most effective and legitimate actors at the local level—in cases where the state is unable to provide services and justice, these are often informal or traditional authorities. However, implementers should be aware of the pitfalls associated with bypassing the national authorities on whose authorization the project's success is dependent. To mitigate the impact of these pitfalls, implementers should pursue a "big tent" approach to bring together leadership from the national and local levels. Likewise, practitioners should be cognizant of how all actors have their own blind spots, agendas and biases and should be aware of how this can undermine programmatic effectiveness.
 - » **Developing community partnerships:** Given that effectiveness of DRG programs in fragile contexts hinges on being trusted by the local community, practitioners should leverage existing networks of locally trusted community organizations. This can provide valuable insight on local talent and resources, and ensure the project is tailored to the local context (especially regarding social norms and cultural factors). This also ensures the project is owned locally and can increase the community's capacity to identify avenues for conflict resolution following the project's closure.
- **Project evaluation:** Strengthening DRG programming in fragile and conflict-affected areas requires rigorous research, analysis and evaluation. However, monitoring and evaluation in these contexts is seriously challenging for several reasons: security concerns, unreliable or incomplete data, and sensitivity

around the conflict, among other issues. Even in challenging contexts, survey experiments (such as list and endorsement experiments), key informant interviews and ethnographic research can provide rich data that are effective monitoring and evaluation tools. Program staff should monitor indicators, with the design of an impact evaluation in mind, to understand the consequences (both intended and unintended) of the intervention. There are several steps that can improve the quality of evaluations and in turn improve the programmatic results: practitioners should rely on local research, which can build trust and be more insightful due to improved access; evaluation planning should account for and remain flexible to account for unforeseen events; evaluators should be aware of sensitive contexts and consider nontraditional (often informal and qualitative) methods to gather data; and local partners—though never without their own biases—can validate findings and help triangulate information, as well as legitimize an evaluation’s results with the target or beneficiary community.

INTRODUCTION

Key Concepts:

Governance

Legitimacy

Fragility

Violent Conflict

Advancing democracy and governance in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is a strategic priority for the United States. State fragility and conflict harms human prosperity and generates regional and global spillover risks. These conditions increase countries' vulnerability to crises, multiplying the impact of shocks such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Fragile and conflict-affected states can serve as sanctuaries for malevolent actors, and thus, can export national security risks. As U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken noted in his first major foreign policy address, "When democracies are so weak that governments can't deliver for their people or a country becomes so polarized that it's hard for anything to get done, they become more vulnerable to extremist movements from the inside and to interference from the outside and they become less reliable partners for the United States."²

Exclusionary politics and deficient governance are critical drivers of conflict and fragility. Weak state legitimacy and state institutions, unstable or exclusionary political and social dynamics and high levels of corruption enable chronic fragility and exacerbate grievances.³ Moreover, elites and political actors weaponize democracy to advance the interests of specific groups, which undermines citizens' faith in democracy and makes other governance models more appealing. When state fragility undermines the legitimacy of democracy, this can have significant impacts on U.S. national security.

Due to the inherently political nature of conflict, strengthening DRG is a key component of preventing and stabilizing conflict.⁴ Legitimate governance reduces the risk for conflict recurrence.⁵ Responsive institutions connect the citizen to the state and thus act as peaceful mechanisms for political contest, resource allocation and conflict mediation. Such structures help check executive power, foster commitment to political reform and reduce the incentives for militias and violent groups to exercise oversight over political elites—all of which minimizes the risk for repeat civil war.⁶

The benefits of conflict prevention are significant: A joint World Bank-UN Pathways for Peace report noted that effectively implementing a global conflict prevention agenda "would save between US\$5 billion and US\$70 billion per year."⁷ In the United States, momentum toward operationalizing this agenda is increasing—the 2019 Global Fragility Act offers an opportunity for the United States to help prevent and mitigate violent

² Blinken, Antony J. "A Foreign Policy for the American People." 3 Mar. 2021, Ben Franklin Room, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, <https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>. Transcript.

³ O'Neil, Carrie, and Ryan Sheely. "Governance as a Root Cause of Protracted Conflict and Sustainable Peace: Moving from Rhetoric to a New Way of Working." *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 20 June 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2019/governance-root-cause-protracted-conflict-and-sustainable-peace-moving-rhetoric-new-way-working>. WritePeace.

⁴ Quirk, Patrick W. "Why and How the National Security Strategy Should Address Fragile States." *Brookings Institution*, 2 Mar. 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/03/02/why-and-how-the-national-security-strategy-should-address-fragile-states/>. Order from Chaos.

⁵ Hegre, Håvard, and Håvard Møkleiv Nygård. "Governance and Conflict Relapse." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 59, no. 6, 1 Sep. 2015, pp. 984–1016. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713520591>.

⁶ Walter, Barbara F. "Why Bad Governance Leads to Repeat Civil War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 59, no. 7, 1 Oct. 2015, pp. 1242–1272. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002714528006>.

⁷ *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. United Nations and the World Bank, 2018, doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1162-3.

conflict across the world.⁸ The Global Fragility Strategy rightly cites transparent and accountable governance as a key component of doing so.⁹

While there is emerging consensus that DRG assistance is critical to helping key allies and priority countries escape cycles of conflict and fragility, results are highly variable in fragile contexts in contrast with stable ones.¹⁰ Deficient access to target locations and partners, violence and mistrust obstruct DRG actors from gathering sufficient situational awareness to identify trusted partners and address community needs. Conflict-affected contexts require a different suite of considerations and tools; yet interventions are sometimes applied uniformly to fragile and stable settings alike.

There is no “silver bullet solution” to the challenge of democratic consolidation in the fluid contexts of conflict-affected states. Existing approaches have often been hampered by a lack of sufficient evidence for the effectiveness of DRG interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This field guide aims to fill this knowledge gap, providing evidence on how to effectively strengthen rights-based, democratic governance in fragile contexts and reduce conflict. The field guide first introduces key concepts, then provides an overview of common DRG interventions and lessons on their application in fragile states and, finally, offers guidance for program implementation. By using innovative, evidence-based strategies such as the ones profiled here, NGOs and government actors can support democratization efforts in ways that place citizens at the heart of their programming and achieve better outcomes by reducing violence and mitigating conflict.

Key Concepts

Governance: Governance refers to the myriad ways in which people make and enforce rules to solve public policy problems, and/or collective action problems, whether at a community, national or global level.¹¹ It entails interactions between the traditions and institutions through which authority is exercised and mediated.¹² Governance is generally understood as actual performance on providing services,¹³ not merely the set of procedures of a Weberian bureaucracy.¹⁴ It can be provided by formal institutions of the state, or a host of informal actors who enjoy local legitimacy, such as religious, or customary leaders, civil society or sometimes armed groups.

Legitimacy: Key to effective governance is the concept of legitimacy. Legitimacy, or legitimate governance, is the idea that the actors charged with policymaking are widely perceived as having the right and authority to make decisions on behalf of the collective community. Legitimacy is a multifaceted concept. Its meaning is shaped by the context in which it is embedded. Legitimacy can be understood as a moral right to govern.¹⁵ It generally refers to the acceptance of a regime as “appropriate” by its population.¹⁶ The World Bank’s “World Development Report 2021” leans toward a normative framing of legitimacy. It defines legitimacy as a “broad-based belief that social, economic, or political arrangements and outcomes are proper and just.”¹⁷ Legitimacy is anchored in

⁸ United States, Congress, House. Global Fragility Act of 2019, Dec. 2019, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5db70e83fc0a966cf4cc42ea/t/5f6208ed4c84b42901596f35/1600260333957/BILLS-116HR1865SA-RCP116-44+%28GFA+ONLY%29.pdf>.

⁹ *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*. United States Department of State, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2020-US-Strategy-to-Prevent-Conflict-and-Promote-Stabilit-508c-508.pdf>.

¹⁰ Chandy, Laurence, et al. *Aid Effectiveness in Fragile States: How Bad Is It and How Can It Improve?* Brookings Institution, 16 Dec. 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/aid-effectiveness-in-fragile-states/>.

¹¹ Fukuyama, Francis. “What Is Governance?” *Governance*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2013, pp. 347–368. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12035>.

¹² Kaufmann, Daniel, et al. *Governance Matters*. The World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2196, 1999. SSRN, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=188568.

¹³ Rotberg, Robert I. “Good Governance Means Performance and Results.” *Governance*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2014, pp. 511–518. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12084>.

¹⁴ Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: Volume 1*. University of California Press, 1978, pp. 220–221.

¹⁵ Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

¹⁶ Brinkerhoff, Derek W. *Capacity Development in Fragile States*. European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2007.

¹⁷ *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*. World Bank, 2011, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/4389>.

trust between the governing entity and the citizens. State and nonstate actors build and nurture trust through constructing cross-cutting, overlapping and inclusive group identities and by developing institutions and practices that are fair and impartial.¹⁸ The typical forms of legitimacy include process legitimacy (the manner in which decisions are made), performance legitimacy (the delivery of services) and international legitimacy (compliance with international laws).¹⁹

Fragility: Fragility refers to the condition of a state when it is exposed to risks and lacks sufficient coping capacity, systems and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.²⁰ Fragility can lead to negative outcomes, including violence, poverty, inequality, displacement and environmental and political degradation.²¹ According to the Fund for Peace, attributes of state fragility may include the loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, a failure to provide reasonable public services and the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.²² Fragility is rooted in colonial legacies, predatory politics and failed international structural adjustment programs, which, in turn, produces a range of dysfunctions.²³

Violent conflict: In this field guide, IRI refers to violent conflict as a situation where a range of groups (even if loose or informal) intentionally use violence as a tool to promote a political agenda. This is in line with the Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset (ACLED), which codes a politically violent event as an altercation where force is often used by one or more participant to a political end. Violent conflict can take a range of forms, including interpersonal, criminal, communal and political violence. It can be used to achieve compliance (with the intent to govern the people who are targets of violence) or extermination (to eliminate rivals, defectors or deserters), or both.²⁴ This definition is more expansive than the threshold provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), which defines armed conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in 25 battle-related deaths.”²⁵

¹⁸ Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse. “Dysfunctional State Institutions, Trust, and Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood.” *Regulation & Governance*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2016, pp. 149–160. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12100>.

¹⁹ Börzel and Risse. “Dysfunctional State Institutions, Trust, and Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood.”

²⁰ This definition draws from the USAID Fragile States Strategy, among other sources. USAID refers to fragile states as a broad range of contexts, distinguishing between fragile states that are vulnerable and those in crisis. It defines vulnerable states as those that are failing to provide for their populations or recovering from crisis. Conversely, it defines crisis states as those where the central government is unable to exercise control over its territory, provide basic services to the population, suffers from weak legitimacy and is prone to violent conflict. “*Fragile States Strategy*,” United States Agency for International Development (USAID), January 2005, https://rmpportal.net/library/content/tools/biodiversity-support-program/copy_of_cbnfm/higherlevel_fragilestates/view.

²¹ *States of Fragility*. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2020. OECDiLibrary, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/ba7c22e7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/ba7c22e7-en>.

²² *What Does State Fragility Mean?* Fragile States Index, Fund for Peace, 2018, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/frequently-asked-questions/what-does-state-fragility-mean/>.

²³ Grävingsholt, Jörn, et. al. “Disaggregating State Fragility: A Method to Establish a Multidimensional Empirical Typology.” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 7, 2015, p. 13. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2015.1038340>.

²⁴ Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

²⁵ *UCDP Definitions*. Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala Universitet, <https://pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>.

About the Field Guide

This *Field Guide for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Programming in Conflict-Affected Contexts* is designed to be used as a reference tool by policymakers, practitioners and partners designing, implementing and evaluating DRG projects in conflict-affected and fragile areas. The field guide is designed to be both accessible to subject matter experts in the DRG field, area-studies experts, conflict analysts, as well as newcomers to these subjects. The goal of the resource is to provide evidence that can help increase the efficacy of interventions, ensure their resonance with the local context and emphasize do no harm and conflict sensitivity considerations. The field guide provides an outline of key concepts used in the DRG sector, summarizes evidence for various types of DRG interventions, provides technical guidance on implementation, and, finally, offers information on the principles of project management, implementation and evaluation of DRG projects in conflict-affected contexts.

DRG interventions in fragile and unstable contexts should take an inclusive and conflict-sensitive approach so that interventions targeting one DRG area do not exacerbate preexisting tensions in another. This field guide offers insights on both how to implement DRG programs in conflict settings, as well as how to use DRG programs to reduce violent conflict.

Methodology

IRI conducted a systematic literature review to inform the field guide. It involved analyzing results from DRG programming, applicable data from randomized control trials and reports or evaluations from implementers who have used a credible methodology. For each of the interventions, IRI reviewed evidence to better understand implications for program design and implementation.

TECHNICAL GUIDANCE FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE INTERVENTIONS: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, rights-based democratic governance interventions can help build peace and transform the drivers of conflict by:

- Promoting political moderation and inclusion;
- Encouraging civic participation and government responsiveness to citizens' concerns;
- Fostering government transparency and accountability;
- Mitigating societal cleavages;
- Channeling conflict into nonviolent, democratic forms of resolution;
- Strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of governing structures;
- Mitigating or deescalating conflict to reduce the likelihood and consequences of violent outbreaks; and
- Increasing community resilience.

Implementing foreign assistance projects in fragile contexts is a complicated endeavor: good intentions can exacerbate existing cleavages when attempting to reduce violence and improve governance.²⁶ As such, it is critical to ensure traditional DRG approaches are tailored, evidence-based and conflict-sensitive.

Once the user has identified the need for a particular type of DRG program in their conflict-affected setting—from anti-corruption to civil society strengthening—they can consult this section of the field guide to determine best practices to guide design and implementation of that intervention. For each of the most common DRG interventions, this section first introduces the intervention, including the problem it attempts to resolve and its relation to conflict and fragility; the key challenges to designing and implementing the specific intervention in conflict-affected contexts; a list of illustrative activities; as well as lessons learned from past programming and key considerations for future interventions. In sum, this section offers the user actionable guidance on how to implement each type of DRG program in conflict-affected areas as well as ideas on how program activities can help mitigate or even prevent conflict.

The DRG interventions listed below are representative of the most prevalent types of interventions. In practice, however, there may be significant overlaps between each intervention; for example, a youth engagement program

may include elements of civil society strengthening, or a political party program may also seek to strengthen participation of marginalized groups. Thus, the challenges and insights for each intervention may also be relevant for other interventions. In fact, the effectiveness of DRG interventions can be enhanced by breaking down these silos and looking at impact holistically. Interrogating the interrelatedness of these interventions will help lead to more strategic program design.

Each subsection captures in-depth research from practitioners, policymakers and academics on DRG interventions in fragile and conflict-affected settings, to go beyond anecdotal examples of useful strategies

²⁶ Justino, Patricia. "Governance Interventions in Conflict-Affected Countries." *The Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 55, no. 7, 3 July 2019, pp. 1364-1378. Taylor & Francis Online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2018.1487053>.

and lessons learned. This section is not fully comprehensive of all evidence on the topic, but rather intends to portray the most salient lessons to provide guidance for DRG policy and programming. In exploring and implementing these strategies, it is possible to not only apply a conflict-sensitive lens, but also to promote integrated and holistic DRG approaches that are tailored to the wide-ranging complexities of conflict systems in fragile settings.

Anti-Corruption, Transparency and Accountability

The nature of corruption in conflict-affected contexts is complex, as corruption both fuels and feeds on conflict.²⁷ Endemic corruption in conflict-affected contexts can create a vicious cycle wherein corruption enables conflict and inhibits effective state responses to address its root causes.²⁸ From contributing to inequality and exclusion to exacerbating citizens' grievances, corruption can drive conflict in many ways.²⁹ Corruption also fuels the conflict economy through extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, smuggling and capture of state resources. These practices erode citizens' trust in government, undermining its legitimacy and its ability to effectively promote social cohesion, mediate divisions and respond to citizens' concerns.³⁰

Anti-corruption, transparency and accountability (ACTA) programming faces particular challenges in conflict-affected contexts. First, while transitional contexts can offer the opportunity to rebuild a political system that limits corruption, the host government and civil society in such contexts often lack the capacity, human capital and financial resources to implement needed reforms.³¹ There is also a higher risk in conflict-affected contexts for civil society to reflect societal divisions, thus sometimes being part of the problem.³² This can make it challenging to find viable partners for ACTA programming.

Second, it is difficult to build the political will necessary to implement effective ACTA programming in conflict-affected contexts. This is because state and nonstate actors alike continue to benefit from corrupt practices or are unwilling to absorb the political risk associated with such efforts, particularly in contexts plagued by weak rule of law and enforcement mechanisms.³³ Conflict-affected communities, divided by societal tension and lacking shared perceptions of public good, may not be invested in the public oversight required to hold government accountable and make ACTA initiatives effective, thereby limiting their impact.³⁴

Third, in some contexts, corruption is such an inherent part of the system that ACTA programming risks causing further instability in the short term. Such interventions may focus more on exposing corruption, rather than tackling the systems and people that enable it. In countries where corrupt networks dominate political and economic life, they often serve a pseudo-government role, providing services to citizens and upholding their own version of the rule of law.³⁵ In other contexts, the government is so inherently corrupt

²⁷ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings: A Review of the Evidence*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, September 2020, https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2020_en_anti-corruption_in_fragile_states.pdf.

²⁸ Chene, Marie. "Lessons Learned in Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict Countries." *Anti-Corruption Resource Centre*, 17 Dec. 2012, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a5a40f0b64974000560/expert-answer-355.pdf>.

²⁹ Scharbatke-Church, Cheyanne, and Kirby Reiling. "Lilies that Fester: Seeds of Corruption and Peacebuilding." *New Routes*, vol. 14, no. 3-4, 2009, <https://buildingintegrity.hq.nato.int/Resources.aspx?id=1122014964>; Chene. "Lessons Learned in Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict Countries"; Spector, Bertram I., et al. "Practitioner's Guide for Anticorruption Programming." *United States Agency for International Development*, Jan. 2015, https://www.usaid.gov/opengov/developer/datasets/Practitioner%27s_Guide_for_Anticorruption_Programming_2015.pdf.

³⁰ Chene. "Lessons Learned in Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict Countries."

³¹ Spector, et al. "Practitioner's Guide for Anticorruption Programming."

³² Chene. "Lessons Learned in Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict Countries."

³³ Chene. "Lessons Learned in Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict Countries."

³⁴ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

³⁵ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

that addressing corruption would imply intervening on entire government and civil society cadres. In both situations, actors are likely to fiercely resist any efforts to undermine their power. As a result, dismantling such structures too quickly can be destabilizing and lead to further conflict.³⁶



Illustrative Programs and Activities

ACTA interventions either aim to tackle corruption directly or address it as part of broader efforts to advance good governance. Direct programming explicitly and openly targets corruption through legal and policy mechanisms, public pressure campaigns, collective action initiatives and social and behavioral change. Indirect programming focuses on limiting the enabling environment for corruption—and its impact on democratic institutions—by promoting government transparency and accountability. Anti-corruption in fragile settings is particularly important because combatting corruption can help address a key driver of conflict and attempt to support a more transparent and accountable political system.

Direct programming can include:

- Addressing the corruption-conflict system by enhancing oversight of the security sector, reducing corruption in service delivery and fostering mechanisms that seek to promote transparency;³⁷
- Raising awareness of how corruption is a driver of conflict, which can in turn introduce anti-corruption reforms and approaches into peace agreements and broader peacebuilding efforts;³⁸
- Training for law enforcement and judicial officials on how to investigate and prosecute corruption cases, as part of broader security sector reform;³⁹
- Assisting in the formulation and implementation of conflict-sensitive anti-corruption policies and procedures in government;
- Working with government to deploy technologies to detect corrupt behavior;
- Bolstering the capacity of civil society to undertake anti-corruption initiatives, including training on how to identify, expose and counter corruption and conduct advocacy with government officials;⁴⁰
- Addressing widespread corruption by investigating and enforcing accountability over groups which are engaged in unlawful corrupt acts, particularly during a political transition;⁴¹ and
- Social and behavioral change programming to alter social norms and practices around corruption, including at the intersection of conflict and corruption.

³⁶ Spector, et al. "Practitioner's Guide for Anticorruption Programming."

³⁷ Joly, Julien. "Mainstreaming Anti-Corruption in SSR." *Henry J. Leir Institute at Tufts University*, 22 July 2021, <https://sites.tufts.edu/ihs/mainstreaming-anti-corruption-in-ssr/>. Corruption in Fragile States.

³⁸ Ventura, Rosemary. "3 Things Peacebuilders Should Read About Anti-Corruption and Conflict." *Henry J. Leir Institute at Tufts University*, 28 June 2021, <https://sites.tufts.edu/ihs/3-things-peacebuilders-should-read-about-anti-corruption-and-conflict/>. Corruption in Fragile States.

³⁹ *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Sept. 2016, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/sigar-16-58-II.pdf>.

⁴⁰ "Approach to Anticorruption." International Republican Institute, 2021. Internal document.

⁴¹ Stephenson, Matthew. "Guest Post: The Case for Corruption Truth Commissions." *The Global Anticorruption Blog*, 29 June 2021, <https://globalanticorruptionblog.com/2021/06/29/guest-post-the-case-for-corruption-truth-commissions/>.

Indirect programming can include:

- Capacity building for government institutions and civil servants, particularly those working in service delivery and public financial management, to increase professionalism and limit vulnerability to corruption, including through the use of codes of conduct and audits;⁴²
- Helping government agencies establish transparency offices or e-government portals to ensure citizens can easily access information;⁴³
- Improving service delivery and building citizen-state trust in order to gradually address corruption over time and mitigate key drivers of conflict;⁴⁴
- Increasing political party transparency and strengthening enforcement of campaign finance laws;⁴⁵ and
- Supporting civil society and media to demand accountable governance and increase citizen oversight of government processes through mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking and public input into community development plans.⁴⁶

Building Investigative Expertise and Connections for Transnational Accountability in Mexico, Guatemala and Panama



Corruption, transnational crime and money laundering are persistent and intensifying issues in Latin America. Entrenched institutional corruption, spotty civil society oversight and poor access to public information allow transnational criminal organizations to flourish and avoid legal consequences with ease. Meanwhile, the capacity of journalists to carry out rigorous and safe investigations on acts of corruption varies considerably within and between countries. Reporting on corruption can also be dangerous: reporters face numerous threats while investigating and publishing findings, underscoring the need for comprehensive training on investigative journalism, the sociology of corruption and digital and personal security in the region.

Under a project funded by the State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, IRI has trained journalists in Guatemala, Mexico and Panama on research, data visualization and anti-corruption investigations. Following IRI's direct training, journalist beneficiaries conducted trainings and workshops for additional journalists in their media outlets, networks and communities. These journalists have applied these skills to new and ongoing investigations, resulting in higher-quality in-depth reporting on corruption and illicit financing.

⁴² Spector, et al. "Practitioner's Guide for Anticorruption Programming."

⁴³ "Approach to Anticorruption."

⁴⁴ Ventura. "3 Things Peacebuilders Should Read About Anti-Corruption and Conflict."

⁴⁵ "Approach to Anticorruption."

⁴⁶ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- All DRG interventions—not just those focused on ACTA—should consider the potential impact of corruption on programming, including how the misuse of project funds may unintentionally support corrupt practices.**⁴⁷ In Afghanistan, U.S. assistance contributed to—and funded—systematic corruption and plunder in the country, undermining the very governance structures it was there to strengthen. According to a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report, this was because the United States failed to take into account the ability of the host country to absorb—and manage—aid inflows, had ineffective systems in place for monitoring assistance and prioritized alliances with corrupt power brokers to buy their commitment to the peace process in pursuit of short-term stability gains.⁴⁸ Corruption considerations need to be mainstreamed into conflict prevention and stabilization interventions from the start. This can include assessing vulnerabilities to corruption in key sectors, both related to security and service provision; incorporating safeguards into program design to mitigate potential risks; identifying and working alongside transparent partners; and holistically evaluating the effects of an intervention in order to determine whether it reinforced corruption or other negative incentives. It is critical to understand how corruption manifests in a fragile context in order to design effective interventions that restore security and reestablish the legitimacy of the state.⁴⁹ Rigorous analysis can help target the ways in which corruption reinforces conflict, identify willing and trusted partners and determine whether the government is open to reform or will be resistant to change. This will prevent corruption from embedding in new or transitional systems in the aftermath of conflict.
- In conflict-affected contexts, indirect interventions to increase transparency and accountability may be more effective at addressing the root causes of both corruption and fragility, particularly when there is limited political will and capacity for anti-corruption reforms that rely on legal and institutional frameworks and formal enforcement mechanisms.**⁵⁰ Because anti-corruption interventions may be destabilizing in transitional periods, ACTA interventions at this stage should prioritize building trust, enforcing oversight over service delivery and generating ground-up support—and demand—for reform.⁵¹ For example, by empowering citizens to work together at the community level, a DFID-funded project in Bangladesh was effective in generating citizen demands for government accountability and responsiveness to citizens' concerns.⁵² Even in contexts with limited political will for reform, supporting anti-corruption champions and “islands of integrity” can advance the ACTA agenda.⁵³
- Take a systematic approach to building political will as part of ACTA interventions in conflict-affected contexts.** A rigorous political economy assessment can help build a comprehensive understanding of the nature and scope of corruption in the country, the capacity and willingness of the state to address it and the principal actors in power that benefit from corruption.⁵⁴ Neither corruption nor political will is static or consistent across levels of government and society and location, and analyses must be tailored accordingly to provide an accurate snapshot of the specific corruption challenge the project will address.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

⁴⁸ *Corruption in Conflict*.

⁴⁹ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

⁵⁰ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

⁵¹ Chene. “Lessons Learned in Fighting Corruption in Post-Conflict Countries.”

⁵² *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

⁵³ Spector, et al. “Practitioner’s Guide for Anticorruption Programming.”

⁵⁴ *Corruption in Conflict; Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*; Spector, et al. “Practitioner’s Guide for Anticorruption Programming.”

⁵⁵ Chigas, Diana, and Cheyanna Scharbatke-Church. “Top Three Challenges and Good Practices in Anti-Corruption,” *Henry J. Leir Institute at Tufts University*, July 11, 2019, <https://sites.tufts.edu/ihs/top-three-challenges-and-good-practices-in-anti-corruption/>. Corruption in Fragile States.

Program interventions should be tailored based on the level of buy-in among key stakeholders. According to a SIGAR report, anti-corruption programming in Afghanistan failed because it “required the cooperation and political will of Afghan elites whose power relied on the very structures anticorruption efforts sought to dismantle.”⁵⁶ A recent evaluation of USAID’s anti-corruption programming in Sub-Saharan Africa yielded similar conclusions, finding that the absence of political will⁵⁷ was a key determinant of program failure.⁵⁸

Civil Society Support

Civil society helps build a culture of active citizenship and provide citizens with the platforms and tools to ensure government accountability. Civil society includes groups that range from places of worship, nongovernmental organizations and neighborhood associations, to name a few.⁵⁹ In conflict-affected contexts, civil society can effectively represent the local community and sometimes deliver services where state legitimacy and capacity is weak.⁶⁰ Furthermore, civil society helps mitigate and channel conflict through nonviolent methods. Community-level changes in norms and attitudes—fostered by civil society—help create larger-scale changes toward peace.⁶¹

Strengthening civil society in fragile contexts is not without its challenges. First, partners and civil society organizations (CSOs) have their own priorities, and CSO responsiveness to funder requirements may result in a gap between the intended results and local context. In some cases, CSO support may result in duplicating or undermining existing initiatives, leaving a vacuum when program support ends. Lack of contextualization also runs the risk of excluding key actors and groups that are critical to successful programming. Ensuring that programming bolsters local networks, actors and institutional capacities, rather than enabling reliance on international aid, is pivotal to ensuring a successful civil society approach to conflict stabilization and peacebuilding.

Second, CSOs are often prominent targets of repressive regimes, so there may be popular reluctance to participate due to a fear of retaliation.⁶² In some fragile contexts, governments restrict civic space by using tactics that limit freedom of expression and movement, access to information and repress their operations through overreaching laws.⁶³ Including civil society in conflict-affected context programming, however, is key because without such groups, programming can lack cultural and community context, which is necessary to ensure that programming is responsive to local priorities.

⁵⁶ *Corruption in Conflict*.

⁵⁷ Political will is an ambiguous concept. One approach to defining it includes the following components: “a sufficient set of decision makers, with a common understanding of a particular problem on the formal agenda, is committed to supporting a commonly perceived, potentially effective policy solution.” Post, Lori Ann, et al. “Defining Political Will.” *Politics & Policy*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2010, pp. 653–676, <http://wunrn.com/wp-content/uploads/political.pdf>.

⁵⁸ *Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings*.

⁵⁹ Menocal, Alina Rocha, et al. “Assessing International Democracy Assistance and Lessons Learned: How Can Donors Better Support Democratic Processes?” Oct. 2007, <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/1985.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Issifu, Abdul Karim. “Role of Civil Society Organizations in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Ghana.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Conflict Science*, vol. 3, no. 1, art. 1, 15 June 2017, <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=jics>.

⁶¹ Barnes, Catherine. 2006. *Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War & Building Peace*. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Sept. 2006, <https://www.gppac.net/files/2018-11/Agents%20for%20Change.pdf>.

⁶² Issifu. “Role of Civil Society Organizations in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Ghana.”

⁶³ Poskitt, Adele, and Mathilde Dufranc. 2011. *Civil Society Organisations in Situations of Conflict*. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Apr. 2011, https://www.civicus.org/view/media/cso_conflict_complete_report.pdf.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Civil society interventions typically entail increasing the involvement of civil society in democratic processes and bolstering the capacity of CSOs to engage in decision-making and resolving community issues. For example:

- CSO-led advocacy campaigns to promote peaceful conflict mitigation norms and attitudes;
- Strengthening avenues for citizen participation, supporting civic education and amplifying citizens' concerns in order to foster a democratic culture;
- Involving civil society in project design to ensure programming is tailored to local needs, sensitive to the conflict landscape and prioritizes local ownership;
- Strengthening conflict mitigation, stabilization and monitoring systems by working with the community to identify existing capacities and weaknesses;
- Supporting civic outlets and bolstering citizen capacity by funding community programs through small grants;
- Developing communication platforms that connect local conflict mitigation organizations to regional and national efforts;⁶⁴
- Expanding multistakeholder processes, such as forums and partnerships, to bridge the divide between different actors and ensure that key actors are operating with common goals;
- Creating spaces for key vulnerable populations in civil society to participate in dialogues, policy reforms and project designs by requiring a gender integration component in all grants, programs and partnerships;⁶⁵
- Strengthening the enabling environment for CSOs by advocating for the reform of repressive legal frameworks and political institutions; and
- Increasing CSO capacity on program management, digital security and advocacy.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Projects should be locally led throughout all stages of the project cycle, including in the design, implementation and evaluation stages.** By enabling local ownership and accountability, programs better reflect the needs and values of the community. In Colombia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) created a Local Selection Committee consisting of a variety of civil society partners and experts to support CSO initiatives from their conception through closeout—from reviewing proposals to advising and overseeing implementation. At the time, CSOs were the primary actors that provided representation for populations most affected by conflict, as they tended to be from remote or vulnerable regions. These CSOs were able to provide a gateway to conflict-affected communities that otherwise might not have been involved. The committee strengthened networks between different CSOs across the country, which had the capacity to develop a strong culture of inclusion that can

⁶⁴ *Experiences from the Field: UNDP-CSO Partnerships for Conflict Prevention*. United Nations Development Programme, July 2005,, https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/civil_society/undp-cso_partnershipsforconflictpreventionexperiencesfromthefiel0.html.

⁶⁵ *Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding: A Manual*. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, Nov. 2015, p. 18, http://www.mspguide.org/sites/default/files/resource/gppac_mspmanual_interactive_version_final_jan2016_1.pdf.

influence power structures within communities.⁶⁶ A participatory, locally driven approach can be a beneficial way to foster inclusion, consensus and tolerance, having a positive effect on peace processes.

- **Engaging actors across local, regional and national levels is critical for the sustainability of conflict stabilization programming.** Coordination helps deconflict agendas and foster partnerships, which can lead to more tenable policy commitments and institutionalize engagement on conflict prevention. For example, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) convened a Mesa de Seguridad in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, that brought together citizens, CSOs and representatives from local, regional and national levels of government. During these roundtables, participants identified priority areas and solutions, as well as devised ways to design, implement and evaluate collaborative projects. Although the conference took place in 2012, the Mesa de Seguridad is still in place and continues to serve as a way to design and implement programs in the region.⁶⁷ Diverse views can also help strengthen the quality of initiatives to ensure the representation of various groups that have a stake in the conflict.⁶⁸
- **Broad-based civil society collaboration across societal divisions can be effective in promoting social cohesion, particularly among vulnerable groups that are subject to exclusion or discrimination.** For example, CSOs in Crimea organized projects to integrate returnees who were forcibly displaced from Ukraine during conflict. CSOs worked with village councils and community groups where different ethnic groups could share their everyday needs and design development plans to address them. In so doing, the program effectively brought groups together and fostered tolerance across divides.⁶⁹

International Support for Civil Society: Help in Consolidating Ghana's Democracy



In Ghana, the U.S. helped local development organizations, trade unions, advocacy groups and local service providers to build their political capacity, particularly as it related to advocacy with local government. According to an academic study,⁷⁰ USAID support contributed significantly to civil society empowerment and improved government transparency. This programming increased the ability of civil society to successfully participate in governance processes, outside of a small group of elites. The U.S. also empowered these same CSOs to hold legislative representatives accountable to their constituent populations and to contribute to national-level policy making. This two-step programming was highly effective in supporting and promoting a responsive, legitimate legislature with experience aggregating a variety of perspectives and goals. Civil society groups acted as a testing ground for democratic processes, creating a norm around free, fair and representative elections, which eventually bled over into the formal governing institutions.

Critically, these programs were successful because they were conceptualized and executed over a generational timeline, instead of constrained to a more limited implementation period. This allowed for institutional learning, the slow growth of confidence in democratic processes, the development of advocacy networks and socialization of local leaders into democratic norms.

⁶⁶ *Experiences from the Field*, p. 11.

⁶⁷ *Multi-Stakeholder Processes for Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding*, p. 21.

⁶⁸ "Strengthening Local Capacities for Peace: Reducing Intercommunal Violence in Myanmar." *Mercy Corps*, June 2016, <https://www.dmeformpeace.org/sites/default/files/LRP%20Program%20Impact%20Brief%20July%202016.pdf>.

⁶⁹ *Experiences from the Field*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ Owusu-Mensah. "American Democratic Support to Ghana's Fourth Republic."

Supporting Peaceful Elections

Electoral processes offer the opportunity for peaceful transitions of power, moderated political competition and civic engagement. At the same time, all stages of the election cycle are susceptible to violence: from candidates seeking to sway results in the pre-election period to disrupting the process during elections to contesting the results after the voting takes place. A key component of electoral support is increasing citizens' confidence in the voting process so it is perceived to be legitimate and credible.⁷¹

Creating favorable conditions for peaceful elections is challenging even in stable political circumstances. During conflict, it is even more so. When implementing electoral support programs in a conflict-affected context, it is necessary to consider many challenges. First, political actors may have agendas that fail to align with supporting fair and credible elections. Without proper safeguards in place, elections can be manipulated by malign actors and thus exacerbate conflict rather than facilitate a peaceful transition. These malign actors can represent interests of the ruling political party, opposition political parties or other groups allied with these parties.

Through repressive laws, judicial interference, politicization and corruption of electoral management bodies, violence and the use of state resources, malign actors can manipulate or disrupt the electoral process in order to influence the outcome.⁷² The presence of these irregularities does not necessarily negate a credible election in so far as the voting populace accepts the results as legitimate. However, in most semi-authoritarian contexts, elections are merely held to project a veneer of democracy and in fact legitimize autocratic outcomes, resulting in "electoral autocracies."⁷³ In such contexts, it is essential to be cognizant of how election observations and electoral support can be manipulated to legitimize an illiberal or deeply flawed electoral process.

Second, it can be difficult to manage popular perceptions about the neutrality of international practitioners and election administrators alike, given the politicized nature of elections in fragile settings. If electoral support is perceived as biased or exclusive, it can lead to further distrust in the electoral process and exacerbate election violence. Practitioners must be attuned to such perceptions and actively promote the neutrality of their interventions in both words and actions. They can do so by only working with independent, credible actors committed to electoral integrity; ensuring that election observers represent diverse sectors and groups; supporting election dispute resolution mechanisms and electoral justice; providing equitable assistance to democratic parties; and ensuring that all messaging around the electoral process is politically sensitive and neutral.⁷⁴

Third, establishing adequate security is a necessary precondition for promoting a free, fair and credible election. In unstable environments, citizens may be unwilling or unable to safely cast their votes and those seeking to derail the process through violent means will be undeterred. Establishing stable conditions will allow political campaigning and voter participation without intimidation by state and nonstate actors.⁷⁵ Working with local partners to provide incentives for groups likely to disrupt elections—such as combatants, militia, organized crime groups and incumbent leaders—can help encourage them to participate in the electoral process in a nonviolent manner. In the most volatile environments, however, there may also be a need for increased security to minimize electoral violence.

⁷¹ "Approach to Electoral Integrity," International Republican Institute, 2021. Internal document.

⁷² Bhim, Mosmi. "Does Electoral Authoritarianism Persist? A Comparison of Recent Elections in Fiji, Seychelles, and Maldives." *Governance and Political Adaptation in Fragile States*. Edited by J.I. Lahai, et al. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 243–270.

⁷³ Bhim. "Does Electoral Authoritarianism Persist?"

⁷⁴ USAID. 2007. *Transition Elections and Political Process in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations: Lessons Learned*. USAID, November 2007.

⁷⁵ USAID 2007. *Transition Elections and Political Process in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations: Lessons Learned*.

Finally, weak institutions, policy frameworks and enforcement mechanisms often hamper electoral oversight and administration.⁷⁶ Prior to proceeding with an election, it is essential that those in positions of power agree on the terms of the electoral process—and commit to respecting its outcomes. In addition, citizens must have sufficient understanding of the process to both meaningfully participate and accept electoral results.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Electoral assistance programming ranges from providing support for the conduct of elections to training political parties to successfully compete in and ensuring meaningful citizen participation in electoral processes. Interventions include:

- Support for laws and regulatory frameworks that obligate governments to uphold principles for holding democratic elections: transparency, accountability, inclusion, freedom and competition;
- Support for electoral policies that enable independent, impartial management and oversight of elections—particularly as they pertain to security sector reform;
- Capacity building for political parties to develop issue-based campaigns that are responsive to citizens' needs and help parties and voters shift from sectarian or ethnic political affiliations to policy-based affiliations based on common values;
- Developing formal and informal election dispute resolution mechanisms so that perpetrators of electoral violence are held accountable and victims have access to effective remedies;
- Training for candidates and elected officials on how to utilize electoral processes to promote peace, including negotiating peacefully with rivals, coalition building, peaceful and inclusive campaigning and engaging the media in support of peaceful electoral outcomes;
- Supporting political peace pacts through political party consultative mechanisms. These institutions foster accountability for political behavior by facilitating interparty communications and provide a dispute resolution mechanism to mediate disputes before they morph into violence;⁷⁷
- Civic and voter education as well as peace messaging to encourage citizens' understanding of—and nonviolent participation in—electoral processes and promote inclusive and participatory processes to address marginalization;
- Supporting advocacy initiatives for political inclusion in the legal framework, political party platforms and voter outreach;
- Convening dialogues between political parties, legislators and civil society to mitigate electoral violence; and
- Observing and monitoring elections, including training of party poll watchers and citizen observers and long- and short-term international election monitoring, to publish meaningful findings and recommendations in pursuit of peaceful, democratic elections processes.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Paris, Roland. *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*. Cambridge University Press, 2004, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511790836. See USAID's Supporting Democratic Elections Best Practices Check-List for further details. *USAID*, November 2007.

⁷⁷ "Six Approaches to Preventing and Mitigating Electoral Violence: A Review of Evidence from Africa," *International Republican Institute*, 2021, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/evidence_briefer_mitigating_electoral_violence.pdf.

⁷⁸ *Integrity of Elections*. The Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), <https://www.cepps.org/what-we-do/focus-areas/>; Menocal, et al. "Assessing International Democracy Assistance and Lessons Learned."

Producing Independent Election Analysis in Ethiopia



In June 2021, Ethiopia held elections—the first since the sweeping political reform and the sixth since the return to civilian rule. However, deeply seeded and long suppressed ethnic tensions have also come to the fore. Thus, the elections were held in a context of widespread insecurity, instances of political repression and open conflict as well as heightened regional tensions. In response to an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and in accordance with the laws and directives of the National Election Board of Ethiopia, IRI and NDI jointly conducted an International Election Assessment Mission. The goal of the assessment was to provide the citizens of Ethiopia and the international community with an impartial and accurate assessment of the election environment and offer constructive recommendations based on international and regional standards for democratic elections and consistent with Ethiopian law. Due to the constraints imposed by the global health crisis, IRI and NDI organized a virtual pre-election assessment delegation to offer an analysis of the pre-election environment.⁷⁹ As part of this approach, IRI and NDI utilized long-term thematic analysis, sent a small technical team for stakeholder engagement during the immediate election period, conducted a post-election analysis of the results announcement and dispute resolution and engaged stakeholders on reform recommendations from mission observations. Following the June 21 elections, IRI and NDI publicly released their elections report which contains independent analysis of the elections. Such election assessment missions can help raise awareness and hold various actors accountable, including spoilers, political authorities and perpetrators of conflict. At the same time, it is critical to anticipate how such assessments will be perceived by the local population, as they can sometimes backfire and enflame existing tensions.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- EOMs should expand coverage both geographically and temporally.** The record of election observation missions (EOMs) is mixed with regard to preventing electoral violence.⁸⁰ There is evidence that EOMs can also have unintended or negative consequences with regard to both conflict dynamics and public perceptions on the integrity of the election. The presence of monitors may simply displace violence geographically or temporally, rather than mitigate it. Moreover, critical reports issued by EOMs can usher in post-electoral violence. By documenting and exposing election irregularities or fraud, EOMs can lend legitimacy to those contesting electoral outcomes and spark acts of violent retaliation.⁸¹ Successful electoral support occurs when monitors—positioned throughout the country to prevent the displacement effect—are given adequate time to embed in the community in the pre-election period. This would allow them to have a better sense of the local power dynamics and the quality and access of voting opportunities and fairness of the process, all of which have the potential to drive—or deter—electoral violence.⁸² As the risk of electoral violence continues after the election, it is likewise important for electoral violence prevention initiatives to continue as well. Such a strategy also helps mitigate the challenges of malign manipulation of the election prior to and after election day.

⁷⁹ “Joint IRI/NDI Pre-Election Assessment Delegation Releases Report on Preparations for Ethiopia 2021 Elections.” *International Republican Institute*, 13 May 2021, <https://www.iri.org/resource/joint-iri-ndi-pre-election-assessment-delegation-releases-report-preparations-ethiopia-2021>. Press release.

⁸⁰ Garber, Larry. *Violence Prevention through Election Observation*. United States Institute of Peace, 24 Aug. 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/violence-prevention-through-election-observation>; *Six Approaches to Preventing and Mitigating Electoral Violence*. International Republican Institute, 2021. https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/evidence_briefer_mitigating_electoral_violence.pdf.

⁸¹ Garber. *Violence Prevention through Election Observation; Six Approaches to Preventing and Mitigating Electoral Violence*.

⁸² Menocal, et al. “Assessing International Democracy Assistance and Lessons Learned.”

- Understand and anticipate citizens' perceptions of EOMs based on the reputation of stakeholders involved.** There are many positive results produced by EOMs in promoting electoral integrity. The presence of election monitors has been shown to improve the quality of elections, including reducing election irregularities and fraud and enhancing citizen perceptions of the election. A study conducted in Indonesia during the 2004 presidential election found that the presence of observers increased compliance with electoral regulations at polling sites where observers were present.⁸³ Similarly, a comparative study by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) of elections in Kenya and Liberia found that "greater exposure to election monitoring was associated with increased trust in the electoral process, and a general public belief that observers could mitigate fraud and prevent election violence."⁸⁴ However, in other cases, a "backfire effect" can result from EOM statements, undermining the intended messaging and negatively impacting public perceptions of the integrity of the election. For example, in Jordan, a survey experiment found that some citizens adjusted their evaluation of the elections in the opposite direction of the EOM statements due to the unwelcome nature of external intervention.⁸⁵ To avoid undermining election legitimacy through this backfire effect, practitioners need to take into consideration how the local population will view—and respond to—EOMs.
- Civic and voter education campaigns need to be conducted by an entity that enjoys credibility and a reputation of impartiality, started early in the electoral cycle and sustained throughout and target a wide range of stakeholders.** Informational interventions can lead participants to feel empowered to reject electoral violence. Election education conducted by impartial facilitators can prevent violence even in conflict areas and in nonconsolidated democracies.⁸⁶ A comparative study of the 2017 elections in Liberia and Kenya found that civic and voter education interventions were associated with reduced violence in Liberia, but not in Kenya.⁸⁷ It is unclear why there was this difference, but Liberian respondents reported that the programs were more inclusive and more likely to reach citizens regardless of their gender or age. Kenyan respondents criticized the campaigns for not being locally tailored. Interventions in both countries were critiqued for starting too late in the electoral cycle.
- Promote electoral reforms that foster inclusiveness and representation through vote pooling and multiethnic cooperation, such as list proportional representation, single transferable vote (STV) and alternative vote (AV).**⁸⁸ While there are benefits and disadvantages to each, some systems can help incentivize moderation and create inclusive multiparty systems. Other rules can mandate that a party or candidate must win the popular vote plus some percentage of the vote in some number of provinces or states in order to win a national election. This prevents population dense regions from dominating electoral politics.⁸⁹

⁸³ Hyde, Susan D. 2010. "Experimenting in Democracy Promotion: International Observers and the 2004 Presidential Elections in Indonesia." *Perspectives on Politics* : Cambridge University Press, 17 June 2020. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/abs/experimenting-in-democracy-promotion-international-observers-and-the-2004-presidential-elections-in-indonesia/2263EB6A2983731E88D6B6B548CB28B8>.

⁸⁴ Garber, Larry. 2020. "Violence Prevention through Election Observation." *United States Institute of Peace*, August 2020.

⁸⁵ Benstead, Lindsay, et al. "Does It Matter What Observers Say? The Impact of Election Monitoring on Legitimacy." *Mediterranean Politics*, 24 Apr. 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2020.1730601>.

⁸⁶ *Six Approaches to Preventing and Mitigating Electoral Violence*.

⁸⁷ Claes, Jonas, and Inken von Borzyskowski. *What Works in Preventing Election Violence: Evidence From Liberia and Kenya*, Peaceworks, no. 143, United States Institute of Peace, Oct. 2018, p. 5, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/pw143-what-works-in-preventing-election-violence-evidence-from-liberia-and-kenya.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Ten Hoove, Lotte and Álvaro Pinto Scholtbach. *Democracy and Political Party Assistance in Post-Conflict Societies*. Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2016, <https://epd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NIMD-Democracy-and-Political-Party-Assistance-in-Post-Conflict-Societies.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Reilly, Benjamin, and Per Nordlund. *Political Parties in Conflict-Prone Societies: Regulation, Engineering and Democratic Development*. United Nations University Press, 2008.



Voter and Civic Education in Liberia

Voter and civic education can help all citizens know and exercise their right to vote, as well as cultivate public confidence in an election. In fragile states, such efforts are critical for overcoming pervasive challenges related to citizens' access to information and mobilization and can limit the impact of malign actors' attempts to disrupt the electoral process—and discourage voter participation.⁹⁰

The 2011 general election in Liberia occurred at a time when the country was still plagued by the legacy of the 1989-2003 civil war. Localized clientelist systems, fragmented along ethnic lines, dominated the political space at both the local and national levels, inhibiting free voter expression through the control of information and by tying access to security and livelihoods to the patron-client relationship. External aid to Liberia during this period centered, among other things, on citizen-centric democracy promotion to overcome these challenges.

According to a randomized field experiment conducted on the 2011 general elections in Liberia, international actors played a productive role in supporting elections in the country and improving the quality of citizen participation.⁹¹ The field experiment studied two democracy promotion initiatives implemented by Liberian CSOs, the National Election Commission and the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia over a nine-month period in rural parts of the country, which had been sources of political instability during the civil war. The first was a civic education and town hall campaign to disseminate information and provide a regular forum for community discussion on governance issues, including electoral procedures, candidates and citizens' voting rights, among others. The second was an electoral insecurity "early warning" system that aimed to promote security—and citizens' perceptions of security—by connecting communities with United Nations (UN) peacekeepers to discuss security challenges and how to mitigate them.⁹²

The field experiment found that the interventions reduced barriers to information, improved voter coordination and enhanced security, resulting in increased enthusiasm for electoral participation, a coordinated shift from votes for parochial to national candidates and an increased willingness to report on manipulation and voter intimidation efforts. The study's authors conclude that third-party actors, working in coordination with local actors, can help promote democratic elections and democratic expression in fragile states.⁹³

Free and Fair Media

Independent press and media infrastructure are critical for enabling citizens to hold their representatives accountable, gain information about their government's activities and fully participate in the governing process. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the media can play a key role in promoting peaceful

⁹⁰ Mvukiyeye, Eric, and Cyrus Samii. "Promoting Democracy in Fragile States: Field Experimental Evidence from Liberia." *World Development*, vol. 95, July 2017, pp. 254–267, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.02.014>.

⁹¹ Mvukiyeye and Samii. "Promoting Democracy in Fragile States."

⁹² Mvukiyeye and Samii. "Promoting Democracy in Fragile States."

⁹³ Mvukiyeye and Samii. "Promoting Democracy in Fragile States."

and tolerant norms and narratives, strengthening transparency and accountability and providing timely information on instances of violence or instability.⁹⁴

Conversely, media can be used to incite violence, widen tensions and spread misinformation, as was seen during both the Rwandan genocide and the Bosnian war.⁹⁵ Traditional and social media platforms alike have been utilized by violent groups to recruit and mobilize individuals to participate in violence. Stereotypes, hate speech, misinformation and disinformation spread through media can exacerbate communal tensions and promote ethnonationalism and extremism, thereby contributing to instability.

Media support faces distinct impediments in fragile environments. First, fragile contexts create a “disabling” environment for media.⁹⁶ With high levels of corruption, as well as limited access to reliable sources and insecurity, freedom of expression and the flow of information is severely constrained. Journalists are routinely targeted and killed in conflict environments amidst the violent competition to control narratives. In places like Iraq and Syria, fewer organizations and individuals are willing to jeopardize their safety, so information sometimes comes from biased or inaccurate sources instead, with few methods of verification.⁹⁷ Even in places not facing outright conflict, repression and censorship create a chilling effect and suppress a plurality of opinions. Recognizing these intrinsic threats, media support faces challenges in ensuring the physical and digital security of journalists and beneficiaries, as well as identifying trusted partners.

Second, while elite capture of media institutions is a challenge in stable and fragile contexts alike, it poses particular risks in conflict-affected areas with high levels of corruption. In these contexts, there are often competing actors that seek to control the flow of information, including political and elite actors, religious institutions, the private sector and armed groups. Due to the alignment of media with certain government or nongovernment actors, this contributes to mistrust in the media and the community more broadly. In such circumstances, media is particularly at risk of being utilized to promote intolerant or violent narratives. Similarly, interventions that seek to enhance media professionalism may face barriers in places where there is strong reluctance to challenge sources of information or where political, ethnic or religious affiliations take priority over impartiality.

Third, there are particular barriers to measuring and evaluating the impact of media programs in conflict-affected contexts. Results on the nexus of media and conflict prevention diverge sharply given the media’s role in either enabling or mitigating conflict. According to a USIP report, “Researchers of media’s effects generally agree that exposure to media programming may affect certain audiences, under certain conditions.”⁹⁸ The effects depend on the state of media consumption and the audience.⁹⁹ As such, it is difficult to attribute change to media given that participants may be exposed to a variety of external influences.

⁹⁴ Kalathil, Shanthi. *Media Programming Under Fragile Conditions: A Democracy and Governance Field Guide*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2009, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadq659.pdf.

⁹⁵ Stroehlein, Andrew. “An Overview of Media Development and Post-Conflict Transition,” 3 Apr. 2009, Brussels, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/overview-media-development-and-post-conflict-transition-0>. Transcript.

⁹⁶ Betz, Michelle. “How Media Can Be an Instrument of Peace in Conflict-Prone Settings.” *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*, 2 Nov. 2017, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/norway/undp-ogc/documents/UNDOGC_Media_conflict%20roundtable%20background%20paper.pdf.

⁹⁷ *The Best Defense: Threats to Journalists’ Safety Demand Fresh Approach*. Committee to Protect Journalists, 21 Feb. 2017, <https://cpj.org/reports/2017/02/best-defense-safety-emergencies-freelance-risk-conflict-killed-kidnapped-digital/>.

⁹⁸ Arsenault, Amelia, et al. *Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries: Toward Developing Common Principles and a Community of Practice*. Peaceworks no. 77, United States Institute of Peace, 2011, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/134075/PW77.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Arsenault, et al. *Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries*.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Free and fair media helps strengthen a democratic culture and push for necessary political reform and respect for human rights.¹⁰⁰ Media support can involve:

- Increasing digital literacy of audiences in order to improve their capacity to critically evaluate the impartiality of media narratives;
- Supporting journalist safety and digital security;
- Countering disinformation and the spread of violent or intolerant narratives;
- Increasing the skills, professionalism and capacity for conflict-sensitive reporting among media organizations and journalists, which can help establish a foundation for sound conflict reporting and inoculate against the spread of disinformation and misinformation;
- Supporting the enabling environment for media by promoting political reform and respect for freedom of the press;
- Developing and promoting narratives that contribute to peacebuilding. Radio dramas, magazines and stories have all been utilized to promote social cohesion across religious or ethnic lines;
- Monitoring media for intolerant or exclusionary narratives in order to uncover early warning signs of violence;
- Dispelling stereotypes of victims, former fighters and other populations affected by conflict; and
- Raising awareness of conflict trends, political developments and the psychosocial effects of conflict.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Media interventions should be tailored to desired social change and culturally relevant.** Instead of supporting media structures to be free and independent over an unlimited period of time, it is more useful to identify specific benchmarks for normative change and disseminate vital information for stability and everyday priorities.¹⁰¹ For example, in Rwanda, a radio soap opera featured a fictional story that promoted social cohesion and nonviolence.¹⁰² While listeners did not change their personal beliefs, they did change perceptions of norms and behaviors about intermarriage, trauma and trust, among other issues.¹⁰³ In this instance, shaping broader political and social norms was more effective than attempting to change individual convictions. Developing clear and measurable intermediate results is important to understand the efficacy of messaging. As part of this, ensure that media messages are locally relevant and responsive to community needs. Piloting and testing specific media narratives can be an effective way of understanding nascent results and effective messaging, which can be adapted and scaled based on the results.

¹⁰⁰ *Supporting Vibrant Civil Society & Independent Media*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/supporting-vibrant-civil-society-independent-media>.

¹⁰¹ Fraenkel, Eran, et al. *Afghanistan Media Assessment: Opportunities and Challenges for Peacebuilding*. Peaceworks no. 68, United State Institute of Peace, 2010, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/127219/PW68_Afghanistan_Media_Assessment1.pdf.

¹⁰² Paluck, E. L. "Reducing Intergroup Prejudice and Conflict Using the Media: A Field Experiment in Rwanda." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 96, no. 3, pp. 574–587, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0011989>.

¹⁰³ Paluck. "Reducing Intergroup Prejudice and Conflict Using the Media."

- **As part of strategic initiatives to prevent or mitigate conflict, promote an open space or the enabling environment for media.** It could be useful to leverage a political settlement or transition as a way to promote legal reforms that foster an enabling legal environment for journalism and media.¹⁰⁴ While legal reform on media and freedom of expression may not always be feasible, it is essential to tailor media support based on an in-depth understanding of the legal framework and associated risks for program partners and participants.
- **Assess and adapt media messages to the conflict context in order to avoid widening divisions.** Because media is more globalized than ever, it is important to be cognizant of how global media trends—such as disinformation and intolerant rhetoric—may impact the local level.¹⁰⁵ As part of this, it is critical to understand the broader conflict context. If a media intervention focused on promoting peaceful messages takes place shortly after a deeply polarizing event, such as a particularly contentious election or peace process, then it may fall short of intended results or even exacerbate such divisions. For example, the UN produced a series of radio programs focused on peace and reconciliation in the wake of the war in the former Yugoslavia. However, these programs were aired with bias and mistakes, and thus utilized as a tool for propaganda.¹⁰⁶ There are several tools available to help assess the level of risk associated with different narratives. To this end, the Dangerous Speech project has developed a systematic framework to evaluate the message, the audience, the historical and social context of the message, the speaker and the medium with which a speaker delivers a message.¹⁰⁷
- **Exercise caution in selecting media partners and journalists, given the challenges with the legal and regulatory environment, and elite capture of media institutions.** Instead, consider leveraging nontraditional, influential voices in promoting peace and tolerance.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in conflict stabilization is fundamental to ensuring that peace and stability are inclusive, reaching all segments of society instead of just traditional decision-makers.¹⁰⁸ Conflict disrupts gender and social norms, roles and dynamics; at the same time, such norms can shape and enable conflict. In fragile contexts, structural inequality and patriarchal norms often bar women and sexual minorities from being involved in both formal and informal governance systems. The militarization of boys and men can create cycles of violence, and sexual violence can be used as a methodic weapon of war.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, there is a wealth of evidence that gender and social inclusion can improve the prospects for lasting peace. For example, women's participation in peace processes increases the likelihood the agreement will last at least two years by 20 percent, and the likelihood it will last 15 years by 35 percent.¹¹⁰ Women can act as agents of peace, as well as be victims, enablers and perpetrators of conflict.

¹⁰⁴ Idris, Ifat. *Media/Communications on Peacebuilding/Social Cohesion/Changing Prevailing Narratives on Conflict*. GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 9 Apr. 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/781_Media_communications_for_peacebuilding_social_cohesion_changing_prevailing_narratives_on_conflict.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ *Media/Communications on Peacebuilding/Social Cohesion/Changing Prevailing Narratives on Conflict*.

¹⁰⁶ Arsenault, et al. *Evaluating Media Interventions in Conflict Countries*.

¹⁰⁷ *Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide*. Dangerous Speech Project, 19 Apr. 2021, <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>.

¹⁰⁸ *Gender and Social Inclusion*. Creative Associates, 2020, <https://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/gender-inclusion/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory: A Guide for Turning Theory into Practice*. United States Institute of Peace, 2018, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/gender-inclusive-framework-and-theory-guide.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ *Women's Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political*. 1325: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, UN Women, <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>.

Conflict also has disproportionate impacts on marginalized populations. People with disabilities; youth; sexual and gender minorities; the elderly; ethnic, religious and racial minorities; and indigenous peoples face systematic inequality that intensifies the effects of conflict. For example, Afro-descendants in Latin America experience poverty at a rate 2.5 times higher than the median, and 90 percent of children with disabilities in developing countries are not allowed to or cannot attend school.¹¹¹

A key challenge in conflict-affected settings is the issue of resistance and backlash to progress on gender equality and social inclusion. Some societies will be more resistant to normative change in the conflict and security space. For example, a study in Afghanistan found that men were comfortable with women participating in their Community Development Committees, but wanted them to focus solely on “women’s issues” such as education and health. When it came to making decisions on security and conflict mitigation, men simply felt that the women should not be involved.¹¹²

Another common pitfall is the tendency to conflate “gender” with “women.” In so doing, implementers ignore gender norms and gendered effects of conflict on men, women, boys and girls. For example, countering sexual and gender-based violence should not only protect women and girls, but also seek to change social norms and behaviors that lead to such violence. This involves recognizing that men and boys can also be victims, and that harmful masculine norms perpetuate such violence.¹¹³ Programming that seeks to mitigate or respond to conflict can potentially have no impact, or even exacerbate conflict, if it does not take into account the gendered differences of conflict within the local population.¹¹⁴



Illustrative Programs and Activities

GESI interventions focus on promoting political inclusion and protecting human rights of women and disadvantaged groups. Programs can focus on the following:

- Conducting research on gender and social inequalities in communities through the lens of do no harm to investigate how programming can exacerbate or perpetuate gender and social inequalities in different communities;
- Mapping existing capacities and potential gateways for inclusion of disadvantaged populations, to inform how programming can reduce disparities and empower meaningful participation;¹¹⁵
- Supporting workshops and activities that adopt an inclusive lens to conflict and security, which can help demilitarize community conflict resolution and integrate a whole-of-society approach;
- Mentoring women and increasing their leadership in community leadership through partnerships between local women’s groups and regional or national-level activists;
- Building networks between women’s groups, groups for people with disabilities and groups for marginalized populations to promote gender and socially inclusive participation in community decision-making about conflict;¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ *Social Inclusion*. World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>.

¹¹² Haines, Rebecca. *Social Inclusion in Fragile Contexts: Pathways Toward the Inclusion of Women in Local Governance Processes: Perspectives from Afghanistan*. ReliefWeb, 13 May 2020.

¹¹³ Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. *Mainstreaming Gender in Conflict Analysis: Issues and Recommendations*. Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction, No. 33, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, World Bank, Feb. 2006, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/449571468144266512/pdf/351500Mainstreaming0gender0WP3301Public1.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Herbert, Sian, and Sa’eed Husaini. 2018. “Conflict, Instability, and Resilience in Nigeria.” *GSDRC*, February 2018. <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Conflict-instability-and-resilience-in-Nigeria.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ “Gender Equality, Female Empowerment, and Social Inclusion.” United States Agency for International Development (USAID), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/FINAL_GESI_Factsheet.pdf. Fact sheet.

¹¹⁶ “Gender Equality, Female Empowerment, and Social Inclusion.”

- Promoting the engagement of marginalized groups in governance and empowering them to voice their opinions in decision-making forums;
- Protecting and promoting the human rights of ethnic, religious, racial and sexual minorities, as well as people with disabilities;
- Conducting advocacy campaigns to counteract discriminatory laws, norms and platforms;
- Increasing women's involvement in running for office, participation in election observations and coverage of political affairs, as these processes have the power to change norms over time regarding gendered barriers to inclusion in governance and thus increase participation in conflict resolution;
- Advocating for policy change that reduces barriers to social inclusion, participation and decision-making; and
- Social and behavioral change programming to change social norms and practices around acceptance and tolerance of gender and social diversity.

GESI should be mainstreamed across all programming sectors to ensure interventions do not exacerbate divisions and solidify barriers. It should also be integrated across every phase of programming, from project design to evaluation. When gender considerations are not integrated into programming, adverse effects can result. For example, when the conflict in South Sudan officially began in 2013, most analyses focused on the political dynamics that fueled the conflict. However, according to recent research,¹¹⁷ a major factor leading to violent conflict was "bride price," or the payment of assets to the bride's family in exchange for marriage. When these costs increased, this change contributed to men joining militia groups or carrying out violent cattle raids to increase their assets. Incorporating an analysis of everyday violence in communities, in addition to a particular form of violent conflict relevant to an intervention, is integral to a holistic analysis of conflict. Utilizing a gender-sensitive lens throughout this process will allow for a better understanding of triggers and norms that lead to violence.¹¹⁸

While designing a project, gender analysis is critical for ensuring that programming is responsive to the specific gendered vulnerabilities of a community.¹¹⁹ Gender responsiveness and inclusion should also be included as a criterion for selecting local partners and shaping interventions. During implementation, GESI requires ensuring that activities benefit women, vulnerable populations, and other marginalized groups, as well as enacting specific security measures to ensure that vulnerable populations are protected. Moreover, outreach plans should be gender-responsive, meaning they work around barriers to communication so that vulnerable populations are reached.¹²⁰ Finally, as part of the monitoring, evaluation and learning phase, include gender-specific indicators to ensure that programming is addressing the gendered dimensions of conflict.

¹¹⁷ Hudson, Valerie M., and Hilary Matfess. "In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict." *International Security*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2017, pp. 7-40., https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00289.

¹¹⁸ *Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory*, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ "A Common Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Framework." *GESI Working Group, IDPG*, 2017, http://www.ain.org.np/documents/GESI%20Framework%20Orientation%20Session_%20Part%203.pdf.

¹²⁰ "A Common Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Framework."



Promoting Inclusive Peace in Syria

In Syria, IRI supported CSO partners in conducting civic education trainings for citizens with an emphasis on promoting pluralism and religious tolerance. IRI placed special emphasis on training locally legitimate female leaders on advocacy, democracy, human rights, women's political and economic empowerment, elections and related topics. In several locations, women's groups have successfully negotiated with their local councils for the establishment of women's offices to represent women's voices within the local government, and have supported female candidates running for local office. Due to the advocacy efforts of one women's group in northwest Syria, their local council established a quota for women on the council for its upcoming elections. Since 2017, seven women trained through this program have been elected or appointed to political leadership positions in their communities. Through these activities, IRI bolstered pockets of citizen security against Syria's conflict-ridden backdrop.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- Understand which spaces—in both formal and informal governance—are the safest and most promising spaces for the inclusion of women and marginalized communities.** For example, in Afghanistan, research found that preexisting local Community Development Committees, segregated by gender, were the most effective platform for women to voice their opinions. In this case, informal or semiformal mechanisms were identified as key to enhancing gender inclusion in governance, largely due to gender discrimination in formally elected government bodies.¹²¹ Informal or semiformal mechanisms can sometimes provide an opening to lobby for the interests of vulnerable populations.¹²² Such interventions should be paired with those that promote women's voices in the formal political sphere as well. Studies have shown that feminist activism plays an important role in enacting policy changes not only for gender equality but also for encouraging funding of peace and negotiation initiatives.
- Design programs that take into consideration the triple burden that women often face when tasked with participating in community-level decision-making bodies.** The triple burden/workday describes the issue that women are tasked with obligations in the household, workforce and community spheres.¹²³ Thus, it is critical to lift the burden and create both incentives as well as measures that enable community participation. Such measures can include transportation, meeting locations that are centrally located to people's homes, offering meals and/or childcare and timing meetings so that they are late at night when women might have spare time without other burdens.
- Work alongside influential partners to address and transform gendered norms in communities that restrict vulnerable populations.** Programming should target gatekeepers for community participation to reduce barriers to participation and decision-making. This could involve targeting influential actors as allies and advocates of women, youth, disabled peoples and religious, racial, ethnic and sexual minorities. In situations where such actors reinforce exclusion, it may be useful to advocate and produce

¹²¹ Haines. *Social Inclusion in Fragile Contexts*.

¹²² Weldon, S. Laurel, and Mala Htun. 2013. "Feminist Mobilisation and Progressive Policy Change: Why Governments Take Action to Combat Violence Against Women." *Gender & Development*, vol. 21, no. 2, July 2013. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.2013.802158>.

¹²³ Ban, Anusha. "Triple Burden of Women: Conflicting Gender Norms." *The Himalayan*, 2 Mar. 2018, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/triple-burden-women-conflicting-gender-norms>.

messages that contribute to attitudinal and normative change. Messages can include raising awareness of the importance of inclusion to peace, and the risks of intolerance and prejudice.¹²⁴

- **Undertake measures during interventions to protect women and disadvantaged groups from backlash.**¹²⁵ Such groups face security risks, threats and hostility in conflict-affected contexts. Backlash can sometimes erupt against women's increased empowerment and agency during conflict, especially where notions of masculinity may enable conflict. Pairing political inclusion interventions with activities that encourage normative changes can help reduce the risk of backlash. For example, in the Ivory Coast, a project focused on economic empowerment included "gender dialogue groups," which engaged women and their partners on gender-based violence, which contributed to attitudinal shifts on the issue.¹²⁶

Human Rights Protection in Conflict-Affected Contexts



Protecting and promoting human rights is the foundation of lasting peace and stability, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations. Human rights comprise the right to life, the right to favorable working conditions, the right to vote, the right to participate in cultural life and freedom of thought, among others.¹²⁷ Human rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled for every individual irrespective of their identity.¹²⁸ Human rights-related programs can include protecting the rights of vulnerable populations, monitoring human rights violations and supporting human rights defenders.¹²⁹

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, human rights violations and widescale persecution are often key drivers of conflict. Cultural practices can reinforce the exclusion of marginalized groups: for example, in many contexts, sexual minorities experience extreme levels of discrimination with regard to access to education and health care.¹³⁰ These human rights violations are sometimes embodied in legal restrictions, like in Myanmar where Rohingya ethnic people are denied access to citizenship.¹³¹ Moreover, in some countries, women are barred from earning a wage and cannot participate in the economy.

Thus, programs in fragile contexts must be responsive to the needs of all groups in society, empowering them to recognize their rights and instill accountability for abuses.¹³² Identifying those who lacks legal protections and which rights are protected can, therefore, be fundamental to

¹²⁴ Gluzman, Rochelle. "Realizing UNSCR 1325: Men As Partners to Female Peacekeepers." *The Borgen Project*, 22 Aug. 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/female-peacekeepers/>.

¹²⁵ Mooney, Lauren. 2021. "Bridging the Gender Divide Is Key to US Global Fragility Strategy Implementation." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 6 Apr. 2021, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/04/06/bridging-the-gender-divide-is-key-to-us-global-fragility-strategy-implementation/>.

¹²⁶ Gupta, Jhumka, et al. "Gender Norms and Economic Empowerment Intervention to Reduce Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Rural Cote d'Ivoire: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Study." *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, vol. 13, no. 46, 2013. *Springer Link*, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/1472-698X-13-46>.

¹²⁷ *Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2006, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf>.

¹²⁸ *Your Human Rights: What are Human Rights?* United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/pages/whatarehumanrights.aspx>.

¹²⁹ *User's Guide to Democracy, Human Right and Governance Programming*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Feb. 2019, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/DRG-Users-Guide-3.15.2019.pdf>.

¹³⁰ "New ICJ Report on Human Rights Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression in Colombia, South Africa and Malaysia." *International Commission of Jurists*, 31 Mar. 2021, <https://www.icj.org/new-icj-report-on-human-rights-abuses-based-on-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-expression-in-colombia-south-africa-and-malaysia/#:~:text=The%2060-page%20report%2C%20Invisible%2C%20Isolated%2C%20and%20Ignored%3A%20Human,working%20with%20LGBT%20persons%20in%20the%20respective%20countries.>

¹³¹ *WION Web Team*. "Issue Passports to Rohingya or Face 'Consequences', says Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh." *WION*, 16 Oct. 2020, <https://www.wionews.com/world/issue-passports-to-rohingya-or-face-consequences-says-saudi-arabia-to-bangladesh-335750>.

¹³² UN Women, "Rights-based Approach." *UN Women*, 3 July 2013, <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/1498-rights-based-approach.html>.

understanding the broader conflict landscape and how to tailor DRG programs. Local, regional and national-level rights protections are fundamental to increasing representation and decision-making.

Support for Justice and the Rule of Law

Judiciary processes and security actors must be viewed as legitimate in order for individuals to utilize peaceful means to settle disputes, rather than resort to violence. Strong, independent justice institutions help to secure civil liberties, enforce accountability, ensure equitable application of the law and provide mechanisms for redress—all of which are fundamental to promoting stability. To foster durable peace, security and justice actors must build trust with citizens by respecting their rights and potential oversight role in security governance. The rule of law—which is made up of accountability, open government, just laws and access to justice¹³³—is part of the foundation of peaceful and democratic societies.

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, rule of law actors and interventions face particular challenges in achieving their intended objectives and impact. First, there is often tension between short-term security objectives, technical reforms and the rule of law.¹³⁴ Establishing security, protecting human rights and enforcing legal equality is a long-term endeavor. In some instances, a host government may desire security assistance but be uninterested in legal reform or rule of law.¹³⁵ This can undermine the objectives of rule of law assistance and can also lead technical reforms to miss the mark.¹³⁶

Second, fragile contexts are often characterized by an array of informal, nonstate justice providers, from elites to tribal leaders to religious leaders to armed actors. In post-conflict settings, where formal mechanisms may have collapsed or be severely underfunded, informal justice systems are critical to restoring law and order.¹³⁷ There are also situations in which certain customary or religious actors are mandated by the state to be the official justice providers at the district or provincial level. This backdrop poses complex questions about which justice provider is viewed as most legitimate. Without incorporating the reality that these informal justice authorities may serve as more consistent, fair or trusted justice providers, justice interventions may fall short.¹³⁸ In these circumstances, it is difficult to access information and the expertise necessary to understand the pitfalls and advantages of partnering with nonstate justice providers. Bypassing the government in favor of nonstate justice providers also runs the risk of undermining state legitimacy as it may decrease trust in government.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Justice and rule of law interventions are generally focused on enhancing the independence, responsiveness and capability of dispute resolution and judicial institutions. Programming can focus on:

- Promoting transparency in the investigation, sentencing and punishment of perpetrators;

¹³³ *What Is the Rule of Law?* World Justice Project, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/about-us/overview/what-rule-law>.

¹³⁴ Kelly, Catherine. *Rule of Law for Conflict, Security, and Stabilization Programming: Some Key Issues for Consideration*. American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, 2019, <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/directories/roli/misc/roli-rule-of-law-for-conflict-security-stabilization-programming.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Swenson, Geoffrey. "Why U.S. Efforts to Promote the Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed." *International Security*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2017, pp. 114–151. *ResearchGate*, DOI:10.1162/ISEC_a_00285.

¹³⁶ Kleinfeld, Rachel. *Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad: Next Generation Reform*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpj3r.

¹³⁷ Wojkowska, Ewa. *Doing Justice: How Informal Justice Systems Can Contribute*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Dec. 2006, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/UNDP%20DoingJusticeEwaWojkowska130307.pdf>.

¹³⁸ Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Drugs, Thugs, and Crime Are Reshaping the Afghan War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010).

- Training of police, judicial officials, courts and lawyers to respect human rights, such as due process and other principles, which is key to reestablishing public trust in the judicial system;
- Expanding alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to create the space for nonviolent conflict resolution;
- Enhancing access to justice among state court systems as well as informal mechanisms. Access to justice can also promote the legal empowerment of citizens by raising awareness of the role of various justice forums, bridging the divide between citizens, formal and informal institutions;
- Restorative justice programs that allow victims and perpetrators to repair the harm and hurt caused by conflict, as opposed to seeking retribution;
- Promoting citizen involvement and inclusion in the legal framework or constitutional reform process;
- Enabling criminal justice and prison reform by increasing capacity, promoting respect for human rights and encouraging attitudinal shifts toward law enforcement;¹³⁹
- Strengthening informal justice systems to help redress grievances; and
- Supporting victims, displaced people and former combatants by delivering justice, redressing harm and supporting inclusion.

Supporting Judicial Reform in Mexico

In Mexico, IRI helped build the capacity of local CSO networks to more effectively advance criminal justice reforms, crime prevention and human rights reforms in 2012. Since 2017, with funding from the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, IRI built public support for the Mexican government's penal justice system reforms, which introduce concepts of restorative justice and alternative dispute resolution methods. The 2016 judicial reforms have yet to be fully understood by citizens at the local level, and many stakeholders interested in advancing the reforms, including government officials, community leaders and civil society, lack information and resources to improve public awareness.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Analyze and adapt to the existing justice and legal landscape, including parallel structures and nonstate actors.** Where the state system is incapable or unwilling to uphold human rights standards to order, security and equitable application of the law, it may be more effective to work in partnership with nonstate justice providers. In places like Bangladesh, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Iraq and Mozambique, disputes are often settled by informal, customary authorities—sometimes more frequently than by state institutions.¹⁴⁰ The benefits of engaging informal justice actors are vast. According to a USAID guide, local populations in fragile contexts often laud such actors as accessible, well-connected,

¹³⁹ *Criminal Justice Reform in Post-Conflict States: A Guide for Practitioners*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2011, <https://www.usip.org/centers-innovation/rule-law/criminal-justice-reform-in-post-conflict-states>.

¹⁴⁰ Wojkowska. *Doing Justice*. See also, Albrecht, Peter, et al., editors. *Perspectives on Involving Non-State and Customary Actors in Justice and Security Reform*. International Development Law Organization (IDLO) and the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), 2011, https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/61420/DIIS_Book.pdf.

culturally relevant, trustworthy and efficient.¹⁴¹ The abundance of legal actors can offer an opportunity for practitioners to identify and strengthen the institution that shows the most commitment to tolerance and stabilization.¹⁴² Thus, marginalized groups can more readily take an active role in contesting harmful norms and human rights violations.¹⁴³

- Programs should be designed with careful consideration of the interaction between state and nonstate institutions. If possible, local government and police should be linked with informal actors to foster collaboration instead of competition.¹⁴⁴ In all cases, it is essential to coordinate such approaches with diplomatic engagement to ensure complementarity with the long-term strategy and policy decisions in a context.** For example, despite major funding from USAID and other international donors to Afghanistan (more than \$1 billion between 2003 and 2016), the formal policing and courts systems were widely perceived as corrupt and inept.¹⁴⁵ Citizens primarily turn to informal or semiformal institutions for dispute resolutions (including, in some cases, international NGOs); at the local level, such justice providers are usually the village jirga or *shura* councils.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, the Taliban created its own justice system.¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately, these informal local-level providers are highly exclusionary, are not legally binding and act as spoilers for the consolidation of formal state institutions. In many ways, rule of law assistance was counterproductive because it strengthened corrupt institutions, failed to enhance the legitimacy of local justice systems and actors and entertained collaboration with nonstate actors who had little interest in the rule of law.¹⁴⁸
- When engaging with nonstate justice actors, carefully devise a multidimensional strategy with clear and realistic benchmarks.** In Afghanistan, a range of strategies was employed to coopt or partner with nonstate justice systems, but all fell short. Such efforts missed the mark because there was low demand for state-led justice and external actors, instead instrumentalizing nonstate justice leaders for counterinsurgency objectives.¹⁴⁹ Successful rule of law interventions will find a way to incorporate or slowly transition these traditional justice mechanisms to earn the faith of the broader population.¹⁵⁰ For example, USIP's Justice and Security Dialogues in Saaba, Burkina Faso brought together a range of stakeholders, including local leaders, state security forces, self-defense groups and nonstate security providers. As a result, local police are increasingly willing to integrate the *kog/weogo* self-defense groups into criminal investigation, provided they refer suspects to the police instead of executing vigilante justice.¹⁵¹ Yet such approaches are highly sensitive and require continuous adaptation based on changes in the environment and results.
- Focus on creating bottom-up demand and mobilize groups across sectors to garner support for legal reform.** Political and legal reform processes have winners and losers, even in the most seemingly simple cases.¹⁵² It is important to appreciate the political nature of such processes given that, in conflict-affected contexts, there is higher risk of disrupting power dynamics and exacerbating long-standing

¹⁴¹ *Non-State Justice System Programming: A Practitioners' Guide*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Guide-to-NSJS-Jun-19.pdf>.

¹⁴² Albrecht, et al., editors. *Perspectives on Involving Non-State and Customary Actors in Justice and Security Reform*.

¹⁴³ Albrecht, et al., editors. *Perspectives on Involving Non-State and Customary Actors in Justice and Security Reform*.

¹⁴⁴ Albrecht, et al., editors. *Perspectives on Involving Non-State and Customary Actors in Justice and Security Reform*.

¹⁴⁵ Wardak, Ali. *A Decade and a Half of Rebuilding Afghanistan's Justice System: An Overview*. Van Vollenhoven Institute, 2016, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/rechtsgeleerdheid/instituut-voor-metajuridica/afghanistans-justice-system-vs-2016.10.04.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ Wardak. *A Decade and a Half of Rebuilding Afghanistan's Justice System*.

¹⁴⁷ Swenson. "Why U.S. Efforts to Promote the Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed."

¹⁴⁸ Swenson. "Why U.S. Efforts to Promote the Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed."

¹⁴⁹ Swenson. "Why U.S. Efforts to Promote the Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed."

¹⁵⁰ Swenson. "Why U.S. Efforts to Promote the Rule of Law in Afghanistan Failed."

¹⁵¹ Kelly, Catherine Lena. "Justice and Rule of Law Key to African Security." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 25 May 2021, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/justice-and-rule-of-law-key-to-african-security/>.

¹⁵² Kleinfeld. *Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad*.

grievances.¹⁵³ Additionally, it is essential to enforce accountability of conflict actors and generate demand for necessary reforms in order to minimize the opportunities for violent contestation.

- Raise awareness of how law be utilized to improve everyday lives.**¹⁵⁴ Given that high levels of marginalization, divisions and societal fracturing often characterize fragile contexts, rule of law interventions can be utilized as a tool to give a voice to disadvantaged groups. Integrating this perspective can include conducting concerted grassroots outreach, expanding access to justice provision, community organizing and identifying windows of opportunity to counter discriminatory laws. To this end, such interventions must be paired with nonjudicial engagement around social norms or inclusion because some elites may see attempts to strengthen excluded voices as an attempt to silence dominant groups. Such an approach enshrines the importance of moving beyond a state-centric approach and instead puts the focus on human security and community needs.

Legislative Strengthening

Effective legislatures can serve as a cornerstone of democratic resilience by developing inclusive and impactful legislation, exercising oversight over the executive branch and providing representation for citizens.¹⁵⁵ Legislatures contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding by developing legislation and undertaking initiatives that address the root causes of conflict, including poverty, equal distribution of resources and political exclusion.¹⁵⁶ In post-conflict settings, legislatures also hold responsibilities that are critical to the long-term stability of a country, including managing legislation on topics such as transitional justice mechanisms, disarmament and reintegration of combatants; managing internally displaced persons (IDPs); and reestablishing civilian control over the security sector.

To ensure that legislative strengthening interventions do not unintentionally aggravate conflict, consider the role the legislature plays in a) the conflict and b) in the political system more broadly. Legislators can perpetuate a range of predatory political incentives, including clientelism, bribery, coercion and siphoning public resources to increase their own wealth. These shortcomings can exacerbate distrust in government and result in declining levels of support for democracy writ large, fostering popular grievances that drive conflict. Legislators can also be divided along political, ethnic or religious lines; promote their own self-interests; incite or orchestrate violence; and sponsor armed groups. In such circumstances, supporting legislatures may indirectly exacerbate conflict at worst, or generate limited impact at best.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Legislative strengthening interventions aim to increase the technical capacity of a legislature to design and implement effective and responsive legislation, improve the independence and resiliency of legislatures to participate in a system of checks and balances through effective oversight of the executive and enhance the ability of legislatures and legislators to act efficiently, transparently and responsively to their constituents.¹⁵⁷ Legislative strengthening programs include:

¹⁵³ Rebuilding the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict Environments. *United States Agency for International Development (USAID)*, May 2005, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID-Post_Conflict_ROL_508.pdf.

¹⁵⁴ Golub, Stephen. "The Legal Empowerment Alternative." Carothers, Thomas, editor. *Promoting the Rule of Law Abroad: In Search of Knowledge*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpk74>.

¹⁵⁵ "Approach to Legislative Strengthening." International Republican Institute, 2021. Internal document.

¹⁵⁶ O'Brien, Mitchell et al. *Parliaments As Peacebuilders in Conflict-Affected Countries*. World Bank, 2008, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/6532>.

¹⁵⁷ "Approach to Legislative Strengthening."

- Training and building the capacity of individual members (elected officials and staff) to carry out their representational and lawmaking duties and conduct executive oversight;
- Supporting the establishment of mechanisms for intergovernmental collaboration and executive oversight;
- Institution building to establish continuity and stability of government regardless of who is in power;¹⁵⁸
- Increasing connectivity between legislatures and citizens (and civil society) and increasing the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process through training, capacity building and establishing processes and mechanisms for regular engagement;¹⁵⁹
- Supporting legislatures to adopt conflict prevention and management measures, including by establishing human rights standards, transitional justice measures and responsive governance mechanisms that bring constituents into the policymaking process and provide a platform to address their grievances;
- Providing technical assistance to legislative staff and committees to define priorities, generate dialogue and adopt measures that are responsive to conflict dynamics and address the root causes of violence; and
- Facilitating exchanges to increase understanding of lessons learned and good practices for security, counterterrorism and countering violent extremism legislation, among other areas of focus.

Legislative Strengthening in Timor-Leste



After decades of conflict, Timor-Leste emerged as an independent nation in 2002. The country has made significant progress, but still grapples with poverty, public infrastructure and legacies of conflict. In order to support Timor-Leste's progress in its democratic consolidation, IRI worked with the country's National Parliament following elections in 2017 and 2018 to improve the capacity of parliamentarians, including the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, parliamentary staff and party bench staff to carry out their legislative, representative and political decision-making roles. In addition, IRI conducted town hall meetings at the municipal and sub-municipal levels to bring together parliamentarians, local officials, civil society and citizens to discuss key issues at the national and local levels. IRI also brought together local civil society organizations and policymakers through a series of roundtable discussions promoting CSO oversight of the National Parliament by increasing transparency, raising awareness of political parties' efforts to meet campaign promises and building and incubating constructive linkages between MPs and CSOs to promote data and issue-oriented policy development in the National Parliament.

¹⁵⁸ Cutter, Anna. *Strengthening Parliaments in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations: Latin American Component*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2006, <https://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/agora-documents/UNDP%20-%20Strengthening%20Parliaments%20in%20Conflict%20and%20Post-Conflict%20Situations%20-%202006%20-%20EN%20-%20PS.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ "Approach to Legislative Strengthening."



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Legislative interventions must be nationally owned and designed in collaboration with local stakeholders to be legitimate and effective.**¹⁶⁰ Legislature support programs require buy-in and commitment from elected officials to implement successful legislative reforms. National ownership and locally rooted project design can help guarantee sustainability. In Somaliland and Puntland, for example, efforts to strengthen the House of Representatives' constitutional and budget oversight capacity were both initiated and sustained by two Somali institutions, the Academy for Peace and Development and the Puntland Development Research Centre.¹⁶¹
- **Interventions should build consensus and leverage issues of mutual concern in order to help overcome ideological, ethnic, religious or other divisions.**¹⁶² This can help foster superordinate national identities in ways that support peace. Such consensus-building interventions can involve establishing caucuses or legislative committee structures to debate critical issues, which in turn helps enhance negotiation and compromise as well as build trusted relationships.¹⁶³ When committees—and the legislature—are successful in achieving consensus on issues and adopting sound policies, it can have a multiplier effect on conflict mitigation in the country. Political leaders can set a positive example and demonstrate that legislatures are an avenue for nonviolent conflict resolution by redressing grievances, negotiating, advocating for citizen's interests and finding common solutions. This both builds public confidence in the capacity of the legislature to address citizens' concerns and incentivizes groups to use the democratic process to advance their own interests going forward.¹⁶⁴ However, building consensus among deeply divided actors is highly sensitive and must be designed carefully to ensure that programs do not cement divisions among parties, but rather promote inclusion and representation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, caucuses are organized along regional—and, therefore, ethnic—lines and continue to reinforce divisions that were at the root of conflict in the country.¹⁶⁵ In recent years, with support from IRI and other nongovernmental organizations, members of the Parliamentary Assembly started to participate in informal, cross-party caucuses and parliamentary initiatives that allowed them to overcome these divisions and work together on issues of mutual concern.
- **Direct partnership with civil society has proven effective in strengthening legislator communication with constituents, and in advancing the accountability and responsiveness of legislative bodies.**¹⁶⁶ Civil society, if legitimate and trusted in the community, can help elected officials better understand community needs and develop appropriate responses to address those needs. Increasing responsiveness to citizens' concerns through legislative action and citizen engagement can help resolve political exclusion issues.
- **Promoting representation of women and marginalized groups in legislatures can increase the credibility and capabilities of the institution.**¹⁶⁷ Legislatures with greater representation have been

¹⁶⁰ Van Brabant, Koenraad. *Strengthening Parliaments in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations. Drawing on Some Experiences from Africa*. Interpeace, 28 July 2005, https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2005/07/2005_07_IP_Interpeace_Strengthening_Parliaments_In_Conflict_And_Post_Conflict_Situations.pdf.

¹⁶¹ Van Brabant. *Strengthening Parliaments in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*.

¹⁶² O'Brien. *Parliaments As Peacebuilders in Conflict-Affected Countries*.

¹⁶³ Dutta, Nikhil et al. *Strengthening Legislatures for Conflict Management in Fragile States*. Woodrow Wilson School of International and Public Affairs, Princeton University, 2007, <https://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/agora-documents/Strengthening%20Legislatures%20for%20Conflict%20Management.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ O'Brien. *Parliaments As Peacebuilders in Conflict-Affected Countries*.

¹⁶⁵ O'Brien. *Parliaments As Peacebuilders in Conflict-Affected Countries*.

¹⁶⁶ O'Brien. *Parliaments As Peacebuilders in Conflict-Affected Countries*.

¹⁶⁷ Shair-Rosenfield, Sarah, and Reed Wood. "Governing Well after War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-Conflict Peace." *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 79, no. 3, May 2017. *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316865171_Governing_Well_after_War_How_Improving_Female_Representation_Prolongs_Post-conflict_Peace.

shown to prioritize—and implement—policies that address drivers of conflict and improve perceptions of the institution among the populace.¹⁶⁸ Societies with higher representation of women in the legislature are associated with lower levels of intrastate armed conflict and reduced risk of conflict recurrence.¹⁶⁹ Political inclusion, however, must be accompanied by changes in institutional norms and practices to ensure that such groups do not just have a seat at the table, but also a voice and decision-making power.¹⁷⁰

Political Party Support

Political parties are vital for effective democratization and peacebuilding in conflict-prone and post-conflict settings. Political parties serve key democratic functions that civil society organizations or social movements cannot replace. Parties aggregate and represent citizens' interests within the state, engage and involve citizens in democratic processes, structure political choices during elections, form governments and take responsibility for governance.¹⁷¹

In conflict-affected countries, political parties play a key role in sustainable peace or continued violence. Party rhetoric and policy positions can either exacerbate divisions or foster conciliation and political moderation. Parties are often key actors in brokering an end to conflict, bargaining over the future political settlement and institutional structure and fostering responsive governance that can prevent a recurrence of conflict. As one analyst argues, parties are "unique among political institutions in their potential to give political expression to grievances that may otherwise be expressed through violence."¹⁷²

The importance of political parties in conflict-affected countries often exposes their critical deficiencies. Across the world, many political parties are weakly institutionalized, fail to serve citizens and are unpopular. The public often perceives parties as corrupt, self-interested, unresponsive, incompetent, squabbling, petty and standing for nothing.¹⁷³ Many parties are highly personalistic with weak organizations and no clear platform or are built on patronage networks that serve members and loyalists but not the public.¹⁷⁴

Parties unmoored to platforms or policy-based ideologies will often mobilize voters with inflammatory ethnic chauvinism.¹⁷⁵ Political parties can also reflect factional divides, fueling hostile and dangerous political competition. Factionalism as such is directly linked to civil war.¹⁷⁶ In some cases, political parties are not only corrupt but actively prey on communities—sponsoring criminal and political violence. This is the case in Kenya, where politicians have supported violent groups to intimidate their rivals. In such circumstances, the democratic process is exploited and hollowed out for political gain, ultimately undermining state legitimacy.

¹⁶⁸ Shair-Rosenfield and Wood. "Governing Well after War."

¹⁶⁹ Shair-Rosenfield and Wood. "Governing Well after War"; Melander, Erik. "Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 4, Dec. 2005, pp. 695-714. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2005.00384.x>.

¹⁷⁰ Brechenmacher, Saskia, et al. "Representation Isn't Enough." *Foreign Policy*, 2 Mar. 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/02/women-elected-office-representation-not-enough/>.

¹⁷¹ Carothers, Thomas. *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2006/10/23/confronting-weakest-link-aiding-political-parties-in-new-democracies-pub-18808>.

¹⁷² Castillejo, Clare. *Political Parties and Peacebuilding*. Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/a3a0e081d8d2852cc065394acc740420.pdf>.

¹⁷³ Carothers. *Confronting the Weakest Link*.

¹⁷⁴ Carothers. *Confronting the Weakest Link*.

¹⁷⁵ Kaufman, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Cornell University Press, 2001.

¹⁷⁶ Vreeland, James Raymond. "The Effect of Political Regime on Civil War: Unpacking Anocracy." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 6 Mar. 2008. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002708315594>.

Alternatively, where parties have little support or power to influence conflict dynamics, an anarchical political system easily descends into a conflict spiral.¹⁷⁷



Illustrative Programs and Activities

International assistance to political parties in fragile environments typically falls into two general categories:

- 1) **Standard Political Party Programs:** Despite the unique challenges facing parties in conflict-prone countries, they still must serve the same basic functions as parties in more stable contexts, and, therefore, benefit from standard skills-building programs. These programs include trainings on communications, grassroots organizing, campaigning, post-election governance, party structures and internal democracy and strategic planning.
- 2) **Conflict-Specific Political Party Programs:** Other types of political party programs are tailored to the distinct conditions facing parties in post-conflict or conflict-affected countries. These conditions include hyperpolarization, precarious financing, the transition of rebel groups into politics, young and weak parties and limited state capacity and legitimacy.¹⁷⁸ In this setting, political party programs can include:
 - » Interparty dialogues to build trust between rival factions during or after conflict;
 - » Skills building mixed with disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs for rebel movements and leaders transitioning to political actors;
 - » Creation of peace pledges or other public commitments to nonviolence and cooperation;
 - » Skills-building training focusing on women and other marginalized groups who are often disempowered during violent conflict;
 - » Building the capacity of civil society and community organizations to moderate and manage predatory political actors; and
 - » Guiding electoral reform, facilitating power-sharing agreements and reforming the rules that govern the internal structure and behavior of parties in order to mitigate the incentives for divisive or conciliatory behavior.

¹⁷⁷ Posen, Barry R. "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict." *Survival*, vol. 35, no. 1, spring 1993, pp. 27-47. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339308442672>.

¹⁷⁸ *Working with Political Parties in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*. Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2015, <https://nimd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015-04-Fragile-and-Conflict-Affected-Settings.pdf>.

Supporting Peaceful Norms Among Political Parties in Nigeria



The political system in Nigeria is shaped by the rising threats of terrorism, intercommunal violence, armed groups, vigilantes and gangs. Unfortunately, political parties are the source of much of this violence or take advantage of instability to win elections.¹⁷⁹ To address this issue, IRI is working with the two main political parties (the All Progressives Congress and the People's Democratic Party) to enhance internal and external accountability procedures and mechanisms. IRI supported the parties to revise their internal governing documents and set up forums for internal dialogue, consensus building and dispute resolution. IRI has also mediated intraparty disputes at the national and state levels to overcome differences of opinion about primary results or who should occupy leadership positions. As part of these efforts, IRI created the Inter-Party Advisory Council of Nigeria and facilitated the development of codes of conduct and peace accords to set standards for ethical party behavior. These have been signed by the political parties, candidates, religious and traditional leaders and security forces to encourage peaceful conduct during the elections. Critical to the success of these accountability measures is monitoring their implementation, domesticating the agreements at the communal level and in the media and having influential actors speak out when they are violated.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Interventions should refrain from pushing parties to replicate Global North or Western models.**¹⁸⁰ Such models, training expertise and theoretical approaches might not be applicable in countries with different customs and traditions of power relations.¹⁸¹ Based on lessons learned from the peacebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar, the imperative for tailored programs that account for conflict dynamics is clear—it is largely ineffective to assume that all parties across contexts need the same type of assistance.¹⁸² For example, if political parties are fractured along conflict divisions, then programs should attempt to enhance multiparty collaboration. Or, if political parties are dominated by conflict actors, interventions may focus on enforcing accountability and amplifying citizens' voices. Party programs should be situated within the broader peacebuilding environment by focusing on making parties responsive to citizens and (re)building the norms of democracy and nonviolence.¹⁸³
- **Bringing previously excluded groups into the governing process increases the perceived legitimacy of post-conflict institutions and creates more sensitive policymaking.** This can involve supporting a range of candidates, including women; racial, ethnic and religious minorities; youth; and people with disabilities.¹⁸⁴ In these circumstances, political party trainings may be useful, including when supporting parties with former combatants turned politicians.¹⁸⁵ Such outreach and participation must be sustained over a long period of time.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ *The Role of Political Parties in Nigeria's Fledgling Democracy*. International Republican Institute, 2020, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri-policybrief-nigeria_political_party.pdf.

¹⁸⁰ Menocal, et al. "Assessing International Democracy Assistance and Lessons Learned."

¹⁸¹ Kumar, Krishna. "International Political Party Assistance: An Overview and Analysis." Working Paper 33, Conflict Research Program, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2004, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20041000_cru_working_paper_33.pdf.

¹⁸² Castillejo. *Political Parties and Peacebuilding*.

¹⁸³ *Working with Political Parties in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*.

¹⁸⁴ *Working with Political Parties in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*.

¹⁸⁵ ten Hoove, Lotte and Pinto Scholtbach, Alvaro, *Democracy and Political Party Assistance in Post-Conflict Societies*, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, August 2008. <https://www.epd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NIMD-Democracy-and-Political-Party-Assistance-in-Post-Conflict-Societies.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ *Working with Political Parties in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*.

Subnational Governance Support

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, both formal and informal institutions may exercise governing authority. Given that formal institutions often lack legitimacy and effectiveness—or even exploit their citizenry—the range of governance actors expands in these settings. This is especially the case at the subnational level in remote or rural regions, where traditional authorities, civil society or even nonstate armed groups may play a role in delivering services, administering justice and responding to community concerns. As such, interventions that seek to strengthen subnational governance often comprise diverse activities and face distinct challenges when it comes to engaging state and nonstate actors.

To capture a nuanced understanding of subnational governance support, this section covers several integral aspects. First, it focuses on traditional governance programs that seek to enhance the capacity of government institutions and increase citizens' input in government policy and decision-making. Second, it includes information on challenges and lessons learned from engagement with nonstate governance actors in stabilizing conflict.

Support to Subnational Government Actors

Improving state-citizen relations is key to building peace and promoting stability. Subnational governance settings provide a critical opportunity for citizens to influence government decision-making and enforce accountability. Engaging the central government alone is insufficient in mitigating conflict. Subnational governance offers a key entry point to help understand and address highly localized conflict dynamics. Subnational government authorities—like provincial-level executives, subnational consultative bodies, district-level executives and municipal authorities—are often most accessible to the population, help provide an avenue for engagement and sometimes support service delivery.

Developing responsive governance is a long, difficult project. A major challenge when providing support to subnational government institutions is that the quality of local governance can vary significantly within a country, which has implications for peace and development.¹⁸⁷ In some regions of a country, local government can be an effective partner in helping to mitigate conflict; in others, local government may perpetuate violence.¹⁸⁸ Another key issue is the plurality of governance actors that often proliferate in the power vacuum of conflict-affected contexts. Given their prevalence, it is essential to maintain an understanding of nonstate governance, including by traditional and religious leaders, civil society and nonstate armed actors. This issue is discussed in further detail below.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Supporting subnational governance entails bridging the divide between citizens and subnational government actors to address collective action problems in a society. This can involve the following:

- Strengthening subnational processes and supporting government authorities to build their administrative skills and capacity to fulfill their mandates;
- Facilitating coordination between various levels of government, including between and among national and subnational authorities;

¹⁸⁷ Klick, Matthew. "The Effect of State-Local Complementarity and Local Governance on Development: A Comparative Analysis from Post-War Guatemala." *World Development*, vol. 82, Jan. 2016, pp. 1-13. *ResearchGate*, DOI:10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.01.005.

¹⁸⁸ Jackson, Paul. "Local Government and Decentralisation in Post-Conflict Contexts." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, vol. 1, no. 6, 2016, pp. 747-762, p. 751. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2016.1374207>.

- Promoting and implementing decentralization reforms;
- Bridging the divide between citizen and government through 1) participation (participatory priority setting), 2) transparency (information on rights and public service performance) and 3) public service accountability (citizen feedback and monitoring);¹⁸⁹
- Empowering subnational government actors to manage conflict between disparate groups and establish forums for dialogue; and
- Engaging citizens in the planning, management and oversight of public services at the provincial and municipal levels, which can include education, justice, health care, social protection or physical infrastructure depending on the jurisdiction. By empowering citizens to participate in governing their resources, interventions seek to improve not only the provision of services, but also address drivers of conflict, which often include unaccountable government and inequitable distribution of resources.

Additionally, community-driven development (CDD) programs in conflict-affected contexts often attempt to achieve objectives that are closely linked with DRG, such as fostering participation, accountability and political reform at the subnational level. CDD is defined as an “approach that empowers local community groups, including local government, by giving direct control to the community over planning decisions and investment resources through a process that emphasizes participatory planning and accountability.”¹⁹⁰ These programs are characterized by “bottom-up” approaches which seek to promote subnational autonomy and create forums for inexperienced or informal policymakers to enter the formal political process.¹⁹¹ It involves supporting economic activity, managing resources and delivering services. CDD can be a beneficial approach because it can incorporate a broad array of interests and power structures, thus fostering political inclusion.

Strengthening Local Governance in Colombia to Address Conflict



While the peace agreement ended the 52-year armed conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government in 2016, violence and abuses have taken new forms. IRI has worked with municipal governments to monitor peace accord implementation in rural areas. IRI has also helped Colombian youth emissaries engage in dialogue with government authorities and elaborate on recommendations on peace process implementation. Through these interventions, Colombian youth were able to design and implement publicly inclusive policies across the regions of Antioquia, Cauca, Cesar, Meta and Valle del Cauca.

¹⁸⁹ “Does Promoting Citizen Engagement in the Governance of Public Services Lead to Improved Service Delivery and Quality of Life?” *International Initiative for Impact Evaluation*, <https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/systematic-review/does-promoting-citizen-engagement-governance-public>. Systematic review brief.

¹⁹⁰ World Bank, *Community Driven Development in the Context of Conflict-Affected Countries: Challenges and Opportunities*, 2006, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303518492_Community_Driven_Development_in_the_Context_of_Conflict-Affected_Countries_Challenges_and_Opportunities.

¹⁹¹ Justino. “Governance Interventions in Conflict-Affected Countries.”



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Link local norms, values and leaders with local government.** This should involve understanding hyper-localized political and conflict dynamics as well as existing capacities of local government. Failing to do so runs the risk of increasing citizen dissatisfaction and undermining prospects for peace.¹⁹² For example, during the post-conflict period in the autonomous region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, legal institutions allowed for local variations in the selection of members and included traditional chiefs with women and youth representatives.¹⁹³ However, programs must also avoid coming up with their own rules for selection of local representatives based on different interpretations: they should be integrated and adherent to the constitution, for example.
- **Assess the legitimacy of local government actors based on hyper-localized community-level attitudes and opinion.** Along these lines, understand whether local government actors have the support of their communities in order to determine their potential role in stabilizing conflict. A key component is determining the extent to which local governments effectively represent an array of ethnic and communal groups in the community.¹⁹⁴ If there is a severe breakdown in local government legitimacy, it may be more useful to invest in measures to enforce accountability or undertake gradual measures to build trust. Evidence has shown that accountability interventions have had more success when local civil society groups have strong capital and sustained involvement.¹⁹⁵
- **Increasing state-citizen engagement alone may not lead to improved well-being.**¹⁹⁶ Promoting citizen engagement in public service delivery can often stimulate active citizenship and improve access to and quality of services. However, citizen engagement alone might not lead to changes in everyday life. As such, it is integral to either manage expectations of program participants or pair such trust-building initiatives which help improve perceptions of quality of life and social cohesion. Otherwise, there is a risk that programs inadvertently exacerbate existing grievances that enable conflict.
- **Engage various “communities” based on locally relevant conceptualizations.** CDD programs have failed in the past for solely relying on a geographic understanding of a “community.” For example, in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), CDD programs imposed an external interpretation, arbitrarily adding and dividing groups based on the number of target participants and funding requirements.¹⁹⁷ At the same time, critical conflict divisions may not always exist at the village level, thus making the geographic conception of “community” irrelevant. Programming should reflect an understanding of the key societal divisions and how these impact local definitions of what makes up a “community.”
- **The outcomes of improved governance, civic engagement and service delivery are often nebulous and fluid; thus, either narrow or overly broad objectives and theories of change may fail to accurately capture results or produce targeted project strategies.**¹⁹⁸ For example, levels of civil engagement may be punctuated by periods of intense change, with long phases of “quietude” in between.¹⁹⁹ Yet, traditional

¹⁹² *The Role of Local Governance in Sustaining Peace*. International Peace Institute, Feb. 2018, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/1802_Local-Governance-and-Sustaining-Peace.pdf.

¹⁹³ Justino. “Governance Interventions in Conflict-Affected Countries.”

¹⁹⁴ Menkhaus, Ken. “Local Governance and Peacebuilding.” *Legitimacy and Peace Processes: From Coercion to Consent*, edited by Alexander Ramsbotham and Achim Wennmann, *Accord*, no. 25, Apr. 2014, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/legitimacy-and-peace-processes/local-governance-and-peacebuilding-challenges-legitimate>.

¹⁹⁵ “Does Promoting Citizen Engagement in the Governance of Public Services Lead to Improved Service Delivery and Quality of Life?”

¹⁹⁶ “Does Promoting Citizen Engagement in the Governance of Public Services Lead to Improved Service Delivery and Quality of Life?”

¹⁹⁷ King, Elizabeth. *A Critical Review of Community-Driven Development Programs in Conflict-Affected Contexts*. International Rescue Committee and UK aid, 2013, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a0240f0b64974000398/61046-A_Critical_Review_of_CDD_in_Conflict_Affected_Contexts.pdf.

¹⁹⁸ *A Critical Review of Community-Driven Development Programs in Conflict-Affected Contexts*.

¹⁹⁹ Mansuri, Ghazala, and Vijayendra Rao. *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* World Bank, 2013, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/11859/9780821382561.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

projects often fail to reflect this reality in favor of outlining excessively lofty outcomes.²⁰⁰ CDD programs may not always be able to effect simultaneous change in such wide-ranging areas as welfare, governance and social cohesion. Instead, prioritizing a clear outcome may be more useful: the International Rescue Committee modified its approach to CDD in the DRC by focusing specifically on governance, narrowing in on sectors that are acceptable for funding, and developing community scorecards to encourage oversight of the CDD program.²⁰¹ Thus, instead of viewing a specific approach as a “panacea,” it is essential that the project scope and expected results are clear and realistic.

Spotlight on Decentralization as a Conflict Mitigation Technique



The impetus of moving governance away from the hierarchy of the state toward the local level stems from the notion that many violent conflicts, irrespective of their ideological roots, are nourished by people’s lack of access to, or exclusion from, resources and public goods. Supporting decentralization and promoting reforms are a key technique in responding to this problem. Decentralization can expand inclusion of marginalized groups, address intergroup tensions, increase the quality of service delivery and thereby reduce communal conflicts.²⁰² Decentralization is often lauded as a means to expand political participation and increase accountability, efficiency and responsiveness.²⁰³ Local governments are well placed to play a critical role in land disputes, one of the most common forms of communal conflict.²⁰⁴

However, decentralization’s promise often comes with risks, pitfalls and unintended consequences in conflict-affected contexts.²⁰⁵ In some cases, communal conflict instead increases following the implementation of decentralization measures.²⁰⁶ Elite capture, a lack of resources and ambiguity surrounding transfer of responsibility can hamper local government effectiveness and indirectly contribute to conflict.²⁰⁷ In order to control resources or promote a political agenda, decentralization can incentivize and facilitate capture by armed groups and other conflict actors.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ Mansuri and Rao. *Localizing Development*.

²⁰¹ Anyadike, Obi. “Does Community-Driven Aid Need a Makeover?” *The New Humanitarian*, 27 Apr. 2015, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2015/04/27/does-community-driven-aid-need-makeover>.

²⁰² “Tranchant (2008) found fiscal decentralization could reduce the likelihood of conflict by strengthening local bureaucratic capacity. In Kosovo, Montoux (2006) found that decentralization was a tool to reduce ethnic tensions by providing reassurance to ethnic minorities and legitimacy to the political system. Likewise, in Uganda, decentralization can also foster local political stability and national unity through granting greater autonomy to conflicting groups, who are forced to enter into a formal bargaining process with the central government (Rothchild 1994)” in Rusyiana, Aris, and Sujarwoto Sujarwoto. “Does Decentralization Good for Reducing Communal Conflict? A Multilevel Analysis of Communal Conflict at Indonesia’s Villages 2008-2014.” *Journal of Public Administration Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2017, pp. 25–44, p. 26, DOI:10.21776/UB.JPAS.2017.002.01.3.

²⁰³ Jackson. “Local Government and Decentralisation in Post-Conflict Contexts.” p. 750.

²⁰⁴ Jackson. “Local Government and Decentralisation in Post-Conflict Contexts.” p. 749.

²⁰⁵ USAID, “Democratic Decentralization Programming Handbook,” June 2009, 2, <https://urban-links.org/wp-content/uploads/Democratic-Decentralization-Handbook.pdf>.

²⁰⁶ “Green (2008) found decentralization of power to smaller political units could increase local-level conflict by shifting power from ethnically heterogeneous areas to those dominated by only one or two ethnic groups. Brancati (2006) found decentralized systems of government could increase communal conflict when regional parties vote are high. Likewise, Gurr (1993) presented that political system change could shape communal conflict because of institutional weakness” in Rusyiana and Sujarwoto. “Does Decentralization Good for Reducing Communal Conflict?” p. 26.

²⁰⁷ Jackson. “Local Government and Decentralisation in Post-Conflict Contexts.” p. 750.

²⁰⁸ Steele, Abbey, and Livia I. Schubiger. “Democracy and Civil War: The Case of Colombia.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2018, pp. 587–600, p. 589–592. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894218787780>.

Nonstate Governance

In fragile settings, formal local authorities play an outsized role in community governance, as they are often viewed by the population as legitimate and effective in resolving collective issues.²⁰⁹ Nonstate actors play a key role in mobilizing citizen participation, managing resources and delivering services in fragile states.²¹⁰

However, partnering with nonstate governance providers is subject to a number of risks. First, doing so can undermine both state and nonstate legitimacy and capacity.²¹¹ For example, in Mozambique, chiefs were charged with collecting taxes and policing communities; however, their legitimacy decreased as a result because it complicated their position and perception in the community.²¹² In these instances, there may be less incentive to invest in state governance systems because such actors' image is weakened.²¹³

Another challenge is that such programs risk creating parallel structures that are neither aligned with the government nor the principles of human rights and inclusion.²¹⁴ For example, in Somalia, clan elders and traditional authorities play a key role in local affairs, despite having contributed to conflict. In these contexts, it can be harmful to support actors that endorse or use political violence as a tool, because it positions them as spoilers to peacebuilding. However, such groups are not a monolithic entity: some actors may perpetuate community divisions while others are effective conflict mitigation partners. Moreover, excluding informal actors from peacebuilding runs the risk of marginalizing key interests and actors, thus indirectly feeding grievances that fuel conflict in the first place.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Programs that engage nonstate governance actors take a similar form to those that support subnational governments. Interventions can aim to help clarify responsibilities of state and nonstate governance actors and expand civic engagement through nonstate governance. Programming focus areas can include:

- Building the capacity and skills of informal actors to govern effectively;
- Expanding the population's access to nonstate governance actors in order to inform decision-making and address community needs. This can include helping to ensure demands are addressed equitably and in a manner that protects human rights;
- Clarifying and facilitating coordination between state and nonstate governance providers, through legal frameworks, informal collaboration and by addressing public demand;
- Engaging informal governance actors on human rights, civic education and political participation; and
- Expanding the input of women and marginalized groups in community processes and civic engagement led by informal governance actors.

²⁰⁹ "Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework," International Republican Institute, 2021, <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri-conflict-governance-framework-120221.pdf>.

²¹⁰ "Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework."

²¹¹ Eickhoff, Karoline and Luise K. Müller. "Conflict Prevention and the Legitimacy of Governance Actors." SFB-Governance Working Paper Series, no. 72, September 2017, https://www.sfb-governance.de/publikationen/sfb-700-working_papers/wp72/SFB-Governance-Working-Paper-72.pdf.

²¹² Eickhoff, "Conflict Prevention and the Legitimacy of Governance Actors." See also, Buur, Helene and Maria Kyed. "Contested Sources of Authority: Re-claiming State Sovereignty by Formalizing Traditional Authority in Mozambique," *Development and Change*, vol. 37, issue 4, July 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00504.x>.

²¹³ Eickhoff. "Conflict Prevention and the Legitimacy of Governance Actors."

²¹⁴ Price, Roz. *Local Governance in Conflict-Affected Contexts*. Institute of Development Studies, 15 Nov. 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c18eba440f0b60bb6e035f0/234_Local_Governance_in_Conflict_Affected_Contexts.pdf.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Understand the interaction of legitimacy between state and nonstate actors, as well as how this relates to broader policy and strategy in a context.** Support to nonstate actors should be linked or informed by policy decisions and diplomacy and security objectives in order to ensure complementarity. This will help avoid building up parallel structures and assist with determining suitable entry points for state-nonstate collaboration.²¹⁵ In so doing, stakeholders can help open avenues for citizen participation in local affairs by building on and engaging the population through the most prevalent platform for governance. Thus, programs should be built on local values and sources of legitimacy.²¹⁶
- **When building the capacity of nonstate governance actors, it may sometimes be useful to facilitate interaction with formal institutions.** Evidence suggests that doing so will increase the likelihood that traditional and formal systems will complement one another.²¹⁷ This should involve increasing trust between formal and customary actors, as well between such groups and the population.
- **To overcome the issue of enabling corrupt or exclusionary systems, nonstate governance actors can be engaged as both partners and program participants.** For example, in Somaliland, the Danish Refugee Council engaged elders as both “targets and agents of change” in efforts to build peace.²¹⁸ Efforts such as this can involve engaging nonstate legitimate actors to help resolve communal needs, while also enforcing accountability for harmful or exclusionary norms.

Social Cohesion

Fragile contexts are characterized by deep-seated divisions and, frequently, by marginalization of specific groups. Strengthening social cohesion can establish the building blocks of inclusive governance. This entails building trust and fostering a sense of shared purpose between members of a community and between the community and the state. Social cohesion mitigates violent conflict because it seeks to heal the divisions exposed, or nourished, by violence, between groups that are defined by divisions pertaining to religion, ethnicity, political orientation, geography or economics. Strengthening social cohesion requires a simultaneous focus on the elements of “sameness” and “diversity” within a community to emphasize valuing differences instead of erasing them.

Social cohesion is a gradual process, and most societies experience greater or lesser degrees of cohesion at different points in time. Frontline communities—including in Kenya, India and Iraq—have built on social cohesion and intercommunity trust to withstand, mitigate and resist violence.²¹⁹ Effective social cohesion approaches should be built on an understanding and reinforcement of existing community capacity and resilience without delegitimizing them.

Perceptions of social identity play an important role in determining a community’s level of cohesiveness. People assume social identities based on a range of groups—including religious identity, nationality, tribe,

²¹⁵ Eickhoff. “Conflict Prevention and the Legitimacy of Governance Actors.”

²¹⁶ Walter-Drop, Gregor, and David Remmert. “Escaping the Isomorphic Bias: Towards a Legitimacy-Centered Approach to State-Building.” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2018, pp. 545–562. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2018.1546475>.

²¹⁷ *Local Governance and Sustaining Peace*. UNICEF. July 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/media/60291/file>. Guidance note.

²¹⁸ Price. *Local Governance in Conflict-Affected Contexts*.

²¹⁹ Van Metre, Lauren. *Fragility and Resilience*. United States Institute of Peace, no. 2, Sept. 2016, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Fragility-Report-Policy-Brief-Fragility-and-Resilience_0.pdf. Policy brief.

ethnic group, gender and class, among others.²²⁰ When certain social identities are particularly salient, intergroup biases, including perspectives of in-groups and out-groups, are more likely.²²¹ This can contribute to the destruction of the social fabric.

There are many challenges with strengthening social cohesion, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where societal divisions run deep. Such programs require a high level of sensitivity given that discrimination can permeate into all aspects of life, including the ability of certain populations to participate in the economy, be represented in governing bodies and be treated equally under the law.²²² If not carefully executed, programs can easily exacerbate tensions, particularly if assistance is provided to one group and excludes another.²²³ In such circumstances, efforts aimed at building social cohesion can introduce new divisions in a society and pose challenges for marginalized groups. Therefore, promoting social cohesion may sometimes result in decreased tolerance.²²⁴ Bringing groups together across conflict lines only to then have them return to their deeply divided communities may result in distrust within communal groups and harden prejudices.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Contact theory underpins much of the underlying assumptions of social cohesion programs. It posits that increased contact among different groups will promote tolerance.²²⁵ Civic engagement, political participation and advocacy campaigns can all be useful tools to build trust among disparate groups and lend residents a voice in addressing common community challenges. Programming focus areas and activities can include:

- Funding local sports leagues potentially builds community feeling and norms about competition, while also reducing historical tensions between ethnic groups by creating shared experiences and safe engagement spaces. Although this approach does not necessarily address the root causes of a lack of social cohesion, it can decrease tension through a community bonding approach;²²⁶
- Building trust through open recognition of negative experiences, and by increasing community voice in decision-making;²²⁷
- Supporting creative or artistic outlets to promote civic values and tolerance;
- Peace education, intergroup dialogue and projects and cultural or social activities intended to build trust and promote tolerance;²²⁸ and
- Enhancing resource management in order to distribute services equitably across the community.²²⁹

²²⁰ Scheepers, Daan, and Naomi Ellemers. "Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology in Action*, edited by Kai Sassenberg and Michael L.W. Vliek, 2019. Springer Link, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13788-5_9.

²²¹ *Social Identity Theory*. ScienceDirect, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/social-identity-theory>.

²²² Soutphommasane, Tim. "The Challenge of Social Cohesion," 2 Sept. 2016, Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/speeches/challenge-social-cohesion>. Transcript.

²²³ Idris, Iffat. 2016. *Building Social Cohesion in Post-Conflict Situations*. GSDRC, 2 Feb. 2016, <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/hdq1332.pdf>.

²²⁴ Vollhardt, Johanna K., et al. "Social Cohesion and Tolerance for Group Differences." *Handbook on Building Cultures of Peace*, edited by Joseph de Rivera, Peace Psychology Book Series. Springer Link, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-09575-2_10. See also, *Evaluative Learning Review Synthesis Report: USAID/CMM's People-to-People Reconciliation Fund, Annual Program Statement (APS)*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Mar. 2014, https://www.dmeformpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CMM20Evaluative20Learning20Review_Synthesis20Report20Final20March202014_USAID_040714.pdf.

²²⁵ Pettigrew, Thomas F., et al. "Recent Advances in Intergroup Contact Theory." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 35, no. 3, May 2011, pp. 271–280. ScienceDirect, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147176711000332>.

²²⁶ Keith Gilbert, Keith, and Will Bennett, editors, *Sport, Peace and Development*, . Sport and Society Common Ground Publishing, (Champaign, IL, 2012).

²²⁷ O'Brien, Thomas C., et al. 2019. "Building Popular Legitimacy with Reconciliatory Gestures and Participation: A Community-Level Model of Authority." *Regulation & Governance*, vol. 14, no. 4, Oct. 2020. Wiley Online Library, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12264>.

²²⁸ Sonnenfeld, Ada, et al. "Strengthening Intergroup Social Cohesion in Fragile Situations." *3ie Systematic Review*, vol. 46, 2021, <https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/systematic-reviews/strengthening-intergroup-social-cohesion-fragile>.

²²⁹ Idris. *Building Social Cohesion in Post-Conflict Situations*.

Unity Festivals in Tanzania



IRI, in coordination with local partners, organized unity festivals to promote tolerance and social cohesion among deeply divided communities in Tanzania. The festivals were held in Dar es Salaam, Arusha and Mwanza, and sought to promote acceptance and increase dialogue among diverse stakeholders that previously had not had opportunities for intergroup engagement. A feature of each festival was to connect local police, government and religious officials with boda boda drivers, who are perceived to be highly marginalized from communities. Following the second festival in Arusha, local authorities organized a similar festival in Morogoro. The Unity Festival model was recognized by the head of community policing for Tanzania as a beneficial way to facilitate interaction and begin to establish trust between these groups.



Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Enhancing social cohesion is a long and a nonlinear process that is highly context-dependent.** There are limits to what social cohesion interventions can accomplish without structural changes to address socioeconomic and political inequality and human security. The relationship between social cohesion and peace is not invariably unidirectional. Social cohesion initiatives can, for instance, help build trust between some members or subgroups of a community, but not necessarily between all relevant groups. A limited set of activities will be constrained in its reach. Thus, it is likely that the best designed programs do not register effects immediately, or that the promising effects in the beginning may ebb. For example, in Iraq, the random assignment of Christians displaced by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to a soccer team mixed with Muslims resulted in an increased likelihood of registering a mixed team next season and of Christians training with Muslims six months after the intervention.²³⁰ However, it did not affect broader dynamics like participants' willingness to attend a mixed social event.
- **Social cohesion programs can help build trust among members of a community, but not necessarily between communities and the state.** Research in Niger has shown that both intergroup and state-citizen relations are critical for reducing support for violence.²³¹ In this case, traditional and customary leaders can play a key role in aggregating and amplifying community needs and demand.²³²
- **Identifying local bottlenecks that hinder cohesion among community members and local institutions may have more significant results.**²³³ If there are high levels of conflict over a certain issue (e.g., land, resources, beliefs), then programs should be tailored to mitigate this tension. For example, radio programming promoting peace and tolerance in the DRC fell short of its objectives because it failed to articulate realistic scenarios and cover the main issues facing the communities, which were distinct due to the active conflict.²³⁴

²³⁰ Mousa, Salma. "Building Social Cohesion between Christians and Muslims through Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq." *Science*, vol. 369, no. 6505, 14 Aug. 2020, pp. 866–870, DOI: 10.1126/science.abb3153.

²³¹ *Understanding the Links Between Social Cohesion and Violence: Evidence from Niger*. Mercy Corps, Mar. 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Niger_SCViolBrief_v6.pdf.

²³² *Understanding the Links Between Social Cohesion and Violence*.

²³³ "Strengthening Intergroup Social Cohesion in Fragile Situations."

²³⁴ "Strengthening Intergroup Social Cohesion in Fragile Situations."

Youth Engagement

As key agents of change, young people can play a leading role in promoting peace and security by offering creative solutions to advocate for community needs, establishing a sense of belonging and increasing resilience.²³⁵ Youth-led efforts are critical to help address the changing nature and root causes of conflict, including political exclusion. Such initiatives include young people playing key roles in early warning systems, conflict prevention and participation in decision-making processes.²³⁶

At the same time, young people also bear a heavy burden from conflict, with grave implications for their well-being. Conflict disrupts employment opportunities for youth as well as social, political and educational structures. Globally, one in four young people are directly affected by armed conflict and violence.²³⁷ Without effective political outlets, some young people may be recruitment targets for violent groups, either forced or voluntary.²³⁸ Young victims, displaced people or former perpetrators of violence face distinct trauma, discrimination or exclusion.²³⁹

There are numerous challenges facing programs aimed at youth engagement in fragile settings. For example, a key issue that hinders programmatic success is selection bias.²⁴⁰ Some stakeholders may rely on existing networks to select young program participants, thus providing opportunities for individuals that already have significant peacebuilding experience or who are sympathetic to the program's goals, and thus excluding those that have not benefited from such opportunities before and who may be more deeply affected by the intervention.



Illustrative Programs and Activities

Addressing grievances and increasing youth resilience is a critical component of reducing propensity for violence. DRG programs on youth engagement involve an array of activities, such as mentorship, leadership, conflict resolution and political participation.²⁴¹ The below covers a few core focus areas of youth engagement programming in conflict-affected contexts:

- Increasing youth leadership in politics, peacebuilding and civic outlets. This can include supporting their participation in sports, advocacy, or community service.²⁴² One example of such programming was a UNDP project in the Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, which engaged young leaders in a leadership, peacebuilding, governance and gender equality training series in order to expand their capacity for decision-making;²⁴³
- Strengthening networks and building platforms to amplify the voices of young people;

²³⁵ *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. Youth, Peace & Security, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), 2018, <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>.

²³⁶ "Youth and Conflict." *World Youth Report*, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch14.pdf>.

²³⁷ *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*.

²³⁸ "Youth and Conflict."

²³⁹ USAID. "Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention." USAID. https://inee.org/system/files/resources/Youth_and_Conflict_A_Toolkit_for_Intervention.pdf.

²⁴⁰ *Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence*. Mercy Corps, Feb. 2015, <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/youth-consequences-unemployment>.

²⁴¹ USAID. "Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention." See also, *Youth in DRG Programs*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), <https://www.youthpower.org/youth-inclusion-drg-toolkit-youth-drg-programs>

²⁴² USAID. "Youth and Conflict: A Toolkit for Intervention." p. 13.

²⁴³ "Aspiring Youth to Reduce Conflict and Build Sustainable Peace." United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *ReliefWeb*, 12 Apr. 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/solomon-islands/aspiring-youth-reduce-conflict-and-build-sustainable-peace>.

- Enhancing youth resilience to violence by expanding civic outlets, dialogue and avenues for nonviolent conflict resolution;
- Strengthening the enabling environment for youth, including through human rights protection, advocacy and sound legal frameworks;
- Fostering gender equality and social inclusion among youth voices and input in decision-making;
- Empowering young political and government actors and ensuring that political institutions are sensitive to the needs of young people;
- Expanding inclusive service delivery and resource management that is sensitive to special considerations of young people;
- Improving youth electoral participation; and
- Supporting youth victims, displaced people and former combatants by delivering justice, redressing harm and supporting inclusion.

In addition to the above discrete programmatic activities, programs should also mainstream “youth sensitivity” across programs, which involves engaging youth as key stakeholders in conflict stabilization strategies so that they feel engaged, empowered and heard.²⁴⁴ Youth-sensitive programs increase youth inclusion and ownership of programs, including in program design, implementation and evaluation. As part of youth sensitivity, it is critical to encourage the meaningful participation of youth, moving beyond simply engaging young people as tokens, but instead as partners and decision-makers.²⁴⁵

Lessons Learned and Key Considerations

- **Avoid viewing youth as a homogenous group, prone to violence.** There have historically been many programming and policy initiatives that focus heavily on countering violent extremism among youth, while ignoring their positive contributions to peaceful conflict resolution and decision-making. Often, these narratives are constructed with the precise goal of excluding young people from political and governance processes.²⁴⁶ Moreover, it is also important that programs and partners recognize that young people are not a homogenous group and that they represent a variety of perspectives in society. Different groups, like women and ethnic, religious and racial minorities, have a distinct set of grievances as well as multiple and overlapping identities. Youth-centered programming thus needs to be reflective of diversity and take into account that not all youth are prone to violence.²⁴⁷
- **Previous programs have sometimes employed a narrow approach, only focusing on top-down, national-level issues, like peace agreements.** This, however, ignores the overlapping nature of underlying grievances that lead to conflict. Instead, programming should take on a cross-sectoral approach to understanding and mitigating conflict factors. Across a range of sectors and industries, youth can help engage in de-escalation, stabilization and community cohesion initiatives.²⁴⁸ Studies have shown that

²⁴⁴ “Young People Powerful Agents for Resolving, Preventing Conflict, Speakers Tell Security Council Open Debate Amid Calls to Change Negative Stereotypes.” *United Nations Security Council*, 23 Apr. 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13312.doc.htm>.

²⁴⁵ Ebenezer-Abiola, Rebecca, and Jeremy Moore. *What Works in Youth Projects? Lessons for the Youth, Peace, and Security Field*. United States Institute of Peace, 5 Oct. 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/10/what-works-youth-projects-lessons-youth-peace-and-security-field>.

²⁴⁶ “Young People Powerful Agents for Resolving, Preventing Conflict, Speakers Tell Security Council Open Debate Amid Calls to Change Negative Stereotypes.”

²⁴⁷ *Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis?* United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2006, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/810B078967D17D1AC12571920052088C-UNDP%20youth.pdf>.

²⁴⁸ “Youth and Conflict.” p. 391.

single-sector youth programming alone is likely to have little impact on stability and youth engagement in community governance. Programming cannot exclusively focus on the symptoms of instability; it must engage in finding and addressing the reinforcing sources of instability. This involves longer-term, multi-sectoral programming that creates community systems for youth engagement.²⁴⁹

- **Pair civic engagement programs with meaningful governance reforms that improve youth agency.** Mercy Corps research in Afghanistan, Colombia and Somalia found that contextual factors, including the political, economic and security environment, shape and sometimes hinder the results of youth development projects.²⁵⁰ In some instances, civic engagement can exacerbate young people's grievances by raising awareness of deficiencies and increasing disillusionment with exclusionary, elite institutions.²⁵¹ Thus, it is critical to combine civic engagement projects with diplomatic and development efforts to promote reform at the national level.

Youth Ambassadors for Reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina



In Bosnia and Herzegovina, IRI sought to promote reconciliation by facilitating youth-led social cohesion projects and promoting peaceful and tolerant messages. IRI created a feature-length documentary that showed reconciliation happening firsthand among a multiethnic group as it moved through the processes of understanding, appreciation and collaboration by engaging survivors, soldiers, religious leaders, civil society and elected officials. At the same time, youth in 10 cities received small grants to carry out reconciliation projects in their communities. These “advocacy teams” made an impact by organizing service-based activities, such as creating multiethnic murals and remodeling classrooms and playgrounds.

Conclusion and Crosscutting Themes

To mitigate the potential for unintended consequences in fragile settings, it is critical to take stock of evidence that sheds light on effective ways to navigate a complex landscape. The preceding section attempted to summarize findings from a rigorous review of evidence from a range of intervention approaches, highlighting relevant implications for donors and implementers. These lessons and guidance should be considered and incorporated into the design of DRG policies and interventions in order to reduce risk and build on preexisting capacities for peace. Although the evidence review reflected the most widespread DRG interventions, the corresponding lessons may be applicable across each type of programming. Many DRG interventions employ multiple approaches to address the most salient DRG issues in a setting.

In addition to ensuring that DRG policies and programs are targeted and build on evidence-based lessons from the subsectors in this section, it is critical to promote integrated, long-term and multidimensional approaches that cut across many of the subsectors described above. Looking at impact and evidence holistically can help us interrogate the integrated nature of programmatic approaches and design

²⁴⁹ Youth & Consequences.

²⁵⁰ “If Youth Are Given the Chance”: Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youth Support of Political Violence. Mercy Corps and University of San Diego, Apr. 2018, https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/lf%20Youth%20Are%20Given%20the%20Chance_LR_FINAL.pdf

²⁵¹ Youth & Consequences.

interventions strategically. Given that economic, security, political and social factors overlap and reinforce a conflict system, there is a need for cross-sectoral, coordinated approaches that help promote security and peace.

Research on effective conflict prevention and stabilization policies and programs indicate the need to address several recurring themes across DRG programs:

- **Maintain a long-term strategy and presence in order to sustain progress in strengthening governance and mitigating conflict.** DRG interventions can help promote political moderation and accountability, civic participation and empowerment, equitable service delivery and accountability for public resource management—all of which are fundamental to promoting durable peace and security. However, transforming the governance drivers of conflict and strengthening political institutions require a strategic vision that often lies outside of short-term project timelines and rigid procurement regulations. The Global Fragility Act is a good start, but there is a long way to go in promoting a multiyear, coordinated effort to promote stability.
- **Prioritize local ownership and partner-driven approaches.**²⁵² In some cases, DRG assistance relies on Western models of political institutions and groups. Moreover, the vast majority of DRG programming relies on external funders and personnel, and often tapers off once turned over to domestic control because local actors do not have the training, resources, institutional support or desire to continue the work. A recurring theme across the various DRG programming is the role of informal ways to strengthen governance to promote community cohesion. Democratic, rights-based governance cannot be externally imposed; instead, local ownership should continue to be elevated, with special emphasis on understanding existing community resiliencies and capacities for governance. Intentionally promoting local ownership over programming gives interventions the best possible chance of meaningful long-term success. Practitioners should consider how to prioritize local ownership in every phase of project implementation by engaging locally legitimate authorities and developing community partnerships.
- **Promote coordination across sectors but retain a targeted approach.** Because conflict drivers overlap with a range of issues outside of the scope of DRG interventions, it is essential to ensure that diplomatic, development and security assistance work in tandem rather than in isolation. This will be particularly critical in the face of new and emerging threats, such as climate change, which can magnify other factors that lead to conflict.

²⁵² *Time to Decolonise Aid: Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation*. Peace Direct, Adeso (African Development Solutions), Alliance for Peacebuilding, and WCAPS (Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation), May 2021, https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/PD-Decolonising-Aid_Second-Edition.pdf.

CROSSCUTTING MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE FOR DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING DRG PROGRAMS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

Project Design

- Guiding Principles
- Defining the Scope and Theory of Change
- Conflict Assessment and Stakeholder Mapping
- Operational Considerations
- Adaptability

Project Implementation

- Enhancing Legitimacy
- Developing Community Partnerships

Project Evaluation

Having provided an overview of common DRG interventions and evidence of effectiveness in conflict-affected settings, this field guide now turns to program design, implementation and evaluation. DRG programming in conflict-affected countries can play an important role in bolstering citizen-responsive governance to manage collective action problems, strengthen community cohesion and prevent and mitigate violent conflict. While each program or initiative should be shaped depending on the particular context and available resources, there are some common strategies and best practices for implementation in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The following sections outline key considerations.

Project Design

Project design should be grounded in conflict-sensitive principles and considerate of contextual and operational challenges that may have an impact on the project, given the evolving and often unstable environment in which such programming takes place.

Guiding Principles

- **Conflict sensitivity and do no harm.** Conflict sensitivity enables practitioners to understand the operational context, the interaction between the context and intervention and act on this understanding “to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on the conflict.”²⁵³ The principle of do no harm should be integrated throughout an intervention and operationalized through regular assessments, feedback from beneficiaries and adaptation. This should include interrogation of both the outcomes of the intervention itself and potential second-order effects on the relationship of those outcomes to other drivers of conflict. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, consider the broader system at play, and what key points of tension may exist.
- **Inclusion.** By understanding social and gender norms, practitioners can establish a more holistic understanding of conflict dynamics and the effects of interventions. This also enables practitioners to tailor work to different perspectives and experiences. While typical DRG programming may rely on “conventional” actors, such as government and political parties, conflict-sensitive interventions should

²⁵³ “Do No Harm: A Brief Introduction from CDA,” *CDA Collaborative Learning Projects*, <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf>.

look beyond the usual suspects and partner with individuals directly affected by conflict. Mainstream gender and use frameworks like intersectionality²⁵⁴ and masculinities analysis²⁵⁵ to interrogate patterns of marginalization and oppression that inform the participation, support and mitigation of violent conflict.

- **The inherently political nature of violent conflict.** In highly divided societies, understanding how political dynamics perpetuate conflict, and how interventions may interact with local political dynamics, is critical to devising effective project strategies. Thus, *Thinking and Working Politically*²⁵⁶ is a key principle which encourages active assessments and reflections on power structures and stakeholder engagement. Based on this understanding, interventions are designed or adapted accordingly.

Defining the Scope and Theory of Change

In fragile contexts, inappropriately scoped, funded or supported objectives have the potential to cause lasting harm by damaging public faith in governance systems or exposing local partners to retribution after external implementers leave. At the outset, it is, therefore, important to define the scope of the project.

To effectively mitigate violent conflict, tailor interventions to address deficiencies in DRG that are at the core of conflict dynamics. Violent conflict is nonlinear. As regions, countries and subnational communities move between different phases of conflict and fragility, it is critical to adapt programming strategy and implementation to meet the changing patterns of violence. This involves determining the stage in the conflict cycle, including the following:

- **Fragile contexts where violence could erupt:** Engage with the root causes of fragility to prevent the potential outbreak of violent conflict. In these situations, institutions and norms should be cultivated in order to enable constructive dialogue and argumentation as a way to resolve political disagreements.
- **Conflict-affected contexts:** To mitigate the risk of a new outbreak, exacerbation or recurrence of conflict, it may be relevant to foster political avenues for grievance redress and strengthen the capacity of and incentives for government and nongovernment actors to resolve conflict through nonviolent means.
- **Post-conflict and fractured societies:** In contexts where societies are negotiating complex transitions to peace and stability, it is important to strengthen the technical capacity and political will of state and nonstate actors to advance institutional reform and sociopolitical reconciliation processes that address the root drivers of conflict.

After situating the program within the conflict cycle, consider the following questions in determining the scope of the proposed intervention: What elements of democracy or governance will be targeted by the intervention? What exactly is the problem that the intervention is addressing? For example, is this a project that is specifically aiming to increase voter turnout and public perceptions of election legitimacy? Or is the goal to build a strong set of institutions that can check executive power and represent citizens' interests?

²⁵⁴ "Intersectionality" refers to the overlapping nature of social identity such as race, gender and class, which can lead to interconnected systems of oppression or dominance. For a comprehensive toolkit, see Giorgadze, Ani, et al. *Intersectionality Toolkit*. Luther College, https://www.luthercollege.edu/public/images/Intersectionality_Toolkit_and_other_resources.pdf.

²⁵⁵ "Masculinities" refer to a socially constructed gender norm about the kinds of behaviors, attributes and values that are most appropriate for men and boys. As with women and sexual minorities, these social constructs make up "a system of power which shapes the lives, opportunities, rights, relationships and access to resources of women, men, boys and girls." Patriarchal masculinity and violence can be linked in the sense that in most cultures "violence is associated with men and boys in a way that it is not associated with women and girls," to a greater or lesser extent. For more information, see Wright, Hannah. *Masculinities, Conflict and Peacebuilding: Perspectives on Men through a Gender Lens*. Saferworld, Oct. 2014, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding.pdf>

²⁵⁶ *About us*. TWP Community of Practice, <https://twpcommunity.org/about-us>.

After identifying the problem that the intervention aims to address, develop a “theory of change” for how the programmatic intervention will help achieve this objective. Theories of change explain the rationale behind how a particular intervention will bring about desired results. They often take the form of, “If we do programmatic intervention X, the result will be Y, because or assuming Z.” Local stakeholders should be included in the development of the theory of change to ensure that the theory is rooted in local realities—and prioritizes local ownership of the program. Multiple resources are available to assist in the drafting of theories of change.²⁵⁷

Conflict Assessment and Stakeholder Mapping

Programming in places experiencing active or recent conflict will have different considerations and constraints from programs in more stable contexts. Any intervention to mitigate violence or stabilize post-conflict societies must be rooted in an understanding of the drivers of conflict and the key actors that influence and are influenced by the conflict.²⁵⁸ In particular, the stage of conflict in which the programming and analysis occurs should shape both activities and data gathering.²⁵⁹ Prior to implementing any activities, practitioners should conduct a conflict assessment and stakeholder mapping. The scope of this effort will depend on the time and resources available for the project, however at a minimum, practitioners should aim to understand the nature of the conflict, which governance systems and actors are deemed legitimate by the community and how governance systems and actors interact with conflict. This effort should be informed by local analysis and perspectives on the conflict, as well as local insights on political and economic dynamics affecting key actors’ incentives. IRI’s *“Conflict, Governance and Legitimacy Assessment Framework”* provides an in-depth guide for undertaking a conflict assessment and is applicable across a number of different conflict contexts. The Framework begins by establishing an understanding of the conflict system. Once this is analyzed, it is then possible to gain insight on how locally legitimate governance actors and systems are situated and recognized by the community. Building on this information, the user will be able to design informed interventions that help bolster legitimate governance and mitigate conflict.

Operational Considerations

In conflict-affected contexts, there are particular logistical considerations that can impact the ability of external implementers to carry out safe and effective programming. Practitioners should assess these factors during the project design phase and, to the extent possible, build in contingencies to address, avoid or overcome them.

- **Bureaucratic hurdles.** In weak and conflict-affected states, there may be real issues with routine policies and procedures, limiting the ability of implementers to gain access to necessary permits and supports. A professional civil service and record management systems may not be features of the state. Dealing with these obstacles may take significant time and resources, and yet circumventing government institutions may ultimately work against the governance programming the implementer is seeking to promote.

²⁵⁷ For example, see Brown, Ann-Murray. “What Is This Thing Called ‘Theory of Change?’” *Learning Lab*, 18 Mar. 2016, <https://usaidelearninglab.org/lab-notes/what-thing-called-theory-change>; Vogel, Isabel, and Zoe Stephenson. *Appendix 3: Examples of Theories of Change*. DFID, July 2012, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a66ed915d622c000703/Appendix_3_ToC_Examples.pdf.

²⁵⁸ USAID’s *Conflict Assessment Framework*; GIZ’s *Peace and Conflict Assessment*; DFID, FCO and MOD’s *Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability*; SIDA’s *Manual for Conflict Analysis*, UNDG’s *Conflict and Development Analysis*; and the World Bank, European Union, and United Nations’ *Joint Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessments*, among others, all underscore the importance of conflict analysis to inform the design and implementation of any conflict prevention and stabilization programming.

²⁵⁹ *Conflict Analysis Framework: Field Guidelines and Procedures*. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) and Norwegian Church Aid, 2015, https://www.kpsrl.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/363_conflict_analysis_framework_field_guidelines.pdf.

- **Procurement, vetting and financial challenges.** Formal means of doing business, including standard procurement processes and functioning banking systems, are often scarce in conflict-affected states, presenting challenges for implementers on everything from ensuring partner compliance with donor regulations to the ability to pay vendors. In addition, many potential partners are informal groups or grassroots organizations that do not have an organizational structure or established processes to pass vetting or meet donor requirements on financial management and reporting, often rendering them ineligible to receive financial support. At the same time, excluding these partners is not desirable, as they are often the most locally legitimate or have the greatest reach at the local level. As much as possible, implementers should build flexibility into financing DRG programs, engaging the donor to ensure there is a shared understanding about realities on the ground and necessary contingencies required to implement programming—and support such groups—in these contexts while still remaining in compliance.
- **Corruption.** In fragile states, corruption is a pressing issue; government officials, police officers and community leaders may act as gatekeepers or hurdles for access. They might require large sums of money or promises of bribes in kind to process permits, provide access to interviewees or allow materials to be published. Influx of external resources can further fuel corruption. Providing these actors with bribes or opportunities for graft or patronage through weak financial accountability and oversight mechanisms creates a problematic conflict economy and is a contributing factor to weak governance. On the contrary, taking a strong anti-corruption stance can help drive out local corruption.²⁶⁰
- **Physical safety of program staff and beneficiaries.** In areas either currently experiencing conflict or that have recently experienced violence, there are threats to the physical safety of program staff or beneficiaries. This violence could be a result of retribution for speaking with outsiders, because program participation identifies beneficiaries as members of a particular group, or because various groups are jostling for post-conflict power.
- **Access.** Depending on the historical and cultural context of the state, there may be groups that are less accessible to external actors. Historically, this has included groups like women, youth or ethnic minorities. Physical access is a related challenge. Geographic factors, like communities based in an extremely rural locale, or linguistic factors, such as communities which speak languages other than the majority national language (often indigenous groups), may cause some groups to be excluded from programming and assessment. This, in turn, may worsen underlying tensions which contribute to conflict and weak governance, and work against the imperative for inclusion described above.
- **Funding timelines.** Short project timelines often do not allow sufficient time to invest in the long-term development needed to address—and overcome—drivers of conflict. Practitioners should consider their funding timeline and, as necessary, adjust the scope of the intervention to what can be realistically achieved within the funding period, ideally building in sustainability plans so that communities have the capacity and resources to continue successful programming elements beyond the life of the project.

Adaptability

To avoid exacerbating tensions and to adjust to rapidly evolving dynamics on the ground, projects in fragile and conflict-affected contexts need to be flexible and adaptable at every stage of the project life cycle. DRG interventions may have unintended consequences due to the highly sensitive environment in which they are implemented. It is, therefore, imperative to think not only about the desired outputs and impact of the

²⁶⁰ Taub, Amanda. "How 'Islands of Honesty' Can Crush a System of Corruption." *The New York Times*, 9 Dec. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/09/world/asia/south-korea-brazil-argentina-impeachment.html?ref=world>.

program but also to continually evaluate the possible effects that it could register and adjust programming accordingly. For example, does the project empower or strengthen the legitimacy of problematic actors? Does the project exacerbate existing community tensions? In the process of capacity building, does the project only raise expectations and increase grievances without offering an outlet to create positive change?

Building adaptability into project design may include planning for ongoing conflict analysis, establishing reflection points at multiple stages in the project to ensure the approach and activities are still relevant, leaving space for additional project activities to respond to community needs, contingency planning and incorporating project-level learning throughout the period of implementation. These adaptations, in turn, have implications for project monitoring and evaluation and may require practitioners to adjust theories of change and anticipated outcomes throughout the project.

Project Implementation

Successful DRG programs in conflict-affected contexts share several key implementation elements: they are grounded in a deep understanding of the local context; they are “localized” to incorporate locally legitimate actors, institutions and processes; and they prioritize local ownership to generate community buy-in and promote sustainability. While these elements will manifest differently in project activities according to the nature of conflict and systems in a given context, they should be prioritized during project implementation.

Enhancing Legitimacy

Considering the legitimacy of local partners, beneficiaries, community actors and government is critical to devising effective DRG programming in conflict-affected contexts. Two key areas of emphasis apply. First, inclusive processes are seen as more legitimate, particularly those which offer multiple ways to participate and advocate.²⁶¹ Second, legitimacy occurs across all levels of governance; implementers must consider engaging with local and informal actors beyond the national government. Charismatic, religious and traditional leaders may be more effective partners in these contexts because the state has been unable to deliver justice, provide basic services or demonstrate integrity.²⁶² However, completely bypassing the central government can make it challenging for implementers to conduct programming, as the central government is often the party responsible for authorizing implementers to operate in-country.²⁶³ Therefore, implementers should pursue a “big tent” model that brings together leadership at both national and local levels and extends beyond formal policymakers.

Securing buy-in from locally legitimate authorities for a proposed intervention is often critical for both the sustainability of a project and its success.²⁶⁴ Working with legitimate actors builds upon existing structures of power and generally directly serves the targeted communities. Local authorities can serve as key allies

²⁶¹ Babbitt, Eileen F., et al. *Building Legitimacy in Conflict-Affected and Fragile States*. Institute for Human Security, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Dec. 2016, <https://sites.tufts.edu/ihs/files/2018/02/Building-Legitimacy-in-Conflict-and-Fragile-States.pdf>.

²⁶² Babbitt, et al. *Building Legitimacy in Conflict-Affected and Fragile States*.

²⁶³ Babbitt, et al. *Building Legitimacy in Conflict-Affected and Fragile States*.

²⁶⁴ Two conflict mitigation programs in Senegal—the Dialogue et Réconciliation Transfrontalière (Cross-border Dialogue and Reconciliation, or DIRECT) and the Strengthening Community Opportunities for Peace and Equality (SCOPE), funded by USAID to support ongoing conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in the Casamance—found that “engaging local authorities is critical to the sustainability of the conflict management systems and strategies implemented.” See *Performance Evaluation of the ‘SCOPE’ and ‘DIRECT’ Activities in Senegal*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Apr. 2017, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00N5SS.pdf.

A USAID evaluation of four projects to reduce the risk of youth participation in violence in Burundi cited the importance of engaging local authorities for both program success and sustainability, noting, “Those projects that are more fully embedded in the larger national youth policy context and its implementation at the local level are more sustainable because they encounter fewer obstacles from local administrators.” See *USAID Burundi Youth Support Initiative Assessment*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Nov. 2018, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00THJR.pdf.

in overcoming some of the operational challenges outlined above. Coordinating with local authorities also ensures that any proposed intervention aligns with local and national policy initiatives.

Local partners should, therefore, play a key role in identifying locally legitimate actors with an eye toward inclusiveness. At the same time, interveners must be mindful that local partners often have their own biases or blind spots, so triangulation is needed; there is rarely a uniform view at “the local” level. While engaging the full range of locally legitimate authorities may not be possible in all fragile and conflict-affected contexts, whether due to active hostility against the intervention among some actors or their unwillingness to participate, for example, implementers should work to ensure that they are not actively undermining the project.

Developing Community Partnerships

Community groups—whether civil society organizations, neighborhood peace committees, trade associations, the private sector or religious or youth groups, among others—play a critical role in the success and sustainability of interventions.²⁶⁵ Program interventions are more likely to be accepted if they are represented by trusted local partners. Working alongside or with the support of community groups enables implementers to leverage existing, often informal, community dispute resolution mechanisms, provides local talent and resources for the project and ensures that the project is appropriately tailored to the local context, whether in terms of contextual understanding, social norms or other cultural factors.²⁶⁶ In addition, such groups can often provide a platform for bringing community actors together and building trust. Prioritizing community ownership throughout implementation also promotes the capacity of the community to identify and implement peaceful conflict resolution long after the project is over.

Project Evaluation

As is the case in other programming contexts, ensuring that the program’s outcomes and impact are measurable and identifiable is of utmost importance. In conflict-affected settings, however, monitoring and evaluation can be difficult given challenges with incomplete or unreliable data, security concerns and sensitivities surrounding the conflict.²⁶⁷ As a result, programs are designed without strong evidence that would point toward the likely effectiveness or ineffectiveness of specific approaches, their secondary and unintended effects.

The overriding challenge of evaluations in fragile contexts is the constraints that the context imposes on research. For instance, even the most seemingly benign questions can be perceived as invasive in fragile contexts. This often results in high levels of non-responses or evasive responses. To address this challenge, scholars have introduced the practice of “list experiments” and “endorsement experiments” and integrated

²⁶⁵ The final performance evaluation for the SCOPE and DIRECT program in Senegal concluded that engaging civil society was an important factor in the program’s success. The evaluation found that, “For local administrative authorities, the majority of sub-prefects believe that the civil society approach to resolving conflict has a unique advantage of not involving the government and is seen as a more efficient and direct way to resolve conflicts in the area.” USAID, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00N5SS.pdf.

²⁶⁶ A USAID program to improve community-driven efforts to mitigate violence in South Africa—Mitigating Xenophobic Violence (MXV)—highlighted the importance of building networks and linking with grassroots, community structures. The MXV program established and developed local Peacebuilding Teams (PBTs) and community action plans, anchoring the program in the needs—and capacity—of the community. The local makeup of PBTs enabled them to: conduct research to better understand root causes of violence in communities, serve as a platform for bringing community actors together, utilize innovative means for addressing community issues and mitigating violence and promote community capacity to identify peaceful conflict resolution and prevent collective violence. See *End-Term Performance Evaluation of the Mitigating Xenophobic Violence Activity in South Africa*. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), May 2018, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00T2V9.pdf.

²⁶⁷ “Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) in Conflict and Stabilisation Settings: A Guidance Note.” *Stabilisation Unit of the Government of the United Kingdom*, Nov. 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/858813/Monitoring_Evaluation_and_Learning_MEL_in_Conflict_and_Stabilisation_Settings_A_Guidance_Note_7_Nov_2019_-_Final_-_1_.pdf.

them into their research instruments. They have also improved their ability to integrate different streams of research—experimental surveys, ethnographic work, key leader interviews and evidence mapping—to get a more holistic assessment of the context. Yet, there is a lot that policymakers still do not know.

To strengthen programming in conflict, there is a pronounced need for better and more rigorous data, but there is also a need for more coherent narratives on conflict. This entails engaging not only the cutting-edge academic studies, but also novel accounts of the conflict narrated by journalists who are deeply embedded in the context and locals who are experiencing it. By combining hard data with stories, narratives and anecdotes, the DRG community would be able to understand not only the major trends and the drivers of conflict, but also how individual narratives about the conflict confirm or contradict the data.

Qualitative interviews are often more effective at gathering this type of information and can be an effective tool in monitoring and evaluation in conflict-affected settings. This can include utilizing proxies to determine attitudinal and behavioral shifts, employing evaluation methodologies like most significant change and outcome harvesting or conducting participatory monitoring and evaluation in which local actors define what success looks like and how to measure progress toward that end.²⁶⁸ Such information can be combined with other data points, like perceptions on local safety and freedom of movement.

An impact evaluation measures the intended and unintended outcomes of a program intervention and compares them to what those outcomes would have been without the intervention. Conducting impact evaluation provides reliable data to design better programs in fragile contexts. While many organizations working in fragile contexts have developed indicators to monitor processes and outputs, there is still a dearth of data that would help evaluate the impact of programs.

The impetus to monitor program indicators should, however, strengthen the imperative of impact evaluation. Program staff should think innovatively about translating the data on outputs and outcomes into designing impact evaluations. On most occasions, administrative records on the design and implementation of programs can be combined with survey data on program uptake by beneficiaries. For instance, data on selection of program participants and their training outcomes could help set up an evaluation that assesses the impact of training by comparing outcomes between participants and a counterfactual group of nonparticipants. Similarly, for a peace messaging program, output and outcome data on the number of people engaged in the program can be subsequently used to design a before/after comparison of the effects of messaging.

There are several useful practices to undertake to improve understanding of programmatic results:

- Elevate local ownership of research. This expands opportunities for evaluation, instills an institutional tradition of relying on local data sources and builds trust and relationships between local and international researchers. It also minimizes issues of translation or cultural misunderstanding between researchers and participants.
- Build sufficient time in between the different evaluation stages to account for unforeseen events that may propel improvisations in the research design and/or implementation. This practice is likely to be useful if all relevant stakeholders—both local and international—are engaged in the planning process for their subject matter knowledge, contextual awareness, methodological sophistication or evaluation planning experience.

²⁶⁸ Doherty, Megan, et al. *Democracy and Governance Innovations in Fragile Contexts*. Mercy Corps, Nov. 2019, https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Democracy_Governance_Innovations_Fragile_Contexts_November_2019.pdf.

- It may not always be useful to script intended results prior to the project start-up given the fluid nature of fragile and conflict contexts. Embrace the need for innovation, iteration, adaptation and flexibility, not only on the part of researchers, but also funders and program managers. In contexts that are highly sensitive, research participants risk their reputation, resources or even lives when they declare their preferences about issues. In such contexts, evaluators need to explore nontraditional approaches to gathering data, such as ad hoc conversations, informal gatherings and casual observations in places of gathering. This could also entail merging quantitative and qualitative research approaches, gathering cross-sectional secondary data or partnering on questionnaire design with institutions that enjoy better local access.
- The insecurity and uncertainty surrounding interventions in conflict-affected contexts also requires adaptation with regard to monitoring progress toward programmatic results—and in some cases adjustment of the project objectives. In such cases, traditional approaches to project monitoring and evaluation may not be applicable. To account for the dynamic nature of conflict-affected contexts while still meeting agency standards for monitoring and evaluation, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, for example, aligns programmatic goals with "next state" rather than "end state" objectives, setting realistic expectations about what can be achieved during an intervention; supports "action learning" to learn what works, what does not and why at the activity level; and defines success according to how quickly programs respond and adapt to local political developments and U.S. foreign policy imperatives.²⁶⁹ Dedicating appropriate attention to learning and iterating can help practitioners make adjustments to better measure progress and adapt programming to be responsive to changing realities on the ground. Consider third-party or independent monitoring to provide insights throughout the life of the program, particularly in conflict contexts that require innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluation.²⁷⁰
- Asking participants or trusted local actors to assess or validate findings after analysis can also be a useful way of triangulating information in uncertain environments, though local partners may not provide unbiased information. Such an approach also serves to legitimize findings and programming to the broader community, which is particularly key in post-conflict communities.

²⁶⁹ "Lessons Learned: Monitoring and Evaluation in Complex, High-Threat Environments." *Office of Transition Initiatives, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)*, Apr. 2010, https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/oti_lessons_learned_m-e_in_complex_environments.pdf.

²⁷⁰ Everyday Peace Indicators is one organization specifically dedicated to improving participatory research and evaluation in communities affected by conflict. See <https://www.everydaypeaceindicators.org/>.

International Republican Institute

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