

# Community-level conflict prevention and peace building in DRC and Somalia

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**There is growing recognition of the need to address the root causes of displacement through the perspective of the humanitarian-development-peace 'triple nexus'. A locally led programme in DRC and Somalia reflects this approach and offers useful lessons and recommendations.**

Over the years, the aid industry has struggled to find durable solutions to displacement, given the complex and interwoven factors that are involved. There is an emerging consensus that better coordination between humanitarian, development and peace actors (known as the 'triple nexus') could provide a framework to tackle the issues associated with protracted displacement and hence durable solutions. It is within this context that the Sida-funded<sup>1</sup> Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Programme was designed and implemented.

This programme seeks to address some of the root causes of displacement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Somalia. Three key concepts informed the programme's design:

Firstly, the programme focuses on understanding and tackling the structural and immediate drivers of conflict. The structural drivers contribute to conflict but do not in isolation lead to violence. In Somalia and DRC, these are associated with three crises: 1) crisis of identity (for example, the nature of ethnic/tribal composition and the nature of competition among elites); 2) crisis of representation (for example, the nature of the political system and political culture); and 3) crisis of penetration (for example, State capacity to perform its basic functions). The immediate drivers are those that transform structural causes into potentially violent conflicts. In Somalia and DRC, these include: inequality of access to information, services and other public goods; unequal participation in decision making; and the utilisation of ethnic and clan identities to serve narrow political ends.

Secondly, the programme explicitly focuses on positive peace as opposed to

negative peace. Negative peace refers to the cessation of direct, physical violence. Positive peace is about the removal of structural violence – factors such as deep-seated grievances, human rights abuses, gender-based violence, social injustices, exclusion, and weak public and conflict management institutions. Activities to build positive peace aim to remove or gradually chip away at the structural and proximate causes of violent conflict. In DRC, we use equitable access to health services for two ethnic groups (Bantu and Twa) in Tanganyika, and in Somalia we use access to justice in Karaan and Hawl Wadaag districts of Mogadishu, as entry points to promote positive peace.

Thirdly, dealing with the root causes of conflict while preventing a relapse into violence requires a Conflict Sensitivity Analysis that focuses on addressing the relationship between the programme and the conflict/displacement context. We included this analysis as part of the baseline assessment, drawing on our local partners' knowledge in order to highlight priority areas of risk and mitigation strategies. We also incorporated a Do No Harm approach by identifying specific 'dividers' and 'connectors' in project locations – that is, those elements in society that either divide people (and are sources of tension) or connect people (and can be instrumental in problem solving). The findings helped inform the design and implementation strategies of both the DRC and Somalia components.

## The programme: root causes and positive peace

At the heart of the programme is an attempt to support people affected by conflict in ways that keep them safe in their communities

and empower them to influence the decisions that affect their lives. It does so by supporting the following activities that embody the spirit of the triple nexus:

- **Humanitarian action:** responding to humanitarian need through direct service delivery, providing legal assistance and improving the accountability and accessibility of health services in areas where a significant part of the population is either in need of humanitarian assistance, or risks developing that need.
- **Local peace building and social cohesion:** implementing activities that promote social cohesion such as intra/inter-community dialogues, and that include marginalised groups in decision-making processes around health and justice services.
- **Local governance and rule of law:** focusing on strengthening systems and developing the capacity of duty bearers who are responsible for providing health and justice services, while increasing the capacity and knowledge of communities (rights holders) to hold duty bearers accountable.

Local ownership is integral to the design methodology and implementation of both projects. Partnerships include community members and duty bearers, especially local government actors, and civil society. Local actors are the best positioned and most appropriate, effective and sustainable agents for improving accountability and inclusion, mitigating conflict, and identifying and solving local problems.

In **DRC**, we work with a local faith-based organisation, Commission Diocesaine de la Justice et Paix. Here the programme contributes to strengthening resilience, well-being and inclusive participation of people from Bantu and Twa ethnic groups through peace building and access to health initiatives in Nyunzu and Kalemie health zones in Tanganyika Province. It tackles the root causes of conflict between the Twa and Bantu by creating and rejuvenating community platforms that are representative of both ethnic groups.

In Nyunzu, which has experienced extreme poverty, damaged community cohesion and infrastructure, and decades of underinvestment, community volunteers have been mobilised and elected onto local peace and health committees. Through these committees, Bantu and Twa community members are collaborating to build peace and promote recovery. Having mixed committees has been essential for rebuilding trust. The committees' advocacy, including with local militias, has enabled the return of security and displaced populations to the project areas, helping to create the conditions through which health services can be reestablished and accessed.

Community health workers carry out sensitisation in their villages, building awareness of, and trust in, the local health services. Many more Twa are now using services they had previously avoided, fearing discrimination and mistreatment. Twa women are now choosing to give birth in the health centres, rather than at home, and many more are bringing their children to be vaccinated.

In Mogadishu, and across South and Central **Somalia** in general, a key cause of conflict and displacement is the lack of State capacity to provide basic services, including the management and administration of a fair and transparent justice system. The programme in Somalia is working in partnership with two districts – Hawl Wadaag and Karaan. It works to strengthen access to justice systems and the capacities of community members and local authorities to prevent and manage conflicts and disputes in a non-violent way. Specifically the project works to achieve behavioural change by justice service providers so that they protect the right to a fair trial; it also strives to increase use of safe justice services by citizens and to support communities to develop strategies for collective action that are inclusive of all voices, irrespective of clan affiliations.

The programme works closely with the two district councils, strengthening local implementation, ownership and sustainability. In addition, community

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Community meeting with local committee members, Democratic Republic of Congo, March 2019.

representatives – including from women and youth groups – were involved in the initial analysis of the nature of conflicts in Mogadishu.

Recognising Somalia's legal pluralism and the community's preference for and trust in informal traditional and customary justice systems, the project has sought to engage with and build the capacity and willingness of both formal and informal justice service providers to promote the right to a fair trial. Participatory activities such as stakeholder forums, dialogue platforms and community-based conflict mitigation action planning help generate regular communication between communities and local government on conflict management and access to justice. This promotes accountability based on agreed roles and responsibilities.

### Implications for policy and practice

While still in its early stages, the programme is generating some valuable lessons for conflict prevention and peace-building practice. Learning and research are built into the programme cycle, and now, in the programme's second year, three lessons in particular are worth highlighting.

Service delivery has proven to be a useful entry point and viable platform around which to organise peacebuilding approaches and to build social cohesion between conflicting

groups. Strengthening local State and informal institutions and accountability for service delivery is essential for sustainable and locally led approaches. There is huge potential for collaboration and collective action through voluntarism at the grassroots.

Working with the volunteer committees in DRC, for example, has been a key factor in promoting women and Twa ethnic minority representation in local decision-making processes. This has helped to build trust, demonstrating cooperation between communities in solving local problems. To build social cohesion successfully, it is necessary to understand intergroup power dynamics and to address inequalities and barriers to participation for the excluded; this also requires adequate resourcing to offset costs of participation.

Identifying and supporting local institutions while maintaining impartiality requires deep understanding of local conflict dynamics. This demands regular conflict sensitivity analysis and use of Do No Harm approaches. Such processes need to be properly resourced and supported, with the capability of being adapted in response to an evolving understanding of local realities and dynamics.

The above have clear implications for donors and their implementing partners' practices and policies, of which we highlight five.

First, donors should require implementing partners to explicitly adopt context-responsive and locally led programming; donors can facilitate this by supporting more flexible approaches that build learning into the programme cycle and allow for adaptation. One challenge we faced was due to the fact that the initial design of the project was based on a generic, global theory of change. During the inception phase of the project in DRC and Somalia, and following baseline field research, the project team realised that each country project instead needed its own context-specific theory of change, which then informed adaptations to the project design. Donor flexibility and openness to such adaptive project management are vital, as exemplified in our case by Sida's approach.

Second, those within the aid community working on durable solutions to conflict-induced displacement should invest in appropriate research and analysis. For instance, to measure peace-building outcomes, it is important to recognise that not everything that counts can be counted. Rich qualitative analysis – including of storytelling and anecdotes – combined with quantitative analysis can give us deeper insight into peace-building dynamics and results than quantitative methods alone.

Third, it is important to break down the siloes between humanitarian, development and peace-building work. Grand Bargain<sup>2</sup> commitments to durable solutions and to the triple nexus are welcome to the extent that they emphasise the importance of the synergies between these areas of intervention. At the grassroots people do not live in siloes, although the aid community still tends to be organised and to operate in siloes. These siloes can be driven by donor funding streams in conflict-affected environments, which tend to deliberately separate humanitarian from development and peace-building endeavours.

Fourth, funding mechanisms should be tailored toward supporting locally driven solutions for protracted crises, using joint funding streams designed to incorporate positive peace elements with a focus on addressing some of the root causes of violent conflict and displacement.

Finally, our experience in implementing this project demonstrates that it is possible for humanitarian actors to engage in locally driven peace building, and to partner with local development and peace actors, while maintaining neutrality and impartiality. For sustainable peace-building solutions to be successful, it is incumbent on external peace-building actors to understand the role of local structures and local dynamics, and to identify ways to support inclusive participation in a way that builds trust and ensures impartiality.

### Beyond the local

Linking local peace building to broader provincial and national efforts is one of the key challenges in peace-building work, not least because events, actors and interests at higher levels shape and impact on local peace-building efforts. Effective longer-term planning by international actors relies on the existence and implementation of nationally and locally owned development and conflict mitigation plans and political will. This is particularly challenging in the DRC, where there is state failure and often limited political will among national authorities and elites.

Nonetheless, there is huge potential for local community-led peace building in the DRC to have positive impact beyond the local. Initiatives like the Sida-funded project have potential to build a pro-development and peace-building dynamic to counterbalance the lack of political will among the elite, building social cohesion and political will from the grassroots upwards.

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