



Policy Memo

DATE: October 30, 2013

SUBJECT: Preventing Mass Atrocities: Resilient Societies, State Capacity, and Structural Reform

Over the past decade, building resilient societies has emerged as an important objective of international development and humanitarian assistance. The limits of assistance-as-disaster management are increasingly clear, as vulnerable populations face ongoing threats from structural inequalities, political instability and internal conflicts. The principles of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) outline the international community's responsibility to support the state's efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocities by assisting them in building their capacity to protect their own civilians. As a result, capacity building has gained currency among international practitioners of preventive action, but the tools for implementation have faced numerous challenges.

At its 54th Annual Strategy for Peace Conference from October 16–18, 2013, near Washington, DC, the Stanley Foundation convened 30 US government and international diplomatic officials, mass-atrocity specialists, and international civil society representatives to explore the international policy dimensions of strengthening communal resilience against mass atrocities. A diverse range of practical insights reflected the emerging global practice of preventive action.

Though the roundtable focused on the preventive capacity of national governments and multilateral organizations, participants drew on practical experiences to recommend whole-of-society approaches to preventive action. Multiple published and draft documents utilized at the conference described a broader landscape of mass violence, as participants considered how protracted political, social, and economic tensions might render a state incapable of preventing mass atrocities or protecting their populations. Participants offered specific guidance on emerging dilemmas of preventive action including how societies manage political exclusion, how socioeconomic conditions affect resilience, and how international programs interact with local actors.

Participants identified the following guidelines for preventive action against mass atrocities:

- **To achieve resilience, start at the margins:** International actors should identify opportunities for common collaboration with local groups and build from there. By definition the greatest vulnerabilities are the most difficult to address.

- **Preventive action is dynamic, not static:** To adapt to the quick evolution of mass violence, international actors should integrate preventive action across varied sectors and throughout different stages of mass violence.
- **Anticipate unintended consequences:** International actors should be aware that in some cases they will work with and alongside former perpetrators to build preventive resilience. To mitigate hazards, preventive action should define clear boundaries between positive incentives and unconditional support.

Resilience for Preventive Action

Participants divided conflict-affected societies into two components: states with formal institutions, such as the national state, local governing administrations, and military organizations; and states with informal networks, such as illicit economies, paramilitary groups, and loose civil society coalitions. In many cases, these two groups interact, especially when the formal institutions include members of illicit groups. A military unit, for example, may rely on an illicit trafficking network to supplement lagging state revenues. As a preventive objective, resilience refers to the structured social systems and institutions that enable a society to avoid or limit the escalation of mass violence against civilians. In other cases resilience refers to the ability of the state to rebuild national structures after violence with a clear objective to prevent re-occurrence.

Though many discussions of preventive resilience focus squarely on formal institutions, and specifically on the state, multiple participants described some informal networks as an equal cornerstone of preventive action. These participants viewed the international peace-building community's collective preference for formal interlocutors as counterproductive. Though conflict-affected societies may rely on formal bodies for some social services, informal bodies regularly emerge to fill institutional voids. In northern Nigeria, for example, political authority has continued to shift between various bodies, including religious leaders, local governing administrations, and paramilitary forces.

In well-designed programs, collaborative efforts reinforce the unique functions of both formal and informal organizations. The Stanley Foundation Policy Analysis Brief *Getting Along: Managing Diversity for Atrocity Prevention in Socially Divided Societies*, which was discussed by participants, described the importance of political inclusion for preventive resilience, both immediately and over time. The brief centered on divergent processes of formal citizenship, which define and structure the terms of inclusion and exclusion. Multiple participants, however, observed an ongoing interaction between formal citizenship and the general landscape of political belonging, including religious identities, cultural norms, and ethnic politics. These interactions determine a society's resilience against mass violence, as both formal and informal exclusion fray the loose bonds of social trust.

Early warning, a keystone of the international preventive agenda, is a widespread model for collaboration between formal and informal preventive efforts. Some government bodies, such as the US Atrocities Prevention Board, use formal early warning mechanisms, which may influence preventive policies and programs. On a local level, however, international actors use informal information networks to assess and mitigate potential risks. Participants cited Kenya's elections

in March 2013 as a positive case of collaboration between formal and informal bodies, as civil society groups used local information networks to design preventive programs.

Case Study: Early Warning and Resilience in the Run-up to Kenya’s 2013 Elections:

The aftermath of Kenya’s 2007–2008 elections prompted widespread reconsideration among Kenyan and international actors of the possibilities and limits of preventive action. During the violence, Kenyan civil society actors used mobile telecommunication technology to identify emerging mass atrocity risks for local mediators and law enforcement officials. In the run-up to the 2013 presidential election, Kenyan and international peace-building organizations redoubled efforts to strengthen informal information networks and connect these networks to broader first-responder efforts. Multiple conference attendees cited ground-level reports to demonstrate the relative improvement of preventive resilience during Kenya’s

Building Plural Approaches to Resilience

The building blocks of preventive resilience are fragile, much like the societies they support. Participants, as well as the multiple published and draft documents utilized at the conference, identified trust—in formal institutions, in informal social relations, and in international actors—as a prerequisite for sustainable resilience. Just as conflict corrodes the physical architecture of these familiar relationships, mass atrocities can shatter the social support, totally transforming the society left in its wake.

Mass violence reshuffles a society’s building blocks, and variations between resilience and vulnerability become more difficult to identify. Multiple participants noted that international actors are often out of step with an atrocity’s metastasizing violence, testing the adaptability of established preventive programs. Participants observed that international actors see building resilience as a “pre-conflict” task, which loses its salience as mass atrocities escalate. In reality, a conflict-affected society is always in flux, leaving few clean lines between “pre-conflict,” “conflict,” and “post-conflict” dynamics. Participants observed that building resilience, too, is an ever-present process, which should mirror and oppose a conflict’s dynamism. Instead, a program’s bureaucratic barriers—funding, personnel, and other static resources—may leave international actors unprepared for protracted violence.

In that vein, multiple participants highlighted adaptable and plural design as an integral characteristic of successful preventive action. Mass violence is a touchy subject for local and national governments, and government-imposed restrictions may limit both immediate and protracted preventive initiatives. One participant in particular cited a national government’s unwillingness to engage international actors on preventive action, which the host government described as “too political.” Instead, international actors integrated preventive programs into a broader economic development agenda to which the host government gave tacit approval. Over time development actors have come to agree that prevention initiatives needed to be undertaken and integrated into a development agenda, but there was no common consensus about the strategy to accomplish this objective.

Additionally, participants described analytic pluralism as an emerging, if underemphasized, dimension of preventive resilience. Though participants did not agree on the appropriate place

for socioeconomic concerns in formal definitions of the international preventive agenda, multiple participants concluded that socioeconomic inequalities, such as access to services, limit a society's ability to withstand and forestall mass violence. Participants noted that socioeconomic factors interact with tangential inequalities in conflict-affected communities. In central Nigeria's Middle Belt region, for example, political exclusion preserves poverty cycles among local non-indigenous populations. When they intersect, these plural gaps may corrode a society's preventive resilience and hasten the emergence of mass violence between dominant and marginalized populations.

Integrated Approaches to Dynamic Violence

As a mass atrocity transforms its affected society, both perpetrators and survivors adapt to accommodate new environments, new scales of conflict, and shifting resources. The human experience of mass atrocity is always dynamic, and the international peace-building community has developed various mechanisms to deal with his dynamism. Another Stanley Foundation policy analysis brief, still in draft form, highlights security sector reform (SSR), justice sector reform (JSR), and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) as key pillars of this peace-building approach. These processes engage both state and nonstate actors in the difficult task of protecting vulnerable civilians at all stages of a particular conflict. SSR builds civilian-protection norms and practices into the strategic, operational, and tactical dimensions of a society's military, police, and other security forces. JSR performs a similar task, but for a society's legal bodies. DDR, in contrast, may target non-state actors, including paramilitary forces and community-based militia.

Participants observed three dimensions of integrated prevention that may shape a more constructive approach to resilience and reform. The first dimension, *time*, refers to the evolution of resilience processes throughout conflict. In general, international peace-building actors look toward SSR, JSR, and DDR as post conflict processes that may occur only after the violence has ceased. Multiple participants, however, emphasized the inherent flexibility, and the limits of waiting for a post conflict "moment."

The second dimension, *space*, describes the continuous interaction between all levels of a conflict-affected society, from local to international. Multiple participants cited a constructive trend toward local participation in preventive resilience but noted a necessary common ground between top-down and bottom-up partnerships. Participants also cited an emerging role of regional peace-building networks, which may augment both state and nonstate preventive capacity. Multiple participants described the integration efforts of Africa's regional bodies—the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union, in particular—as replicable models.

Under the third dimension, preventive actors facilitate integration across a society's multiple sectors. Multiple participants observed the necessary interdependence of preventive resilience: military accountability in the aftermath of Sierra Leone's second civil war, for example, required the simultaneous growth of justice systems to prosecute perpetrators. Participants identified the success of integrative actors such as hybrid legal officers who conduct civil society outreach on behalf of local, national, and international courts. To their credit, these actors view cross-sector, multilevel programs as a professional responsibility rather than a marginal benefit.

Multiple participants cited Ghana's efforts to develop preventive programs across formal and informal sectors, and to diffuse its preventive priorities throughout the West African region, as a model for integrated preventive resilience. The Ghanaian and Danish governments, in collaboration with the New York-based Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, established the R2P Focal Points Initiative in September 2010. The R2P Focal Points Initiative strengthens informal links between officials tasked with national preventive programs. Since its establishment, the Ghanaian government has worked with international and regional bodies to develop local peace-building programs in northern Ghana, where ethnic politics have historically generated social conflict.

Looking Forward

Participants drew on divergent experiences in economic development, humanitarian aid, and civil society outreach to identify priorities for future preventive action.

Participants expressed the importance of specific pathways for strategic, operational, and programmatic integration. Participants suggested the development of integration mandates for preventive actors and institutions, such as the human-security agenda of the Economic Community of West African States. These prevention actors would bridge disparate preventive programs while maintaining their ability to target specific stages, levels, and sectors of conflict.

Participants underscored continued gaps in the practical understanding of preventive resilience beyond general capacity-building objectives. Multiple published and draft documents utilized at the conference highlighted specific outcomes for cross-sector reform and legal consultation, but participants identified a continued need to understand what it is specifically across time that makes a society resilient against mass violence and how external actors may tailor preventive resilience to meet these needs.

Participants also highlighted the risk of unintended consequences as a gap in the collective understanding of preventive resilience. As a collaborative effort, preventive resilience walks a fine line between productive incentives and unconditional support, and participants expressed interest in how to mitigate these risks.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation or any of the conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

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